



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE
GENEVA

Kari TAPIOLA

Executive Director
for Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work

Geneva, 23 July 2009

Dear Sir,

By a communication dated 22 July 2009, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) have requested the ILO to intervene as a matter of urgency in respect of grave allegations of excessive violence by riot police against striking workers of the Ssangyong Motor Pyeongtaek plant. A copy of this communication is attached for your information.

On behalf of the Director-General, I wish to express my deep concern at the seriousness of the allegations of escalating violence which, if true, would constitute a grave violation of the basic civil liberties and fundamental human rights of trade unionists essential to any meaningful respect for freedom of association. I would urge you to take the necessary measures to ensure that the police are given appropriate instructions to refrain from using force against peaceful demonstrators and to fully respect the fundamental human rights of the striking workers.

I would be grateful to receive any comments or observations your Government may wish to transmit in respect of the matters raised in this communication. In accordance with the regular practice in respect of interventions, your Government's communication will be transmitted to the ITUC and the IMF for information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'K. Tapiola', is written below the 'Yours sincerely,' text.

The Minister of Labour
5th Government Building, Gwacheon
1, Joongang-Dong
Gwacheon-si
GYEONGGI-DO. 427-716



Mr. Juan Somavia,
Director-General
International Labour Office (ILO)
Route des Morillons 4
CH - 1211 Geneva
Switzerland

HTUR/SB

22 July 2009

Request for ILO intervention with regards to escalating violence and repression against trade unionists in Korea

Dear Mr. Somavia,

We write on behalf of our affiliates, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and its affiliate, the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) regarding the rapidly escalating violence by riot police against the striking workers of the Ssangyong Motor Pyeongtaek plant.

Since July 16, management at the plant has blocked all food from entering the factory. On July 19, it began to disallow medical doctors and nurses from entering the compound.

At 10:00 am yesterday, riot police entered the factory compound with court officials and creditors who tried to deliver a forced eviction order. The police surrounded the paint factory where 800 workers are sitting in on the 61st day of their strike.

Over 3,000 riot police and around 30 vehicles including water cannons, ladder trucks and helicopters have been mobilized for this operation. Prior to the start of the police operation, the management had ordered all (non-striking) employees to return to work and cut off electricity, water and gas from the paint factory. The police operation comes just one day after the disclosure of the company's internal e-mails detailing plans that it was looking into using 'sleeping gas' to break the factory occupation.

After news came in that police had started to advance into the compound, it was learned that the wife of the KMWU Ssangyong Motors Branch policy director had committed suicide. She was the 28-year old mother of an 8 months old baby and of a four-year old child. She suffered stress and anxiety from receiving subpoenas and a warrant for her husband's arrest. Recently, company managers have made visits to workers' homes during working hours and threatened family members with imprisonment of spouses and confiscation of homes and assets to pay the company back damage claims for the strike.

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Sir, accounts and pictures taken today, and sent by our Korean colleagues (and of course available), give a clear picture of the unacceptable level of unrestrained brutality exercised by the riot police. Allow me to quote directly:

"The police are now shooting taser guns into the sit-in strikers. The hooks bury themselves in the skin and deliver electric shocks to the exhausted sit-in strikers. One of the sit-in protestors was able to pull the thing out of his leg so a photo was taken.

The police shot the taser gun hook into one of the sit-in striker's face. He was able to get away but is having a hard time maintaining consciousness. We urgently need a doctor to come in and take it out but police will not let the doctors and ambulance at the gate in, effectively continuing to deny the unionists medical care.

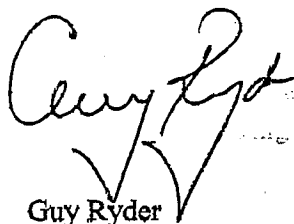
We are still counting up the number of arrested : current count is ~36, among whom 3 are not members (one is the husband of a female KMWU member)"

The actions of both the management and the authorities in this instance are clearly excessive and inhumane.

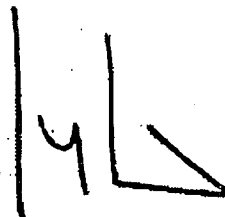
The ITUC and the IMF would very much appreciate if the Office could, as a matter of urgency, and before further blood is shed, impress upon the authorities the need to respect workers' fundamental human and trade union rights. Violence and repression on this scale cannot lead to constructive industrial relations.

We shall of course inform you of further developments as they become available and would appreciate being informed of any progress.

Yours sincerely,



Guy Ryder
General Secretary, ITUC



Jyrki Raina
General Secretary, IMF