Stop Firestone Coalition Celebrates Victory of Union Elections

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STOP FIRESTONE COALITION CELEBRATES VICTORY AS LIBERIAN SUPREME COURT DECISION APPROVES UNION ELECTION RESULTS ON FIRESTONE RUBBER PLANTATION

Firestone encouraged to begin negotiating with new union leaders

After a lengthy strike by workers on a rubber plantation owned by the Firestone Natural Rubber Company in Liberia, the Supreme Court of Liberia ruled today that recent union elections held in July 2007 on the plantation were indeed legitimate. The first free, fair and independent union elections to take place on the plantation in its 81 year history in Liberia ushered in a new union leadership, but the previous company-controlled union challenged the elections through the legal system. The Supreme Court ruling confirmed that the union elections were in fact legitimate as the international election observers and the Firestone workers have been asserting for over five months.

The Stop Firestone Coalition, which includes both U.S. and Liberia-based human rights, labor, environmental and Africa-focused organizations, welcomed the ruling and called on Firestone management to immediately recognize the newly elected union leaders.

Austin Nantee, the newly elected President of the Firestone Agriculture Workers’ Union of Liberia (FAWUL), said, “The Firestone workers are jubilant and are steadfast in their commitment. The workers themselves have realized their power and are looking forward to carving out a new collective bargaining agreement with the company.”

Alfred Brownell, President and founder of the environmental law group Green Advocates in Liberia said, “This is a great Christmas gift and we are looking forward to a new day on the plantation. The Supreme Court has shown a large degree of independence and this is a victory not only for the workers, but also Liberia. The international collective action has produced the results today.”

Emira Woods, co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus in the U.S. said, “After 81 years of modern day slavery, the Liberian judiciary has done the right thing to recognize this new union leadership and usher in a new day for the workers in Liberia.”

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum in the U.S. said, “This is a huge victory for the workers. With the coming of the new year, we hope that Firestone management will resolve to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement in good faith with the new leaders.”

The Firestone rubber plantation in Liberia has been the focus of international scrutiny as well as a lawsuit
because of its use of child labor, abuse of worker’s rights and environmental destruction. As a result of its abuses in Liberia, the company was presented with a Public Eye Award for Worst Global Corporation in 2007. A democratic and independent union leadership will help the workers to negotiate conditions which respect their human rights.

The Stop Firestone coalition is a coalition of U.S. and Liberian-based human rights, labor, environmental and Africa-focused organizations working to hold Firestone accountable for its 81 years of exploitation of Liberia. For more information, please visit: www.StopFirestone.org [1].

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