

INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM

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TRADE UNION REPRESSION IN THE PHILIPPINES HIGHLIGHTED IN NEW PETITION ILRF files petition to remove duty free access for the Philippines for failure to stop violence against labor activists

GSP Petition available at

www.laborrights.org/publications/gsppetitionphilippines062207.pdf

WASHINGTON, DC: The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) filed a petition against the Philippines under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program on Friday, June 22. The complaint submitted to the Office of the United States Trade Representative alleges that the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) systematically denies workers the rights of freedom of association, the right to organize and to form and join unions. The petition requests suspension of GSP benefits to the Philippines until the violence against unions is effectively addressed by the Philippine government.

The widespread and often violent attacks on workers in the Philippines have earned the country a rating as the second most dangerous country in the world for union organizing, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). In the year 2006, Philippine trade unionists and labor activists experienced **110 assaults on picket lines, 102 physical assaults and injuries, 41 instances of torture, 33 killings, 40 abductions, 748 instances of intimidation, 946 “grave threats,” 159 illegal arrests or detentions, and 1,097 instances of blocking, breaking up or violently dispersing demonstrations.**¹

The ILRF petition states that labor leaders and activists in the Philippines are being killed and abducted, subject to surveillance, harassments, intimidation and grave threats by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), local police forces and private security forces. Criminal charges, including rebellion and sedition, are used to quell dissent and end organizing efforts. The Philippine government has tacitly condones attacks on labor leaders, as well as other human rights activists, by its failure to investigate or hold those responsible accountable for the killings and abductions of union leaders and members.

The US government has failed to hold the Philippines to account for the escalating violence, instead rewarding President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for her promise of partnership as an ally in the War on Terror. Since President Bush met with President

¹ “Workers’ Rights Report 2006,” *CTUHR Monitor*, December 2006.

Arroyo in 2001, GSP benefits have risen sharply. In 2006, the US imported \$1.14 billion in goods from the Philippines under GSP.² **Multinational corporations implicated in the escalating violence against unions include Nestle, Coca Cola, Toyota and International Wiring Systems, according to the petition.**

The author of the complaint, ILRF Staff Attorney Brian Campbell, said “Until the government of the Philippines takes meaningful steps to end the use of violence and the misuse of the legal system to deny workers’ fundamental rights, it should not receive special economic privileges from the US.”

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of ILRF, said, “It is unconscionable that the US continues to reward a government which violates workers’ fundamental rights through the use of extrajudicial killings, among other abusive techniques.”

For years, ILRF has been one of the central organizations working to support labor rights conditionality in trade programs like GSP. The Philippines GSP complaint has been filed with the United States Trade Representative and is currently pending a decision to accept or reject. ILRF will continue to coordinate with labor rights organizations in the Philippines to push both the US and Philippines governments as well as multinational corporations to respect workers’ rights in that country.

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² United States International Trade Commission, Interactive Tariff and Trade Dataweb, at <http://dataweb.usitc.gov/>