

RESOLUTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE SRI LANKA LABOR MOVEMENT

WHEREAS we, the members of APALA, watch with concern the impact the economic crisis in Sri Lanka has had on workers, where half a million jobs were lost in 2022 and workers are facing unprecedented and unbearably high cost of living, collapsing real wages and deteriorating living conditions;

WHEREAS over 86% of the Sri Lankan population has reduced the regular food intake, 48% of the children under 5 are malnourished and seven million people accounting for 31% of the total population are considered 'poor' according to emerging data;

WHEREAS despite the stark numbers of people in crisis, the economic reform program taken forward by the Sri Lankan Government at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has singularly focused on debt servicing, while contributing to worsening human conditions;

Whereas the IMF's debt restructuring program with private international creditors and bi-lateral creditors which will affect worker welfare funds in Sri Lanka, is shrouded in secrecy with no worker representative or voice in the negotiation process;

WHEREAS the Sri Lankan Government has embarked on an untimely effort to reform labor laws seemingly under local employers' lobbies which unions have called as a move towards 'slave like work conditions', while dismantling the existing tripartite National Labour Advisory Council, removing non-party affiliated unions and female representation, and likely leading to dismantling existing internationally accepted labor protections for Sri Lankan workers;

WHEREAS we are aware of the continuous anti-union practices by the Sri Lankan Government and Companies on Sri Lankan Workers, including the recent harassment and intimidation of a Union Leader of Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation for organizing workers, the arrest and detention of a union leader of the Ceylon Teachers Union, the suspension of union leaders of the Petroleum Corporation when they engaged in strike action and the dismissal of 16 workers in 2021 in the ATG Group of Companies in an export processing Zone, all of which indicate the suppression of Union rights which are constitutionally protected in Sri Lanka;

BE IT RESOLVED that APALA will:

1. Re-affirm its continuing solidarity with the Sri Lankan labor movement and supports the struggles of Sri Lankan workers as they confront intensified repression of labor rights including Trade Union rights; and
2. Work and coordinate to build awareness amongst APALA members regarding Sri Lankan people's movement in 2022, and the role of Sri Lankan Unions in this peoples' movement; and

3. Work and coordinate with the AFL-CIO and other labor allies to write a letter of concern to which APALA and its member unions can sign to the Sri Lankan Government, and the US Trade Representative about the increasing state repression on Trade Union leaders and trade union rights of workers and the Labour Law reform process which will result in dismantling labor protection for workers; and
4. Work and coordinate with the AFL-CIO and other labor allies to take continuous steps to advocate with the US Government, especially Customs and Border Protection to ban importing Sri Lankan products manufactured with forced labor, and advise of the violations of ILO Labour Standards in Sri Lanka, particularly ILO Conventions 87 and 154; and
5. Write a letter to the ILO Mission in Geneva to take a proactive role in protecting ILO Labour standards in the Sri Lankan Government's labor reform initiative including advising the Government against dismantling existing labor protections for workers; and
6. Work and coordinate with the AFL-CIO and other labor allies to make representations to the IMF, including writing a letter of concern to which APALA and its member unions can sign, to the IMF and the Sri Lankan State to immediately halt the decision to use social security funds of the Sri Lankan people for Domestic Debt Restructuring and that no debt restructuring negotiation will be done in the absence of worker representatives in the negotiation process.

Submitted by:

The APALA International Solidarity Committee (Atley Chock)