

(Tentative)

Statement by the International Trade Union Confederation Conference “Building Solidarity with Burmese workers, Tokyo”, 11-12 February 2010

The 5th international trade union conference on Burma hosted in Tokyo by the JTUC-RENGO was held in order to prepare for the ITUC's upcoming Congress in Vancouver in June 2010, where the future strategy of the international trade union movement with regards to Burma will be decided.

The Conference was a working session on all the strategic options available to the international trade union movement ahead of the announced elections in Burma in 2010. The possibility that certain governments may shift their policy towards Burma in the wake of the elections and the international trade union movement's policy response were discussed. In the absence of constitutional change and dialogue, the Conference affirmed that the elections could not be considered legitimate, It expressed its firm opposition to the 2008 constitution adopted by the regime, and called for meaningful dialogue before elections are held.

The Conference reaffirmed the conclusions and the solidarity expressed in 2007 during the 4th Burma Conference held in Kathmandu and called for a strengthening of the commitment undertaken in 2007 for the restoration of democracy and to combat the use of forced labour in Burma. The Conference welcomed the efforts undertaken by affiliates in the region and globally to raise awareness with their governments about workers' rights and democratization in Burma.

Forced labour is still prevalent in Burma despite the ILO Commission of Inquiry in 1998 and people reporting cases of forced labour continue to be persecuted. Even after the conclusion of the Supplementary Understanding in 2007, giving immunity to victims and complainants, people have been arrested and too many remain in prison. The Conference expressed outrage at the continued reprisals against complainants and against the fact that the present number of detainees were as high as 23.

The Conference welcomed the holding of the first congress of the FTUB in March 2009 and the subsequent affiliation of the Burmese trade union to the ITUC and the ITUC-AP in 2009. The Conference expressed the urgent need to address more aggressively the situation with regards to freedom of association in Burma. The Conference stressed that while it was important to maintain the pressure on the issue

of forced labour it should be considered, how the issue of freedom of association could be given greater attention, especially within the framework of the ILO. It therefore proposed tabling a complaint leading to the establishment of an ILO Commission of Inquiry on freedom of association in Burma.

The discussion happened against the backdrop of an increasing number of strikes in Burma by discontented workers and growing divisions within the military. In the course of the Conference, the FTUB received information about a strike by 12000 workers inside Burma.

The overall strategy within the ILO was discussed in depth, both with regards to forced labour and freedom of association. The Conference reaffirmed its strong support for the decisions of the ILO Governing Body and the Conclusions of the 2006 ILC Selection Committee to pursue a referral to the International Court of Justice.

The strategy with regards to investment in Burma was the subject of serious discussions. The Conference reaffirmed the commitment towards divestment and to maintain pressure on all companies operating in Burma as their operations directly or indirectly serve to prop the illegitimate regime. It was proposed that the different database and information sources on pension funds and companies investing and/or operating in Burma be better coordinated to bring more aggressively targeted pressure to bear.

The Conference concluded that there was a need to aggressively follow-up on the call by the ILO to Governments, Workers and Employers to take all “appropriate measures to ensure that the said member cannot take advantage of such relations to perpetuate or extend the system of forced or compulsory labour referred to by the Commission of Inquiry... and report back in due course and at appropriate intervals to the Governing Body” within the framework of its Resolution adopted in 2000.

The Conference reiterated the resolve of the international trade union movement to support the struggles of our Sisters and Brothers in Burma and their capacity through the FTUB to carry out their just fight for democracy and workers’ rights. The Conference agreed a plan of action to strengthen the capacity of the FTUB by providing support for a reinforcement of its structures. It finally committed to mobilizing support amongst ITUC affiliates for the funding of an expansion of FTUB’s activities and training programs.