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GUY RYDER
GENERAL SECRETARY
SECÉTAIRE GÉNÉRAL
GENERALSEKRETÄR
SECRETARIO GENERAL

Mr. Lee Myung-bak
President of the Republic
Blue House,
Seoul
Republic of Korea

By fax: +82 2770 1690

HTUR/SB

24 July 2009

RE: Police violence against striking workers

Dear President,

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents over 170 million workers through its 312 affiliates in 157 countries and territories; including yours, we are extremely concerned with the 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 on July 22, 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 63rd 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.

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.

Sir, accounts and pictures taken yesterday, and sent by our Korean colleagues, give a clear picture of the unacceptable level of unrestrained brutality exercised by the riot police.

We are deeply concerned about the blockade on water, food, access to medicine and medical treatment for the workers as well as the constant battery with chemical substances including teargas concentrate dropped from helicopters. These represent violations against basic human dignity.

Violence and repression on this scale cannot lead to constructive industrial relations.

I urge you, as a matter of urgency and before further blood is shed, to end the brutal attack against the Ssangyong Motors Branch workers, withdraw all pending arrest warrants and release all imprisoned union leaders related to this strike.

I strongly urge your government to immediately begin negotiations with the Korean Metal Workers' Union to promote a peaceful resolution through dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Guy Ryde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'G' and 'R'.

General Secretary

Cc: ITUC-AP
KCTU
IMF
ILO Kari Tapiola
ILO Standards