Bangladesh Labour Activists Released

The Clean Clothes Campaign is very pleased to announce the release of Kalpona Akter, Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam after spending 30 days in custody. During a special hearing on Wednesday September 8, 2010, a magistrate judge granted bail to the three defendants, and ordered their release.

They were officially released at approximately 10 PM Dhaka time on Friday September 10, at the start of the Eid Festival, which marks the end of Ramadan.

We would like to thank everyone who supported the BCWS, and contributed to the release of Kalpona, Babul, and Aminul. This is, however, only the first step towards justice for the defendants.

They still face the charges brought against them by the government of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the BCWS’s non-governmental registration has yet to be restored and the organization is still not functioning. Please stay tuned for further updates and action requests.

Background information

Kalpona and Babul were arrested on August 13 at 2 AM in the morning, and stand accused of being involved in 8 cases of worker unrest, violence and destruction of property. These cases, which were filed by garment factory security personnel and police officers against thousands of (anonymous) workers, included accusations against what appears to be an arbitrary list of union leaders and labour activists, including staff members at the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). Aminul, who had already been arrested and brutally beaten in June by the National Security Intelligence, but managed to escape, was rearrested and charged in 3 cases on August 29. Meanwhile, Babul was beaten in his holding cell on August 28 with a thick wooden stick by several non-uniformed persons, who blindfolded him and then threatened to shoot him in a staged police incident.
It seems that the source of most of the “evidence” against the BCWS staff comes from the testimonies of 6 other arrested workers, which was obtained only after charges against the BCWS had already been filed. Moreover, Aminul had been coerced into signing a statement that incriminated Babul and Kalpona, revealing efforts by the police to manufacture evidence. The Bangladeshi government cancelled the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity’s (BCWS) NGO registration on June 3, 2010, and ordered the confiscation of all of its property and froze its bank accounts.

Two months later, on August 9, BCWS was granted permission to submit a new NGO registration application. This was considered unacceptable to the BCWS, because agreement to the submission of a new application would essentially be an admission of the government’s allegations against BCWS as stated in NAB’s June 3, 2010 deregistration letter, namely: “involvement in several wrongful acts, including inciting to create [a] riotous situation and assisting in creating labor unrest in the readymade garment sector, and in anti-state and social activities,” which are “deemed as [a] threat to national interests and security.” Another condition of re-registration was that Kalpona and Babul had to resign from their positions at BCWS.

The BCWS, however, continues to maintain that their NGO registration should be restored based on the legitimacy of the review petition they submitted to the NAB on July 27, 2010, in which they reject all of the outstanding allegations against them.

See also [http://www.sweatfree.org/bcwsalert-7-2010](http://www.sweatfree.org/bcwsalert-7-2010) for more background information and a case chronology.

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