



International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP) Statement on Construction Site Fire in Icheon, Korea on 29 April 2020

06 May 2020

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation - Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP), representing effectively over 60 million members of 59 affiliated national trade union centres in 34 countries and territories in the Asian and Pacific region, I would like to extend, in great sorrow, our sincere condolence to the victims and their families of an industrial accident at a construction site in Icheon, Korea on 29 April 2020, killing 38 workers, including one Chinese and two Kazakhstan workers, and having injured 10 workers.

We express our strong dismay to the Moon Jae-In administration, having claimed to pursue the 'human-centred world', to fail to keep many lives of workers again as they failed to protect 6,119 workers' lives from 2017 to 2019. This factory fire is a clear act of murder to have knowingly continued the operation without any preventive or corrective measure after several official warnings against the fire hazard. This is also an administrative and regulatory failure to neglect a duty to stop the tragic accident.

Furthermore, we condemn strongly the increasing outsourcing of occupational hazards and deaths in Korea while deregulation and fragmentation with greater precariousness in the Korean labour market have been becoming more acute. The Korean government's occupational safety and health policy framework, including necessary inspection, has been underdeveloped in order only to protect interests of business with soft punishments while thousands of workers lose their lives and limbs every day. In particular, most vulnerable workers, such as youth, women, migrant, precarious workers and so on, have been suffering the most without protection.

The ILO Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) stipulates clearly that labour is not a commodity and the international community recognises safe working conditions as a human right. A person's life cannot be weighed with anything and labour is noble to realise our lives as well as to sustain our society, community and family. Hence, an occupational accident or disease is a man-made crime to humanity.

Hence, the ITUC – AP firmly support the struggles of our Korean affiliates, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), for identification of the exact cause of the fire and for heavy punishment of all the responsible.

Further, the ITUC-AP reaffirms our commitment to working together with our affiliate for an adequate and effective national occupational safety and health framework to protect all workers from any work-related risk in Korea. We note clearly that President Moon Jae-in made his commitment to reduction of industrial accidents to create safer workplaces on Labour Day this year.

In order to eliminate occupational hazards and create an environment in which workers can work with peace of mind, it is necessary to promote social dialogue based on trust building among social partners.

In this regard, we recommend strongly the Korean government;

- to ensure a thorough investigation and severe punishment of those who are involved in the industrial action in Icheon, Korea on 29 April, and to provide full supports for the victims' families.
- to have, without delay, social dialogue to improve its national occupational safety and health framework, including
 - 1) introduction of a law on punishment of enterprises responsible for fatal accidents and diseases;
 - 2) strengthen punishment of those who have responsibilities throughout its production chains;
 - 3) reinforce an occupational safety and health authority to suspend any business operation without appropriate compliance with its administrative order;
 - 4) increase the number of labour / OSH inspectors with an authority to check workplace, especially, with high occupational hazards;
 - 5) improve a system to collect data on occupational accidents and diseases with proper penalties to false reports by employers; and
 - 6) expend the protection of the industrial accident insurance for all workers; and
- to respect the fundamental workers' rights including the freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and collective action for all workers.

Our demand is simple and right;

'Workers are not numbers but humans. Stop killing us'

Shoya Yoshida
General Secretary
ITUC-Asia Pacific