



September 8, 2010

File: 20405-B02

Ms. Sheikh Hasina Wajed
Office of the Prime Minister
Gano Bhaban, Sher-e Bangla Nagar
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: 880-2-811-32-43

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Intimidation and Harassment of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity

On behalf of the 3.2 million working men and women members of the Canadian Labour Congress, I am writing to protest against intimidation and harassment of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS).

We have been informed, by the International Trade Union Confederation, that on July 30, several criminal charges were filed against Ms. Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter, and Mr. Aminul Islam of the BCWS. We have also been informed that their family members have been harassed and threatened with violence by police officers. We understand that Ms. Kalpona Akter and Mr. Aminul Islam were arrested on August 12, 2010.

It is reported that BCWS leaders have been accused of inciting worker unrest. However, BCWS is an internationally known and well respected advocate for workers' rights. Also, it is reported that cases have been filed against other worker leaders, including Haji Md. Shahidul Islam, Montu Ghosh, Mahbub Islam, Bazlur Rashid Feruz, Moshrefa Mishu, Sultan Bahar, Nasim Nasrin, Ruhul Amin and Abul Hossain, and that several had to go into hiding.

The Canadian Labour Congress understands that they have been charged in connection with demonstrations against the new minimum wage proposal announced on July 29, and that many other labour leaders and strike participants were arrested or have had arrest warrants issued against them. Some say that at least 5,000 workers have been dismissed from their employment for involvement in the protests.

.../2



Police have reportedly confirmed that 20 people, including seven women, have been arrested since the beginning of August, and that they had opened files on "several thousand" workers. Some reports claim that at least 100 workers have been arrested and files have been opened against 12,000 workers.

Targeting trade unions and labour rights organisations for defending the legitimate demands of garment workers for higher minimum wages is against the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Your government is under an obligation to refrain from such action under ILO Conventions 87 and 98, which are ratified by Bangladesh.

The Canadian Labour Congress urges you to ensure the withdrawal of criminal charges of fomenting labour unrest filed against labour rights advocates and worker organisers. We also urge you to immediately release all those imprisoned and withdraw arrest warrants issued against all other labour leaders or workers for exercising their fundamental rights, and guarantee their personal safety while in detention.

I thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. Georgetti', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

cc. CLC Officers and Assistants
Hon. Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Mr. Robert McDougall, High Commissioner, High Commission of Canada to
Bangladesh