

INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM | INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES

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**FIRESTONE WORKERS IN LIBERIA SIGN HISTORIC CONTRACT
New Contract is a Major Victory for International Campaign Against Firestone**

Workers on the world's largest rubber plantation owned by Firestone in Liberia will sign a new collective bargaining agreement today at a ceremony with company management and the Labor Minister of Liberia. In Firestone's 82 year history in Liberia, this is the first time that workers have been represented by an independent and democratically elected union leadership during contract negotiations.

Workers on the plantation held the first ever free and fair union elections in July 2007 and after a long struggle which included a two week strike and international solidarity actions, the newly elected union leaders were finally recognized by company management in December 2007 and new collective bargaining agreement negotiations began. The new contract represents a major step forward for workers and their families as well as a success for the international solidarity campaign which has been putting pressure on Bridgestone Firestone to improve conditions on its rubber plantation.

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum, said, "This is an historic occasion for the workers on Firestone's rubber plantation in Liberia as well as for the union movement in Liberia and for international labor solidarity. We will be watching closely to be sure that Firestone honors their commitments and goes even further in improving working and living conditions for their workers in Liberia."

Emira Woods, co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies, said, "The workers of Firestone are casting off chains of exploitation. For the first time in 82 years, workers have a contract negotiated by an independent and effective union. This is a monumental step in the long road to justice."

For 82 years, workers on the Firestone plantation in Liberia have been forced to meet an unreasonably high daily production quota or their low wages of just over \$3 a day would be halved. As a result, they have been forced to bring their children and wives to work to meet their quota. Among other abuses, workers had to carry two buckets of raw latex weighing 75 pounds each on a stick on their backs for miles without protective gear. The workers live in crowded shacks without running water, electricity or indoor latrines.

Through an independent union, the Firestone Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia (FAWUL), the workers now have an important vehicle for making their voice heard by Firestone management.

For more information, please visit the Stop Firestone coalition website at www.StopFirestone.org.

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