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Sixtieth session
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**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL
FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD**

**Written statement* submitted by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
(ICFTU), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 March 2004]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions is an organization in General Consultative Status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), representing 151 million unionised workers through its 234 affiliated national trade union centres in 150 countries and territories. The text below presents a rough outline of the countries in which trade unionists have suffered the brunt of repression in 2003 and early 2004.

The Americas

Colombia:

While acknowledging that the number of assassinations of trade unionists in the country has decreased significantly, for the first time since the early '90's, from 184 to somewhat over 70, we are challenging the figures of the Government, according to which the problem has all but disappeared. We are also firmly denouncing a proportional rise in every other form of repression, such as arbitrary detentions, death threats, forced displacements and other violations, which confirm beyond doubt that the government of President Alvaro Uribe Velez has embarked forcefully on the path of "criminalisation of social protest", making the expression of trade union rights meaningless as far as Colombia is concerned.

Haiti:

Despite recognition of freedom of Association in the 1987 constitution, anti-trade unionism, harassment and killings of trade union supporters have made it virtually impossible for workers to organize in Haiti. In December 2003, over 50 people were killed in violent acts carried out by the government's security forces, the Chimeres, in relation to peaceful demonstrations by people calling for the resignation of the government. On 24 January 2004, 11 trade unionists were arrested in Haiti, where repression of the civilian population is spiralling out of control. They were still detained at the time of writing (end February)

Venezuela:

The government of Venezuela continues to violate worker's rights and freedom of association. President Chavez recently fired 18 000 workers from PDVSA, the state owned oil company and is strongly suppressing the independent trade union, Confederation de Trabajadores de Venezuela, (CTV) by persecuting trade union leaders and creating a new, government-friendly trade union, Unión Nacional Trabajadores (UNT).

Africa

Zimbabwe:

As importantly, though for different reasons, we are strongly denouncing the criminal policies of Mr. Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, where the year of 2003 was marked by brutal murder, torture, rape, imprisonment and dismissal of hundreds of trade unionists. January of this year saw a continuation of these policies. The ICFTU, together with its sister organisation Union Network International (UNI) is finalising a formal complaint against Zimbabwe to the ILO, in reaction to a new dismissal campaign targeting the leadership of the union at Zimbabwe

Posts, or “Zimpost”. The President of the Zimpost union, who is also President of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), has just been fired, after attending the Congress of the African Organisation of Trade Union Unity, for alleged unauthorised absence from work. Behind this arbitrary measure, however, is a frontal attack by President Mugabe on an organisation that is fighting for basic human rights and which finds itself, by coincidence, on the same wavelength as the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, which has recently called on the European Union to assist in monitoring next year’s presidential elections. We are simultaneously assisting African trade unions across the continent in their efforts aimed at obtaining the adoption of a strong Resolution on Zimbabwe at this session of the CHR.

Asia

Burma:

The ICFTU will once again express its disapproval of the regime in Burma. The military dictatorship is continuing to violate fundamental human rights by practicing forced labour, arbitrary arrest, torture and execution. Trade unions are banned in the country and the worst forms of child labour are widespread. International pressure has not helped reducing the use of forced labour in practice, despite attempts by the ILO to supervise the worker’s situation by the posting of an ILO liaison officer in the country. Even though several corporations have withdrawn their operations in the country, foreign business continues to support the government by investing in Burma. The ICFTU condemns all activities by foreign investors that support the regime’s suppression of fundamental human rights.

Cambodia:

The beginning of 2004 saw the murder of Chea Vichea, a prominent trade union leader in Cambodia; the government’s investigation into this killing is already marred by manipulation and procedural flaws, including the alleged torture of his would-be murderer.

China:

As in previous years, the ICFTU is also exposing heavy prison sentences imposed on independent labour activists in China. In March 2002 thousands of Chinese workers protested against corruption and poor employment condition, which resulted in the detention of five worker’s representatives, among them Xiao Yunliang and Yao Fuxin. The two men were sentenced in June 2003 to seven years imprisonment after being charged with “subversion” and “organising illegal demonstration” on the grounds of their alleged “links with foreign hostile elements”. Both men suffer from serious health conditions and they do not receive proper medical care in prison. The ICFTU condemns the imprisonment and the grounds on which they were sentenced to jail.

Further, on 8 February 2004, an estimated 2000 workers protested against the working conditions at a textile factory in the Hubei province. Several workers were injured after a violent police confrontation and over 20 workers were detained. The detentions were carried out not only on the day of the demonstration, but also on the three following days.

Europe

Belarus:

The authorities of the Republic of Belarus are straightforward in their suppression of trade union rights, and the pressures imposed on trade unions and their democratic leaders has increased, so that one can speak about systematic violations of trade union rights in the country. In particular freedom of expression in relation to trade union rights has been denied and heavily suppressed by the authorities, which has resulted in the arbitrary arrests of several trade unionists and also later the dismissal of Aleksandr Bukhvostov, President of the Belarussian Automobile and Agricultural Machinery Workers' Union (ASM). These measures are designed to terminate the few independent trade unions there are left in the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, an organization now openly controlled by the government.

Middle East

Iraq:

The labour law of the country has been denying workers freedom of association and the right to organize since 1987. The ICFTU is seriously concerned that even the transitional government is not doing enough in order to establish these rights. The building of a free trade union movement and the process of constructing a new labour code (hence, the road to true democracy) should be supported by the expertise of the International Labour Organisation to ensure the development of free and independent workers' organizations as a crucial element for the building of a truly independent, free and democratic Iraq.
