

## Stop the Killings in the Philippines!

We condemn the killing of Edward Panganiban, secretary of the independent union “Salamat-Independent”, in the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines. On 3 June he was trying to catch a ride to work when he was gunned down by motorcycle-riding men at 5:20 pm. He died on the spot, sustaining 12 gunshot wounds in his body.

Panganiban, 27, was the secretary of the union “Salamat-Independent”. For five years, he had been an employee of Japanese-owned Takata Philippines Corporation, which manufactures airbags and car seatbelts, in the Laguna Technology Park.

His death shows the willingness of the previous regime led by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to assassinate union organizers and activists.

Panganiban’s death once again highlights the very repressive atmosphere prevailing in Filipino special economic zones, such as the Laguna Techno Park. These havens of cheap and contractual labor have also established themselves as centers of union busting, with extrajudicial killings fast becoming a weapon of choice against unionists.

The KMU (May 1st Labour Movement Centre) has launched a campaign to end the killing of worker and union activists in the Philippines. The KMU calls on the new administration of President Noynoy Aquino to put an immediate end to extrajudicial killings, abductions and other human rights violations.

The KMU also calls for the previous President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to be held accountable for her role in extrajudicial killings, adductions and other attacks on unionists.



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po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia

tel: + 61 3 9663 7277

email: [aawl@aawl.org.au](mailto:aawl@aawl.org.au)

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# Report on the Labour Movement in the Philippines



*In early May 2010 a delegation of eight Australian trade unionists from the CWU, CFMEU, AMWU and the RTBU from across Australia attended the 26th annual International Solidarity Affair (ISA), in the Philippines. The ISA was organized by the KMU (May 1st Labour Movement Centre), the largest federation of militant unions in the Philippines. The conference was also attended by delegates from Germany, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Denmark and New Zealand.*

## **Workers' conditions in the Philippines**

The 2008 global financial crisis intensified the existing hardship and suffering exacted on the Filipino people by the neo-liberal globalisation policies of the past 20 years, led mainly by the US. Whilst the vast majority of the 94 million Filipino people live and work in the poorest conditions and devastating poverty, much of the country's wealth is hogged by a tiny group of obscenely rich families who run the country. Enormous profits extracted from the Filipino workers' cheap labour by the multinational corporations (mainly US, Japan, South Korea) are sent off shore. At the same time the Filipino economy has become increasingly dependent on remittances from more than 9 million intensely exploited Filipino migrant workers working overseas to support their impoverished families in the Philippines.

Successive governments in the Philippines have implemented wholesale privatisation and deregulation, while business has enacted widespread retrenchments, casualisation, "flexibility", part-time work, putting permanent workers on short term contracts, victimisation

of union members, and more. The GFC provided business and government with an excuse to intensify the exploitation of workers, including rolling back gains won over many decades. The majority of the affected industries are export-oriented, including electronics and garments. Many of the lowest paid workers are now getting wages below even the minimum wage. Official unemployment is 11%, while 19.4% of registered employed workers in 2009 are underemployed and the number continues to rise. These figures do not reflect the true numbers of unemployed with many in "unpaid family work" or impoverished street vendors being counted as employed. An October 2009 survey by the Ibon Foundation found that 71% of Filipinos rate themselves as poor. Basic necessities of life are unaffordable to many people in the Philippines.

The GFC and globalisation have made it easier for employers and the government to crush unions, slash union membership and savagely wipe out many collective agreements. The total labor force in the Philippines is approximately 38 million of whom only 10% is organised in unions and only 4% are covered by a collective agreement. There are many special "export processing zones", which are covered by an official government policy of "no-union, no-strike".

## **Violent repression of workers and union activists**

Against this background trade unions in the Philippines operate in extremely harsh and violently repressive conditions. Successive national governments have ensured that they deliver to multinational corporations and local large employers favourable conditions for the super exploitation of workers.

The military (government and private armies of big employers) constantly harass, threaten and violently attack union activists. Union members and activists are commonly blacklisted by employers, the government, army and police. Many human rights violations are committed by the state's military and private armies and hired goons. Union organisers and activists are the main target of the violence.

In past 8 years 96 union leaders have been murdered in

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the Philippines, the most recent one on 2 June this year. Edward Panganiban, a 27-year old Union Secretary in Takata Philippines Inc. was another motor cycle drive-through assassination, a common method of assassination of trade union activists by the army. The highest number of recorded human rights violations, in the form of harassment, threats, intimidation, bashings, shootings and assassinations, are against workers and union organisations.

Whilst the Filipino Labor Code officially recognises the rights of workers to form unions or workers' organisations, in practice this is not being upheld. Many factories and farms have been militarized, with the army, police or privately employed thugs stationed permanently on site to prevent and crush unions organising and defending the workers. Union activists trying to organise workers or workers fighting for better conditions are regularly harassed, threatened, victimised, intimidated and bashed by soldiers (state and private armies) and hired thugs. Many union activists have been jailed on trumped up charges or have disappeared.

### 8-year long Nestle workers picket

The international ISA delegation met with Nestle workers sacked in 2002 over a dispute with the company, which refused to bargain over workers' retirement benefits. To this day Nestle is ignoring court orders to reinstate sacked workers. ISA delegates joined the sacked workers and supporters on their 8-year long picket line. Sacked Nestle workers are continually harassed, threatened and blacklisted by the army and the company.

### Toyota workers fighting to unionise since 1992

Delegates also met and held extensive discussions with Toyota workers and their families, who have been struggling to form an independent union since 1992. Several times Toyota unsuccessfully tried to set up company sponsored union or yellow unions. In 2001 workers went on strike that resulted in many union activists being sacked. Toyota ignored the supreme court

ruling to reinstate the sacked workers. In 2009 an ILO high level mission investigated the Toyota sackings and recommended reinstatement but nothing has happened, and the government is refusing to enforce the ILO's recommendations. Intimidation, threats, bashings and assassinations of union activists continue until this day. Workers inside are harassed and military intelligence is crawling inside the factory spying on workers and identifying union members and activists to bosses and the military.

The KMU has continued actively working with the Toyota workers - not only with those still working inside the plant but also with sacked workers since 1992. Some sacked workers have been blacklisted by the company and government and live in dire poverty. Some have sold their homes, some returned to countryside and some are hiding on account of arrest warrants for trumped up charges.

### Union busting by South Korean ship-building company Hanjin

Hanjin in Subic Bay is another "no-union, no-strike" "export economic zone" in the Philippines. Hanjin is a South Korean ship building conglomerate and Asia's 3rd largest ship builder. The company prohibits any form of unionism, pays minimum wages and sacks workers at whim without needing to provide any reason - common practice in the Philippines. The company does not have to adhere to any health and safety standards and there are common injuries and deaths from being crushed, falling objects and electrocutions. More than 400 workers are women, mostly welders. The pay is insufficient to make ends meet. Since 2006, 47 workers have died from work accidents and there have been 2,000 recorded serious accidents. Workers taking 2 or 3 days leave are sacked. As an "economic zone" even Government Labour Department and local officials are denied entry to the plant. Recently, 300 union members, mostly leaders, were sacked.

*This article is based on extracts from a report to VTHC on the ISA written by Shirley Winton, CWU P&T (Vic)*

*The full text can be viewed on our website at:*

[http://aawl.org.au/files/pdf/ISA\\_report\\_VTHC\\_10June.pdf](http://aawl.org.au/files/pdf/ISA_report_VTHC_10June.pdf)

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# Report on the Workers Movement in South Korea



Photo: May Day Rally in Seoul

*In April this year, AAWL Union Convenor Piergiorgio Moro made a solidarity visit to South Korea. He reported on the state of the labour movement there, including updates on key labour campaigns.*

## Government attacks on organized labour

The South Korean workers movement has developed through intense and consistent struggle against the state since the 1970s. The present government of Lee Myung-bak has renewed the state's attack on workers, via both legislation and workplace changes. The government is using legislation to not only restrict the ability of unions to organise at the workplace, but also to make it very difficult for workers to actually join unions in the first place.

The government had implemented two new laws concerning union organising. One is that more than one union can represent workers in one workplace, while the other was that the wages of workplace union organisers could not be paid directly by that company. The previous legislation allowed only one union to represent workers in a workplace (once it had won the right to be recognised as such) and the wages of the union officials were paid directly by the company of that workplace as part of the bargaining agreement.

A general strike was planned to protest these new

laws on 28 April, but at the last minute, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) withdrew as a show of respect for the sailors that has died in the sinking of a South Korean military ship the week before. The government passed the law two days later. The construction union, the KFCITU, nevertheless decided to go ahead with the rally on 28 April, as it faces additional government interference in trying to organise workers in the construction sector. The rally was attended by around 5,000 workers, and while under intense government pressure - the rally was totally surrounded by riot police - it went ahead peacefully for over three hours.

The construction sector in South Korea has a high degree of casualisation among its workforce. Employers use many thousands of undocumented workers from overseas as cheaper labour, and the industry suffers from almost two deaths per day in workplace accidents.

Casualisation of labour has become a huge problem in South Korea. It is estimated that South Korea has the highest rate of workers in non-permanent employment contracts in the OECD - around 60% of the workforce. This has undermined the ability of unions to organise by increasing workers' sense of insecurity.



Photo: KFCITU rally against new union laws

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## Ssangyong strike leaders in prison; union trying to re-organise

The two-month long Ssangyong auto strike and occupation in the middle of 2009 ended in the destruction of that workplace chapter of the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU) with all the main union leaders arrested and the union facing million of dollars of fines. Its president is currently in jail facing a sentence of over four years, while the Ssangyong company has organised a new yellow union for its workforce.

AAWL's union convenor Pier Moro visited Mr. Han Sang geun, the former president of the Ssangyong KMWU, in jail to offer solidarity greetings. Mr Han was being held in a local police lock up as he was waiting for an appeal to be heard, but was in very good spirits. Pier also visited the other local KMWU members. They are based in the office of the local KCTU branch, because their old office at Ssangyong is now being used by the new yellow union. They are trying to re-organise their union by getting people re-employed at the Ssangyong factory once again. They do not see the battle as lost.

## Government Employees Struggle to Establish a Union

The Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU) is another union that is battling for legal recognition as it tries to represent government employees - whether at a national, state or local municipal levels. The government sees its employees as an extension of itself, and therefore a unionised workforce is a threat to its authority. The KGEU has been denied registration three times in the last ten years, usually after the government had arrested some of its leadership. Under Korean law, people with criminal records cannot hold a public office, such as leader of a union.

In mid-May, thousands of government employees took part in a nation-wide protest, as part of the campaign for union registration - even though the government had threatened retaliation against members taking part.

## Campaign for workers' health and safety at Samsung

The Samsung corporation is famous in South Korea for its anti-union stance. While it employs over 150,000 workers across a number of sectors, it only has a few yellow unions representing some of its workforce. There is now a specific union just for workers in Samsung. Samsung is also known to use criminal elements to harass and intimidate workers and their families.

The Korean Institute for Labour Safety and Health (KILSH) is a relatively new organisation that is multi sectoral and works to highlight the issue of OH&S in the workplace. Unfortunately South Korea has, since the 1960s, had a bad health and safety record, with high industrial accidents rates and occupational diseases. One of KILSH's main activities is to highlight the deaths and sickness in the electronics industry, which also encompasses Samsung companies.



Photo: KILSH organiser with AAWL's Pier Moro

## Migrant workers organising

There are over 500,000 migrant workers in South Korea who work under very restrictive work permits, which often transform them into 'illegals' once they lose/quit a job. The Migrant Trade Union (MTU) began by organising illegal/irregular workers, but have had to change this tactic as all their leaders were progressively deported. Therefore, they now concentrate on organising legal temporary workers, while only providing welfare support to 'illegal' workers. They organise workers across all sectors.

## 20,000 attend May Day Rally in Seoul

May Day was well attended by approximately 20,000 people in Seoul, with thousands more attending smaller gatherings in regional cities. The day was attended by many social and labour groups, with lots of singing, theatre acts, as well as a speech by the mother of labour activist and martyr Jeon Tae-il, who burned himself in protest against sweatshop conditions in the garment sector in 1970. The crowd then marched to the near by headquarters of the MBS media corporation where all the journalists and workers had been on strike for over three weeks over the issue. government editorial interference.



# Free Han Sang Kyun

On 13 February 2010 Han Sang Kyun, Chairman of Ssangyong Motor Company Union was sentenced to four years in prison for leading a strike against mass sackings. We are campaigning for his release. Send your solidarity letter before Han's final appeal hearing on 9 August 2010.

## Ssangyong Strike South Korea

Workers at the Ssangyong car company were subjected to mass sackings and they occupied the Ssangyong factory in Pyeongtaek in protest.

The company and South Korean government responded with violent police attacks against the strikers and solidarity supporters including the use of chemical agents. They blockaded the workers and denied them food, water and medical aid.

The KCTU conducted a general strike in support of the Ssangyong unionists. The

KMWU organised a major solidarity rally attended by 10,000 unionists who marched to the Pyeongtaek factory to support the occupation.

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) organised an international solidarity campaign sending protest messages to the South Korean government and support for the KMWU.

On 6 August agreement was reached between Ssangyong Motors management and the KMWU Ssangyong Motors Branch.

The 77-day sit-in strike ended after repeated extremely violent police and company security guard attacks. Many unionists are in hospital. Many are in jail and more are facing charges. The Korean Metal Workers Union, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, the International Metalworkers Federation and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union are asking all unionists for continued solidarity.

aawl.org.au 11 August 2009

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# Free Han Sang Kyun

## Motion for your union

Workers are in no way responsible for the capitalist crisis. Companies do not have the right to use mass sackings to deal with their economic crisis, to save their profits while impoverishing workers. Unionists must be able to resist and take industrial action, including strikes, sit-down strikes, picket lines and solidarity action. **Our union demands that Han Sang Kyun be released immediately.**

Send this motion to the Korean government:  
<http://english.president.go.kr/common/email.php>

Send copies to:  
Korean Metal Workers Federation: [inter@metal.nodong.org](mailto:inter@metal.nodong.org)  
Australian Manufacturing Workers Union: [amwuvic@amwu.asn.au](mailto:amwuvic@amwu.asn.au)  
International Metalworkers' Federation: [info@imfmetal.org](mailto:info@imfmetal.org)  
Australia Asia Worker Links: [solidarity@aawl.org.au](mailto:solidarity@aawl.org.au)



Ssangyong Solidarity Rally Melbourne 2009



Ssangyong Solidarity Rally Seoul 2009

## Solidarity letter

Send this solidarity letter to:  
The President, Korean Metal Workers Federation [inter@metal.nodong.org](mailto:inter@metal.nodong.org)

Dear comrades

We are aware that comrade Han Sang Kyun, Chairman of the Ssangyong Motor Company Union was sentenced in February 2010 and is still in jail, because of his union activity during the Ssangyong dispute in 2009.

Before his arrest Han Sang Kyun, who was born in 1961, was living with his wife and two school-aged children.

Comrade Han led a 77 day strike and occupation at the Ssangyong vehicle manufacturing plant in protest against mass sackings. The company and South Korean government responded with violent police attacks against the strikers and solidarity supporters.

They blockaded the workers and denied them food,

water and medical aid. The strike ended in August 2009.

We need to defend the right of all workers and genuine unions to organise and take industrial action. The occupation at Ssangyong was conducted in response to the harsh policy of sackings to save company profits at the expense of workers' jobs.

We strongly protest comrade Han's continued detention, and we demand that he be freed immediately. We echo your call on the Court of Appeals to find Hang Sang Kyun and his 21 other comrades **not guilty**, and rule in favour of their immediate release. Please let Han Sang Kyun know about our support and solidarity for him, his family and all the members of your union.



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