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HTUR/NT

21 April 2010

### **Workers and trade unionists harassed and threatened in Zestafoni and Chiatura**

Dear Mr Saakashvili,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 175 million workers through its 311 affiliates in 155 countries throughout the world, is concerned by the difficulties faced by Georgia's trade unions in their attempts to secure genuine industrial relations and by employers' use of anti-union tactics with total impunity owing to serious loopholes in the current labour legislation.

On 10 and 11 April, Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) leaders and the president of the Metal and Mining Industry Workers' Trade Union of Georgia, Mr. Tamaz Dolaberidze, attended meetings in Zestafoni and Chiatura with workers from LTD "Georgian Manganese" (which combines Zestafoni Metal Plant and Chiatura Manganese Ore Mining). These workers are members of the Imereti Region Metal and Mining Industry Workers' Trade Union, which is affiliated to the Metal and Mining Industry Workers' Trade Union of Georgia. The aim of the meetings was to discuss industrial relations between the union and the management of LTD "Georgian Manganese", and to discuss a plan for protest action and the date for a warning strike.

The ITUC was informed by its affiliate the GTUC that before both meetings, trade union members and workers were threatened and provoked by company administrative employees, including the heads of the company's security service at both sites. Workers were warned that they might lose their jobs if they followed the union's advice. They even tried to put pressure on them by calling the police, mentioning that workers and union representatives were provoking disorder and unrest. Some workers were asked if they were trade union members. During one of the meetings, miners' and union representatives' speeches were recorded by persons identified as company officials. This did not, however, prevent both meetings from adopting the decision to hold simultaneous warning strikes on 20 April in Zestafoni and Chiatura.

Furthermore, according to our information, a yellow trade union has also been set up by the company both in Zestafoni and Chiatura, with leaders appointed by the management, and some workers have been forced to sign applications to join this union.

These events violate the ILO core labour conventions on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining, both ratified by Georgia. The ITUC reiterates that such repeated use of negative company management practices have been made possible by the pro-employer Georgian Labour Code adopted in 2006. As mentioned by the ILO Committee of Experts in its last report, the Labour Code does not provide for adequate protection against anti-union discrimination and promotion of meaningful collective bargaining.

I trust that you will address these important matters and ensure that Georgian employers respect fundamental workers' and trade union rights. In its support to the GTUC complaint to the ILO Committee of Freedom of Association (CFA), the ITUC reserves its right to submit additional information related to LTD to the ILO and other relevant agencies linked to the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Guy Ryde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'G' and 'R'.

General Secretary