Sample Letter

Ms Park Geun-hye,

President of the Republic of Korea

Blue House

Seoul, Korea

president@president.go.kr

cc. [Name], Ambassador to Republic of Korea in [name of country]

email address

Crackdown on trade unions and disregard for freedom of peaceful assembly

and association in Korea

Dear President Park,

On behalf of the [name of your union] I strongly denounce the ongoing crackdown on the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and its affiliates, and urge you to cease the serious attacks on freedom of peaceful assembly and association in your country.

We have been following the situation in South Korea carefully and are appalled by the growing severity of union repression, which has involved multiple raids on union offices and investigation, arrest and imprisonment of union officers and members.

In particular, we are gravely concerned by recent reports that the police may at any moment arrest KCTU President Han Sang-gyun based on a detention warrant in connection to his role in organising strikes and protests against your government’s regressive labour reform.

[Name of your union] is appalled that trade union leaders are being arrested and detained merely for exercising fundamental labour rights. We recall that your government has an obligation to respect the right to freedom of association as a member of the ILO and as a party of the Korea-US FTA and Korea-EU FTA.

We understand that the labour reforms your government is pursuing will result in cuts to overtime pay and salaries for senior workers, make it easier for employers to fire workers, expand temporary agency work and weaken protections for subcontracted workers, introduce performance-based pay systems stimulating competition, and restrict trade unions’ ability to intervene when employers implement changes to workplace rules that are detrimental to workers.

These reforms are based on your government’s claim that labour protections are too high and a barrier to job creation, and on a supposed tripartite agreement. We note, however, that the OECD has ranked worker protections in South Korea to be weaker than in the majority of OECD member countries. In addition, the so-called tripartite agreement upon which the reforms are based excluded the KCTU. What is more, your reforms go well beyond the content of this agreement.

The [name of your union] also vigorously protests the ban on the second People’s Mass Mobilisation planned for 5 December 2015. It is outrageous that the government and police are intensifying repression of the right to peaceful assembly instead of offering an apology to the public and the family members of Mr. Baek Nam-gi, a 69-year old peasant who remains in critical condition after being hit by a police water cannon during the November 14 rally. It is our understanding that the Constitution of the ROK does not grant the police the authority to ban reported demonstrations.

We are aware that following comments you made likening protesters to the ISIL, the ruling party has introduced legislation that would make it illegal to cover one’s face during demonstrations. Moreover, the Justice Minister has announced an increase in existing penalty levels even before the bill was passed.

According to media reports, the police have issued summons for hundreds of protesters and threatened to issue arrest warrants before December 5 against those who do not appear before the police. Dozens of union leaders and officers are already detained without any reasonable grounds. We cannot help but conclude that all of these measures are being taken in order to discourage union members and the public from participating in the December 5 Mass Mobilisation and the KCTU’s general strike to be called later in December.

We support the decision by trade unions and social movement in Korea to go forward with the Mass Mobilisation on December 5 despite these acts of intimidation.

[Name of your union] calls on you to drop all charges against KCTU President Han Sang-gyun and stop all attempts to arrest and detain him. All other imprisoned trade unionists should be released and the charges against them dropped. The arrest warrants against all other labour leaders should also be immediately withdrawn. We call on you to fully guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and association, especially for the second People’s Mass Mobilisation on 5 December 2015. Finally, we urge you to withdraw the regressive labour reforms.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Name

Title (eg. president, general secretary)