Belarus

(Belarus ratified Convention No. 87 on 6 November 1956)

THE BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE FINALLY TAKEN OVER THE LARGEST TRADE UNION ORGANISATION IN THE COUNTRY AND ARE CONTINUING THEIR EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE ALL FORMS OF OPPOSITION. THE FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS OF BELARUS IS NOW FULLY CONTROLLED BY THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT LUKASHENKO, WHO IS USING THE FEDERATION TO REMAIN IN POWER. THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE NO EFFORT TO COMPLY WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ILO’S SUPERVISORY BODIES.

Key facts

- The requests made by the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association for reinstatement of the strikers dismissed from the Minsk underground have gone unheeded. Police intervened using force to break up the underground strike in the capital.
- Presidential Decree 2 makes the registration of trade unions virtually impossible if the respective employer or the State itself disapproves.
- The authorities forced a change of trade union leadership at national and local level by appointing individuals close to the authorities to these roles after intimidating trade unionists and interfering in trade union elections.
- Trade union activists are dismissed.
- The bank accounts of trade union organisations have been frozen for months following excessive and arbitrary tax audits.
- Employers are encouraged by the State to support and deal with only State-controlled unions.
- Presidential Decree 8 states that the government must give its consent for any international support for trade unions in Belarus.
- Trade union officials and representatives are refused access to the premises of companies where they have members. This runs contrary to the country’s legislation.
- Presidential Decree 11 provides for the disbanding of a union if a picket disrupts the activity of a company or the transport system.
- Government Decree 1804, which makes it illegal to deduct trade union dues at source, has been used to weaken the financial independence of trade unions and to ease the way for unions to be

decree violates Belarusian law and contradicts numerous collective agreements.

- The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association has examined the supposed ‘election’ of Mr Kozik, a former senior official of Mr Lukashenko’s Presidential Administration, to the post of chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) and has requested independent analysis of allegations of interference in the trade union elections.

- The Belarusian government has repeatedly declined the invitation to its delegates at the 90th International Labour Conference (June 2002) to appear before the Commission on the Application of Standards to clarify the situation.
Special paragraph

In its report adopted by the 2001 International Labour Conference, the Committee on the Application of Standards devoted a special paragraph to Belarus in relation to Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948. That paragraph, still as relevant in 2003, reads as follows:

The Committee took note of the written and oral information provided by the Government representative and the discussion that took place thereafter. It noted that the comments of the Committee of Experts referred to a number of discrepancies between recently adopted legislation, various decrees and instructions and the provisions of the Convention, in particular as concerns the right of workers and employers to establish organisations of their own choosing and the interference by the public authorities in trade union activities and the election of trade union representatives. The Committee expressed its grave concern at the issuance of instructions by the head of the presidential administration which called upon the ministers and chairs of government committees to interfere in the elections of branch trade unions and noted with regret the statements made before it that government interference in the internal affairs of trade unions continued. In this respect, the Committee urged the Government to take all necessary measures to put an end to such interference so as to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are fully applied both in law and in practice. Noting the Government’s statement that measures were being considered to amend Presidential decree No. 2 on some measures on the regulation of the activity of, among others, trade unions, the Committee expressed the firm hope that the necessary steps would be taken in the very near future so as to ensure fully the right of workers and employers to establish organisations of their own choosing without previous authorisation. The Committee also requested the Government to ensure fully the right of these organisations to function without interference by the public authorities, including the right to receive foreign financial assistance for their activities. The Committee urged the Government to supply detailed information in the report requested by the Committee of Experts for its coming session and expressed the firm hope that it would be able to note next year that concrete progress had been made in this case.

Trade union demands

In view of the gravity of anti-trade union repression in Belarus, the Workers’ Group is demanding that:

● The Belarusian government honour its international obligations by fully respecting Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise, in line with the recommendations made by the Committee on the Application of Standards and by the Committee on Freedom of Association;

● The governments of the ILO Member States use every means at their disposal to bring pressure to bear on the Belarusian government to make it respect international labour standards;

   ● The international trade union movement guarantee trade unionists in Belarus the solidarity they need;

   ● The relevant employers’ organisations use their influence at both national and international level to step up the international political and economic pressure on the Belarusian authorities to make them respect freedom of association for both workers and employers;

   ● The ILO Director-General restrict technical assistance provided by the ILO to Belarus only to genuine workers’ and employers’ organisations until the government proves willing to implement the recommendations of the ILO’s supervisory bodies.

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