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PARLIAMENTARY, UNION LEADERS VISIT MEXICO TO SUPPORT MINEWORKERS UNION

U.S. Congress Urges Calderón to Meet

Mexico City – Trade union and parliamentary leaders from 13 countries are visiting Mexico this week to support the National Union of Mine and Metal Workers, which has been under attack by the Mexican government and the Grupo Mexico mining company.

Yesterday, 27 members of the U.S. Congress wrote to Calderón asking him to meet with the delegation. “Continued efforts by the Mexican government and Grupo Mexico to repress this democratic union in Mexico have raised serious questions about labor practices in your country,” the letter stated.

The delegation, organized by the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF), www.imfmetal.org, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions (ICEM), www.icem.org, and the United Steelworkers (USW), www.usw.org, is seeking a meeting with President Felipe Calderón to discuss his government’s handling of the Mineworkers conflict, which has been criticized by the international trade union movement.

“Workers around the world are outraged at Mexico’s attacks on the Mineworkers union,” said USW President Leo W. Gerard.

The Mineworkers are one of the few unions in Mexico that continues to strike for higher wages. The union has won a series of strikes this year with wage increases above 8 percent, well above the 4.5 percent limit imposed by the government. The union has also

criticized the government's labor law reform proposals and the lack of health and safety protections for workers.

In response, the government has twice removed the leader of the union, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, from office. The Committee on Freedom of Association of the International Labor Organization (ILO), ruling in a complaint brought by the IMF, found that "the labour authorities engaged in conduct that is incompatible with Article 3 of Convention No. 87, which establishes the right of workers to elect their representatives in full freedom."

The government has repeatedly filed criminal charges against the union leadership, although these have been thrown out by the courts. The government has also tried repeatedly to declare illegal a strike at three Grupo Mexico mines which has run for nearly two years, but the courts have rebuffed these efforts. The government has also supported Grupo Mexico in establishing company-dominated unions at eight other facilities.

Four union members have been killed in the conflict. The government has not investigated or prosecuted these cases.

"We are concerned that the Calderón government, which claims to be fighting for rule of law, practices impunity when it comes to the rights of the mineworkers" said IMF General Secretary Jyrki Raina.

In Mexico City, the delegation will meet with Congressional and union leaders and will visit Mineworkers' official Juan Linares Montufar who has been jailed by the government.

The delegation will attend the Mineworkers' 75th anniversary in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán and will visit the Pasta de Conchos mine where 65 workers were killed in an explosion in 2006. An ILO report this year concluded that "the Government of Mexico did not do all that was reasonably expected of it to avoid or minimize the effects of the accident which had such devastating effects with the loss of life of as many as 65 miners."

The delegation is headed by Jack Layton, leader of Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) and includes parliamentarians from Australia and Peru. The delegation includes trade union leaders from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, Norway, Peru, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

"We intend to let our governments and employers know what is going on in Mexico, and to discourage them from further investments until it is clear that workers' rights are being respected" said Manfred Warda, General Secretary of the ICEM.