

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 26, 2011**

**The Government of Bangladesh should release a labour leader Mrs. Moshrefa Mishu immediately!**

Mrs. Moshrefa Mishu (46), President of the Garment Workers Unity Forum (GWUF), was illegally arrested by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police at around 1am on 14 December 2010. According to Mrs. Mishu, she had been under intelligence surveillance and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police illegally arrested her without an arrest warrant. Also, the Bangladesh government neither allowed Mrs. Mishu, who suffers from asthma, to take necessary medication nor provided her adequate medical treatment. As a result, her condition has seriously deteriorated while in detention. Furthermore, the Bangladesh government threatened Mrs. Mishu with death if she refused to cooperate with the government, while interrogating her for her union activities in garment industry for over 20 years. It is obvious that the arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of Mrs. Mishu is the irrational repression to labor movement by the Bangladesh government.

We are more concerned by Mrs. Mashu's case because her arbitrary detention is closely related to the recent massive protest organized by the garment industry workers on 12~13 December 2010. This protest was triggered by the workers of the Korean company called Youngone Corporation, the biggest garment factory in Bangladesh. As been reported in the Korean press, thousands of workers protested in the center of Dhaka as well as the Chittagong free export zone (FEZ) where Youngone Corporation is located, and called for the increase of the minimum montly wage and improvement of working conditions. However, the Bangladesh

police brutally suppressed protesters by using rubber bullets and tear bombs and as a result, four protesters died and over 200 were injured. Garment exports account for 80 percent of the county's total exports and several Korean companies including Youngone Corporation are standing on the heart of garment industry. The December protests became the momentum that raised big concern over the miserable condition of the Bangladeshi workers within the Korean society. More Korean people are now urging that the Korean garment companies in Bangladesh should be held accountable for the December crisis.

We strongly criticise the Bangladesh government's illegal detaining of Mrs. Mishu and denying to provide her a proper medical treatment. These acts by the government, which clearly violated international human rights laws, is very shameful behavior and should be strongly blamed. We also urge the Bangladesh government to immediately stop arresting and abusing the union activists. It is shame to see that the Bangladesh government is repressing the labour leaders rather than making any effort to improve the severe working conditions of workers. Such repression by the Bangladesh government eventually forces workers to work under the poor work conditions with very low wages, while being the effective method to increase Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflows. This gives us clear signal that the Bangladesh government would continue to violate rights of workers and ignore international criticism. The anti-human-rights capital attraction fever which is representing as free economic zone and free export zone in all the corners of the world including Bangladesh and Korea made the workers' daily lives worse like a misery. In this regard, Mrs. Mishu's suffering cannot be separated from ours and we will strongly fight for Mrs. Mishu with solidarity.

We particularly urge that the government of the Republic of Korea and Korean

companies should also take responsibility for Mrs. Mishu's case. Many Korean companies entered Bangladesh market by taking advantage of the Bangladesh government's low wage policy and anti-union policy, and are highly contributing to build up the vulnerable conditions for the workers. Youngone Corporation has claimed that the massive workers' protests triggered from its own factory in December, must be controlled by external powers and kept denying its own responsibility. However, when it comes to take a close look into the purpose of operating its factory in Chittagong FEZ, it becomes very clear why Youngone Corporation should be held accountable for the December protests. The workers in the FEZ are denied to wield the right to take collective action, while the FEZ authorities has absolute power over the issues such as the workers' wage negotiation, the employment and dismissal of workers. If the benefited Korean companies would not take responsibility for the damaged workers by the benefits, then who should take responsibility for this? It is clear that the Korean companies are benefitted by the Bangladesh government's abuses against workers. In this regard, Korean companies are also responsible for Mrs. Mishu's illegal arrest, detention, and ill-treatment by the Bangladesh government.

Instead, the Korean government has been promoting Korean companies to invest in Bangladesh by suggesting attractions such as low wages and weak labour protection policy. Till now, the Korean government has been paid less attention on the international labor standards and has not been implementing its international obligations. However, the recent massive protest in Bangladesh indicates that the Korean government should not remain passive over the labour issue in Bangladesh. At least, the Korean government should sincerely study the causes behind the massive labor demonstration and try hard to make sure that Korean companies are not involved in human rights abuses against Bangladesh workers. One of President

Lee Myung Bak's national campaign slogans is "becoming the mature global country". Urging the Bangladesh government to release Mrs. Mishu should be the top priority for the Korean government as "the mature global country", for the sake of protecting and improving human rights.

We, the Korean civil and union groups, strongly call for Mrs. Mishu's immediate release. Standing in solidarity, we will continue to fight together with Bangladesh workers until Mrs. Mishu is released and workers achieve three basic labour rights and live like a human being. All the workers are the one; no one's human rights should be violated!

Statement by

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**Catholic Guri Namyanju Migrant Center**

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