

UNITED FOR A JUST FUTURE

IndustriALL Global Union 3rd Congress
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Solidarity with the Struggle for Freedom of Association and Assembly in Korea

Under pretext of pandemic control, the Korean government is attacking the freedom of association and assembly in the cold calculation that they have escaped international attention with the ratification of ILO Conventions 87, 98 (Freedom of Association) and 29 (Forced Labor) that will go into effect in 2022.

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) President YANG, Kyeung-soo was forcibly arrested in a pre-dawn raid of union headquarters on 2 September 2021 with over 2000 police (41 squadrons) encircling the building. President YANG, an auto worker and member of the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU), has been transferred to Seoul Detention Center.

The arrest warrant was issued following a 3 July rally calling on the government to address inequality -- deepened by the pandemic -- and for urgent action to protect health and safety at work. Participants carefully observed government preventative guidelines such as wearing masks, social distancing and temperature checks.

Authorities began a broad investigation into the union leaders and members to scapegoat the rally as the main culprit for the 4th coronavirus wave. But, the results of the contact tracing by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that there is no positive covid-19 case from this rally. Korean civil society organizations have pointed out that in early July, the government permitted thousands of people to crowd into baseball stadiums, soccer matches and even indoor music concerts, and only rallies were banned due to the spread of infectious disease.

In the factories as well, the KMWU Hyundai Steel Precarious Workers Local has legally gained the right to strike, but under the pretext of preventing the spread of covid 19, the police blockaded the strike rally area in front of the steel plant with dozens of police buses. Hyundai Steel should accept the court ruling obligating direct employment of its subcontracted workers and directly-employ the precarious workers at Hyundai Steel. But instead, Hyundai Steel continues to refuse collective bargaining and threatens to dismiss the subcontracted workers unless they accept transfer to indirect employment at a newly-established subsidiary called ITC, conditioned on signing a contract renouncing workers' economic claims on and rights to direct employment at Hyundai Steel. Further, Hyundai Steel is suing 180 precarious workers for 20.0 billion KRW (about USD\$17.2 million) of claimed losses for the first 9 days of this ongoing strike.

Even after a 2017 candlelight revolution that brought down the previous government, and Korean government ratification of ILO Conventions 87 and 98 following the first labor rights trade dispute using the Sustainable Development chapter of the EU-Korea FTA, Korea's environment for trade unions and freedom of association remains very challenging.

IndustriALL demands release of KCTU President YANG and for the Korean government to stop this crackdown on freedom of association and assembly immediately. To support the Korean unions fighting against companies repressing workers' rights and to inaugurate a system that meets the basic expectations for workers' right to freedom of association and assembly, IndustriALL and its affiliates will:

- Support the KCTU October 20 general strike and fight for labor law reform for fundamental trade union rights and abolition of precarious work, for a Just Transition and for stronger public services and social protection
- Demand multinational companies respect freedom of association and mobilize solidarity to defend union and labor rights, counter companies' threats and repression and improve supra-enterprise collective bargaining arrangements in Korea
- Monitor Korea's labor and human rights obligations under international law – ILO Conventions 87 and 98, UN international Bill of Human Rights, obligations under the OECD MNE Guidelines – to fully implement them in law and practice, and to demand that governments of the world pressure the Korean government towards this by using, if appropriate, diplomatic and trade relations.

