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International Transport Workers' Federation - ITF president meets with Hong Kong dockers during solidarity mission

ITF president and chair of the ITF dockers' section Paddy Crumlin attended a solidarity meeting with striking dockworkers at the Port of Hong Kong this afternoon. Addressing members of the Union of Hong Kong Dockers (UHKD), Mr Crumlin said that systematic welfare abuses together with the woefully inadequate remuneration of dockworkers at Kwai Chung Container Terminal, amounted to "disgraceful behaviour" on the part of Hong Kong International Terminals (HIT) subcontractors.

Mr Crumlin said that HIT, a subsidiary of global network terminal (GNT) operator Hutchinson Port Holdings Trust (HPH), needed to come back to the bargaining table to restore peace on the waterfront.

"It is critical that HIT engages with the outsourced workers and their representatives. HIT needs to respect the fundamental rights of these workers and their right to decent work, irrespective of whether they are directly employed by the terminal" he explained.

"Four and a half million transport workers around the world are united in their solidarity with the UHKD and other workers in the port in the struggle for decent treatment and fair pay."

The solidarity mission by the ITF president has been arranged specifically to build on the support expressed at the weekend by ITF regional secretary Mahendra Sharma who met Hong Kong strikers and attended protest marches. UHKD has taken strike action in a last-ditch attempt to secure dialogue over health and safety, working conditions, pay parity between contract and directly employed workers and the exploitation of outsourced workers. The dockers have not had a pay increase in 15 years, despite a booming local economy. Dockworkers have also reported having to urinate, defecate and eat in their cabin so that operations are uninterrupted.

"Hutchinson should be ashamed that workers under their contract are being treated little better than caged animals. The abuses must stop and the employers need to show that they are committed to ending the exploitation of outsourced dockworkers" added Crumlin.

The union commenced strike action on 28 March. Last Friday, the ITF called on HPH to intervene and urge HIT to go to the bargaining table. Meanwhile Hong Kong High Court granted an extension of an interim injunction preventing full scale industrial action at Kwai Tsing. Despite the ruling the court appeared to recognise the need for dockworkers to be able to express their concerns publically to some degree. Restrictive terms on the injunction specify the union's right to enter the workplace and take strike action in limited numbers and in designated areas.

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