



Geneva and Brussels, 4th October 2021

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IndustriALL Global Union and industriAll European Trade Union call on the European Commission to ensure that the GSP+ conditionalities demand respect of democratic and trade union rights in Sri Lanka

Dear colleagues in the European Commission and the European External Action Service,

We are writing this letter to you on behalf of [IndustriALL Global Union](#) and [industriALL European Trade Union](#), both representing millions of workers in mining, energy and manufacturing industries in Europe and worldwide, including Sri Lanka.

We wish to bring to your attention the concerns of the unions in Sri Lanka in the context of the current discussions regarding GSP+ in Sri Lanka.

While unions in Sri Lanka are very mindful of the advantages of the GSP+ status to Sri Lanka, we wish to place some of our concerns regarding democratic and trade union rights in Sri Lanka, which we believe must be fully considered in the negotiations with the government of Sri Lanka.

In the last year, government measures against the spread of coronavirus have unfairly targeted workers, especially those working in the Export Processing Zones. In October 2020, garment workers in Sri Lanka [were herded off into quarantine by the army in the middle of the night](#) following a rapid increase of infections. This measure could have been avoided by forming the recommended health committees.

In July 2021, trade unions, including teachers' unions and students were protesting against the privatization and militarization of education. Those protesting were dealt with brutally by the police despite the fact that the right to protest is protected by the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

We are further informed that the protestors were granted bail by the magistrate. Upon their release, the police rounded them up and forcibly took them to a quarantine centre. They are kept in the quarantine centre against their will. The police have no right to take away people in the name of quarantine. This was again a serious violation of the Constitutional and democratic rights of the trade unionists and citizens of Sri Lanka.

In the last month alone, two of IndustriALL Global Union's affiliates have faced police intimidation and union busting in their efforts to organise workers into unions, a right which is protected by the constitution of Sri Lanka as well as ILO core convention, including Convention 87.

The Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union has informed us that one of their members working in a factory located in the Koggala Free Trade Zone was summoned to the criminal investigation unit of the Galle police station on 4th September 2021 and questioned regarding his membership in our trade union, leadership of the trade union and a post of his on Facebook. He was also questioned about an industrial dispute that is at present pending before the authorities.

The summoning of individual workers to police stations in industrial matters is a way to intimidate workers and questioning them about their membership in trade unions is an infringement of their freedom of association, which is guaranteed by ILO Convention 87. These kind of police actions are completely unwarranted in labour disputes. IndustriALL Global Union had written to the Cabinet Minister for Public Security and the Minister for Labour, calling upon them to ensure that police do not intervene in trade unions, to which again there is no response.

Another affiliate, the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union has informed us of the termination of 16 workers by the management for joining a union in August 2021. Despite the fact that an industrial dispute was raised over a month ago, the Labour Department is yet to take serious action in the matter. We have written to the management in this regard.

Trade unions, including IndustriALL Global Union's affiliates, met with you, discussed these issues in detail on the 30th of September, and submitted a memorandum proposing certain urgent remedial measures.

IndustriALL Global Union and industriAll European Trade Union are calling on you to ensure that the GSP+ conditionalities include a strict compliance with ILO core conventions and the Constitution of Sri Lanka with regard to democratic and trade union rights. We also request you to consider the remedial measures proposed by the trade unions in the attached document, particularly setting up a Monitoring Committee that includes trade unions, in order to ensure compliance.

I look forward to your positive action.

Yours sincerely,



Atle Høie
General Secretary
IndustriALL Global Union



Luc Triangle
General Secretary
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