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**International Centre for Trade Union Rights**

*Centro Internacional para los Derechos Sindicales*  
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ICTUR was founded to  
defend and extend trade union rights and  
to raise awareness of these rights and their violations  
around the world

**July 2017**

**By e-mail:**

psecy@pmo.gov.bd  
secretary@pmo.gov.bd  
stateminister@mole.gov.bd

**Attn:**

**Sheikh Hasina,**  
**Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
**Old Sangsad Bhaban,**  
**Bir Uttam Ziaur Rahman Rd,**  
**Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh**

**CC:**

Mr. Md. Mujibul Haque, State Minister, Ministry of Labour and  
Employment  
Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF)  
IndustriALL  
Annalisa Ciampi, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to  
freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

The International Centre for Trade Union Rights is gravely concerned  
about reports of violent attacks on trade unionists at factories in  
Chittagong.

ICTUR understands that workers at the Azim Group's Orchid and  
Savar factories in Chittagong have been subjected to violence, threats  
and coercion for attempting to form a union. The Bangladesh  
Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF) has been  
trying to form a union at the factories since early 2016. In March 2017,  
workers filed their fourth application to the labour administration for  
the registration of Savar Sweater Ltd. Sromik Union which has a  
membership of 2200 workers; in April 2017 an application was filed  
for the registration of the Orchid Sweater Ltd. Workers Union. with a  
membership of 1760 workers. It is understood that the application for  
the Savar factory union was again rejected and a decision on the Orchid  
factory union is still pending.

On 27 May 2017, these workers and union organisers were threatened and physically attacked in front of the factory gates. On the following day, workers and union organisers were again attacked and told they would be killed if they continued to try to organise a union. It is reported that local police were present and looked on as the union leaders were assaulted, and that the attackers visited the union leaders' homes and threatened family members; one union leader's wife was threatened at knifepoint and another leaders' brother was kidnapped and later released.

This climate of violence, intimidation and harassment of trade unionists represents a serious violation of Bangladesh's obligations under the International Labour Organisations' Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, and Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining.

Fundamental rights – especially those relating to human life and personal safety – must be fully respected and in order to guarantee the principles of freedom of association. According to the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association the rights of workers can only be "exercised in a climate that is free from violence, pressure or threats of any kind against the leaders and members of these organizations, and it is for governments to ensure that this principle is respected." (*Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO*, Fifth Edition, 2006, paras. 42-45). The Committee has further noted that an independent judicial inquiry should be instituted immediately to investigate assaults on the physical or moral integrity of individuals, in order to determine responsibility, punish those responsible and prevent repetition (*ILO Digest*, paras. 46, 50, 184, 191). Failure to hold guilty parties to account creates a culture of impunity, "which reinforces the climate of violence and insecurity, and which is extremely damaging to the exercise of trade union rights" (*ILO Digest*, para. 52).

ICTUR calls on the government to promptly investigate the circumstances around these attacks, including the failure of the police to defend the fundamental human rights of the victims, and further to undertake all necessary measures to ensure the fundamental freedoms of workers to join and form unions and to take action in defence of their interests. ICTUR will report these incidents in the journal *International Union Rights*, which was established in 1993, and which enjoys a readership in more than 100 countries.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Blackburn', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel Blackburn, Director