

CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN

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Nov 21, 2006

Stop violence against Philippine garment workers

■ Please support garment workers in the Philippines, whose attempts to organize in defense of their rights are currently met with repression and extreme violence.

The incidents mentioned below highlight once again that the Philippine authorities not only condone acts of union repression, but are also reportedly perpetrators of extreme violence against union representatives and other workers' advocates. Philippine labor organizations call upon the international community to support their struggle.



On August 30, Chong Won union members started a picket line in front of the factory after management sent them home allegedly due to absence of orders.

Recent violent incidents include:

- The shooting of Gerardo Cristobal, a former union president and member of the Solidarity of Cavite Workers (SCW), a labor-related NGO,
- The brutal murder of Bishop Alberto Ramento of the Philippine Independent Church, workers' rights defender and chairman of the board of the Workers Assistance Center, Inc, a non-governmental labor institution, and
- The continuous violence against strikers at two garment factories in the Cavite export processing zone: Chong Won Fashion Inc., producing for such major retailers as Wal Mart, Target and Mervyn's, and Phils. Jeon Garment Inc., producing for such brands as Byford, DKNY, CNI Los Angeles, Dreamstation, Hanes and Bobson.

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is alarmed at the recent violence and ongoing repression directed at those who support workers' rights in the Philippines and find the alleged involvement of local authorities, the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) police and Jantro Security guards to be particularly troubling. These incidents are not isolated cases; human rights organizations report the continuous occurrence of political violence in the Philippines over the last years. (see box)

Please contact the Philippine president and the governor of Cavite Province to voice your concerns about these recent events and to demand their immediate action to ensure the safety of workers and labor rights defenders and to see that workers' rights are respected in the Philippines. The Clean Clothes Campaign also calls upon companies sourcing from the Philippines to support workers' right of freedom of association and to strongly condemn all forms of violence against workers and labor organizers.

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Background information

Labor leader Cristobal ambushed

On April 28, 2006 labor leader Gerardo Cristobal was seriously wounded when

More info:

[April 4, 2007 - Philippines: violence against workers continues](#)

[Labor leader Cristobal ambushed](#)

[Bishop Ramento killed](#)

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Human rights violations in the Philippines

In 2005 151 political activists were killed, of which 31 were labor leaders, local organizers of trade unions and urban poor communities and labor activists, according to the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER) in their report on the International Labor Solidarity Mission organized on April 30 2006.

The same report refers to the killing of five laborers by suspected military, para-military or police agents, during the first four months of 2006.

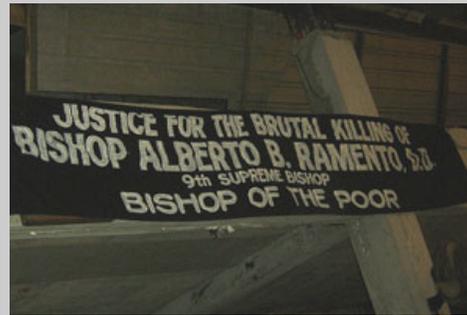
The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) addressed the Philippine president in July this year with a distressing list of 19 incidents that took place between September 2005 and July 2006, in which unionists, labor activists and workers were killed, abducted, or arrested for their labor organizing work.

[More info >>](#)

ambushed by armed men who were later identified as operatives of police intelligence in Imus, Cavite. Cristobal had been receiving persistent threats to his life from the police and private armies of Governor Ireneo "Ayong" Maliksi of Cavite, when the shooting took place. Cristobal suffered serious gunshot wounds to his stomach, hip and hand. He was on his way to a protest action when the incident took place. The protest, however, was called-off following the incident. The head of the police intelligence operatives in Imus later tried to twist the account of the shooting, saying that Cristobal was responsible for starting the gunfight. No independent investigation into this case has taken place to date. Cristobal had to undergo several operations as a result of the attack, which left two bullets lodged near his spinal column.

Bishop Ramento killed

Bishop Alberto Ramento, workers' rights defender and chairman of the board of the Workers Assistance Center (WAC), a non-governmental labor institution was stabbed to death and found lying in his church in Tarlac City the morning of October 3, 2006. He was with the military's Order of Battle, or hit list, before he was brutally murdered. His brutal killing took place at a time when unions and striking workers are under severe pressure from the government's Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA). Bishop Alberto Ramento has been actively supporting the workers of Cavite in their struggle for protection and defense of their rights from 1998 until his death. He determinedly opposed the repressive character of the Arroyo government and strongly criticized the on-going extra-judicial killings of activists.



WAC firmly believes that Bishop Ramento was murdered because of his vocal and unyielding political conviction for the poor and oppressed people. For further information visit <http://www.wacphilippines.com/?p=43#more-43>

EPZ police violence against striking workers



The police of the Cavite Export Processing Zone and private security guards assaulting striking workers

The police of the Cavite Export Processing Zone and private security guards are reported to have assaulted striking workers protesting outside the Chong Won Fashion Inc. and the Phils Jeon Garments, Inc. factories. On several different occasions, workers were reportedly hit with clubs on the head and kicked all over their bodies. Since the start of a strike on September 25, food, water and clothing supplies to the workers have been blocked and their makeshift tents were dismantled despite the fact that the union received permission to strike under Department of Labor and Employment regulations.

The conflict at the Korean-owned Chong Won Fashion, Inc. factory, based in the Cavite Export Processing Zone in the Philippines and producing for US companies including Wal Mart, Target, White Stag and Mervyn's, started when management refused to recognize the bargaining rights of the Nagkakaisang

Won), formed in 2004. Since its formation, the union sent management various letters of intent to start collective bargaining (CBA) negotiations, the last being filed by the union on June 24, 2006. All of the attempts to start negotiations have been refused by management. Instead management has reportedly been insulting and verbally abusive to union members and has suspended active union officers and members for minor violations of company rules and regulations. The Workers Assistance Center (WAC) reports that in some cases, these alleged violations have been completely false. Union leaders have been under constant pressure to resign, being threatened with filing of charges, warnings, suspensions or transfers to other departments if they refused. On August 16 and September 7, two union officers, Monina Eugenio and Sellwyn Simpan, were fired without just cause.

On August 30, Chong Won union members started a picket line in front of the factory after management sent them home allegedly due to absence of orders. A Notion of Strike was filed before the National Conciliation and Mediation Board of the Department of Labor and Employment (NCMB-DOLE), in preparation of a general strike of the workers at Chong Won. The union's demands concentrated on the start of CBA negotiations with the management.

On August 31, at least 40 security guards and policemen attached to the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) violently broke into and dismantled the workers' picket line. The guards and police were armed with clubs, short firearms and had their nameplates covered. This attack was repeated after about 15 to 20 minutes, this time being enforced by the PEZA Police Chief Jose Sarasua. Although the workers stand firm and continue their picket lines, the police continue to harass them.

More Chong Won workers walked off the job on September 25 and joined the picket line, frustrated at the lack of progress regarding the demands of the protesting union members - the start of CBA negotiations and the reinstatement of union officers Monina Eugenio and Sellwyn Simpan. On September 26 and September 30, Chong Won management issued termination notices to a total of 116 strikers, which is illegal under Philippine labor law. Meanwhile the production of a Wal-Mart order at the Chong Won Fashion, Inc. continued, being carried out by 760 contract workers hired to replace the strikers.

Striking Chong Won workers



At Phils Jeon Garments, Inc, another Korean-owned factory in the Cavite EPZ, the lawful elected union met the same kind of problems as at Chong Won. Management refused to start CBA negotiations, instead questioning the legitimacy of the union Kaisahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Phils. Jeon. However, the DOLE has declared the union as sole and exclusive bargaining representatives in a final and executory decision. Since July the Phils Jeon union has been demonstrating daily in protest of management's continued refusal to begin CBA negotiations. On August 12, the Phils Jeon union's president Emmanuel Bautista was illegally dismissed, according to the WAC, on the basis of false accusations of serious misconduct. Instead, it is believed that Bautista's dismissal results from his support for co-workers' complaints regarding unreasonable rules and regulations. On September 25, workers of Phils Jeon went on strike.

On September 25 and 27, PEZA police, Philippine National Police from Rosaria Municipal police station and Jantro security guards violently dispersed and brutally beat the striking workers of both the Chong Won and the Phils Jeon factories, injuring at least 50 union members. Food deliveries to the picketing workers at both sites have been blocked by PEZA since. The protesters cannot leave the zone out of fear of not being readmitted. Over 200 of the strikers are being prevented from entering the zone, and have been threatened with blacklisting from every factory in the zone.

On October 19, management of both Chong Won and Phils Jeon dismantled the temporary shelters the striking workers have set up to protect them from the sun and rain.

On October 23, 2006, the union secretary Merly Grafe of Kaisahan ng mga Manggagawa sa Phils. Jeon and union president Resurreccion Ravelo of Nagkakaisang Manggagawa sa Chong Won Fashion filed a formal complaint before the regional office of the Commission on Human Rights against PEZA Director General Lilia De Lima, PEZA Industrial Relations Division Chief Atty. Mary Jane Arada, PEZA Police Chief Jose Sarasua, and Philippine National Police Chief Inspector Audie Lirio Madrideo, head of the Rosario Municipal Police Station.

The unions charge the respondents with allegedly conspiring with management to use their authority to violate the fundamental rights of the workers at the two companies. They specifically refer to the violent dispersals of their strike carried out by PEZA and its security forces without any lawful written order on September 25 and 27. A total of 50 workers were injured in these incidents, including a pregnant worker, Analyn Diaz, of Phils. Jeon who had a miscarriage days later. The union leaders also strongly condemn PEZA Director General De Lima for the blanket authority she gave, in particular, to Atty. Arada and Sarasua, in using violence, arbitrary and coercive acts against the workers on strike such as banning the entry of the strikers to the economic zone, continued enforcement of a food and water blockade, supplying and escorting of replacement workers to get into the factory, confiscation of strikers' company identification card and zone pass, and setting up of checkpoints to ensure no entry of strikers to their picket lines. For more information on the complaint, please see <http://www.wacphilippines.com/?p=45>.

Brands in the Cavite EPZ and the Philippines

Companies producing their goods in the Philippines have a responsibility to ensure respect for workers' rights to organize in the Philippines, therefore they should strongly condemn the climate of violence against local trade unions and labor rights organizations and take immediate action to see that the current problems are resolved. The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) and the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) approached the international brand companies, known to source from the Philippines in general and the Cavite EPZ in particular, to urge them to contact their suppliers and the Philippine authorities about these issues.

American Eagle Outfitter, Gap, Jones Apparel, Liz Claiborne, Phillips- Van Heusen, Polo Ralph Lauren and Wal-Mart signed a joint letter (initiated by the MSN) to the Philippine president urging the government to take proactive measures to ensure the physical safety and to protect the rights of workers and labor rights promoters. Find the text at: <http://en.maquilasolidarity.org/sites/maquilasolidarity.org/files/CompanyJointLetter.pdf>.

Tommy Hilfiger reported that they contacted their central sourcing department and local buying offices in the Philippines. Nike informed the CCC that they made contact with their supplier and stressed the importance of workers' rights, in particular the development of an environment that fully respects freedom of association. Target claims that they have instigated their vendor to address the violations at the Chong Won factory. Ann Taylor wrote to the Clean Clothes Campaign that they will contact their suppliers and continue to monitor the situation in the Cavite Export Processing Zone closely.

Although the Clean Clothes Campaign welcomes these steps taken towards suppliers, a serious approach to the issues at stake takes more than a single phone call, letter or meeting to effectively guarantee the right to organize for workers in a country known for its flagrant violation of labor advocates' rights. None of these companies provided an explanation of how they would address the general anti-union atmosphere in the long term. Furthermore, they did not express their concerns to the Philippine president.

Adidas, although admitting the potential benign effect of companies' letters of concern to governments when the safety of labor rights promoters is at stake, did until now not want to address the Philippine government about these issues.

Other companies sourcing from the Philippines, Reebok, Eddie Bauer, Shopko, Cherokee, Jansport, Limited brands, DKNY and Airin, were approached but did not react to our call to reach out to their suppliers and the Philippine government, neither did they clearly state that they do not have business relationships in the Philippines. We are still in dialogue with C&A about these matters.

Action request

Please read the update of April 4, 2007 - [Philippines: violence against workers continues](#)

1. Send a letter to the president of the Philippines, the governor of Cavite province, the director-general of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority to demand an end to the violence against labor rights leaders, activists and workers

on strike. Addresses and a sample letter are provided below.

2. Send a letter to the brands sourcing from the Philippines, to demand 'that they communicate their adherence to the right of freedom of association and the strong condemnation of any violence directed at workers, union leaders and labor rights advocates in general to their suppliers and the Philippine authorities. Addresses and a sample letter are provided below.

3. **Sign the online petition to the Process Exporting Zone Authority (PEZA)** started by the Workers Assistance Center (WAC), based in Cavite, Philippines, in support of the striking workers at Chong Won Fashion, Inc. and Phils. Jeon Garments, Inc. To sign the petition, go to <http://www.petitiononline.com/cwpj925/petition.html>

Sample letter to the President of the Philippines

Dear Honorable President Macapagal-Arroyo

I write to you to express my deep concern about the current use of violence against trade unionists and labor rights activists in the Philippines. I have been informed by the Clean Clothes Campaign about recent reports of alleged violent attacks on striking workers and the assaults and killings of labor rights promoters. These include the shooting of Gerardo Cristobal, former union president and a member of the Solidarity of Cavite Workers (SCW), on April 28 2006, the murder of Bishop Alberto Ramento, chair of board of the Workers Assistance Center (WAC), on October 3 2006, and the ongoing violence against striking workers by the police and security guards of the Cavite Export Processing Zone (EPZ).

I am shocked to hear that the armed men that ambushed Gerardo Cristobal were later identified as operatives of police intelligence in Imus, Cavite, and that allegedly Bishop Alberto Ramento was with the military's Order of Battle or hit list before he was brutally murdered. I am also disturbed to learn that striking workers at Chong Won Fashion Inc and the Phils. Jeon Garments Inc have suffered violent attacks by the police of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA), the Philippine National Police from the Rosario Municipal police station and private security forces on August 31, September 25 and September 27 this year. I understand that food deliveries to the picketing workers at both sites have been blocked by PEZA and that striking workers cannot leave the zone out of fear of not being readmitted.

I strongly urge your government to take proactive steps to put a stop to the police violence and discriminatory practices of the Cavite Export Processing Zone authorities and to ensure the physical safety and rights of workers and labor rights promoters in the region. I also urge you to support and fully cooperate with an independent and impartial investigation into the murder of Bishop Ramento and the shooting of Gerardo Cristobal.

Your prompt attention on this serious issue is highly demanded. I am looking forward to hear from you.

Sincerely

Sample letter to brands

Dear Madam/Sir

I write to you to express my deep concern about the current use of violence against trade unionists and labor rights activists in the Philippines. As you know, there have been recent reports of alleged violent attacks on striking workers and the assaults and killings of labor rights promoters. Examples provided by the Clean Clothes Campaign and other labor rights organizations include the murder of Bishop Alberto Ramento, chair of board of the Workers Assistance Center (WAC), the shooting of Gerardo Cristobal, former union president and a member of the Solidarity of Cavite Workers (SCW) and the ongoing violence against striking workers by the police and security guards of the Cavite Export Processing Zone (EPZ).

I believe it is extremely important that companies producing goods in the Philippines voice their opposition to the use of violence against human and labor rights promoters and workers. I therefore expect that you will very clearly express your concerns to the Philippine authorities and collaborate with labor rights organizations in supporting the workers' right to organize.

I urge you to contact the management of factories supplying your company and the Philippine Economic Zone Authority and clearly state:

- Your commitment to ensuring respect for workers' rights, in particular

freedom of association and collective bargaining, in the countries from which you source, and your belief that local trade unions and labor rights organizations can play an important role in working with manufacturers, government, and buyers to help improve labor practices and working conditions in the apparel industry;

- You will not tolerate violence, harassment, intimidation or discrimination against workers because of their union membership or activities;
- Where specific violations of workers' rights take place in factories producing for your company, you will develop corrective action plans with workers' and their representatives, as well as management, and work with other buyers, suppliers and stakeholders to implement these plans.

In addition, I urge you to contact the President of the Philippines and the Governor of Cavite Province to:

- Condemn the violence against labor rights leaders and activists and demand they ensure that all violence and threats against people and organizations working to protect and fight for the rights of workers to unionise and organise is stopped. Workers' rights activists should be able to express their views freely and operate without fear of violence;
- Clearly call on them to carry out an impartial investigation into the murder of Bishop Ramento and the Cristobal shooting and bring those responsible to justice. They should also take proactive steps to ensure the physical safety of their family members, union members and labor rights leaders and activists;
- Underline the importance for you, as a foreign buyer who does business in the Philippines, to have confidence in the government's commitment to trade union freedom and the rule of law;
- Express your commitment to ensuring respect for workers' rights, in particular freedom of association and collective bargaining, in the countries from which you source, and your belief that local trade unions and labor rights organizations can play an important role in working with manufacturers, government, and buyers to help improve labor practices and working conditions in the apparel industry.

Please keep me informed of the steps you take to follow up on this serious matter.

Yours sincerely,

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TELL A FRIEND



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