Deep concern about the harassment of union leaders members of BCWS

- [english] - Region - Asia - Bangladesh -

Date de mise en ligne : Friday 20 August 2010
Open Letter to Mr. Md. Zillur Rahman,

President of Bangladesh

Re: Deep concern about the harassment of union leaders members of BCWS

Your Excellency,

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) call upon the Government of Bangladesh to put an end to the repression against trade union leaders and textile workers.

According to the information received, since June 2010, there has been a growing social unrest among textile workers, who suffer from harsh living conditions due to extremely poor wages which barely allow them to ensure the survival of their families. On July 27, the governmental Committee on the minimum wage took the decision to raise the wages by 80% up to 3,000 taka (approximately 34 euros), decision which was officially announced on July 29 by the Labour and Employment Ministry. However, textile workers consider this minimum wage insufficient and demand a raise up to 5,000 taka (approximately 56 euros) in order to confront the serious financial problems that they currently face.

On July 30 and 31, 2010, following the Ministry's announcement, the textile workers expressed their extreme discontent by demonstrating in the streets, when the police forces reportedly fired tear gas on the demonstrators and brutally charged at them.

Several protesters and union leaders were arrested and union leaders have been criminalised, as illustrated by the criminal charges filed against Ms. Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter, and Mr. Aminul Islam, union leaders, members of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). They have all been accused of "inciting workers unrest during the protests". BCWS has already been targeted by the authorities in the past. Indeed, prior to these events, on June 3, 2010, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) cancelled the non-governmental license of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) thus depriving it of its legal right to operate in the country. Moreover, the bank account of the institution was closed, following an order issued by the Director General of the NAB.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders is deeply concerned about the ongoing harassment against members and leaders of the BCWS and urges the Bangladeshi authorities to drop the charges against Mr. Islam, Ms. Kalpona Akter and Mr. Babul Akhter as they seem to be merely aimed at sanctioning their human rights activities. The Observatory further calls upon the authorities to re-issue a NGO registration for BCW, to repeal their decision to close its bank account and ensure, in all circumstances, that BCWS and its members are able to carry out their work freely and without any hindrance. More generally, the Observatory exhorts the Bangladeshi authorities to stop all acts of harassment, including judicial harassment, against demonstrators, union leaders and all human rights defenders in Bangladesh and to conform with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

The Observatory kindly urges you to act expeditiously in the framework of your mandate with regards to this situation.
and we express our sincere hope that you will take these considerations and requests into account.

Yours sincerely,

Souhayr BELHASSEN
FIDH President

Eric SOTTAS
OMCT Secretary General