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Statement

about the response of the Indian government to legitimate protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB)

The Council of Global Unions (CGU) – representing more than 200 million workers from across the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Global Union Federations including the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD – wholeheartedly condemns the response of the Indian government to the legitimate protests of the Indian people against the recently passed citizenship law.

The passing of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) through the Indian parliament on 11 December has seen people take to the streets throughout the country, and the government has responded by attacking basic, fundamental freedoms.

According to reports, the government has called out troops, shut down the internet and imposed curfews. We understand the violence has resulted in at least 6 deaths.

In addition, on 17 December, we understand the Supreme Court refused to hear a petition against the police action inside Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University, where they allegedly attacked students inside campus premises.

This overwhelmingly disproportionate, brutal response is not compatible with a functioning democracy. Every citizen of the world has the right to freedom of assembly, of expression and of association. We - the global labour movement - cannot allow these fundamental rights to be violated.

We further understand that the bill itself violates the secular principles enshrined in the Indian constitution; that faith cannot be made a condition of citizenship. The constitution prohibits religious discrimination against its citizens, and guarantees all persons equality before the law and equal protection of the law.

The CAB offers amnesty to non-Muslim illegal immigrants from three neighbouring countries - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. We understand the government says the CAB gives sanctuary to people fleeing religious persecution. However, to the outside world it appears part of an agenda to marginalise Muslims.

For workers, these violations are occurring in the wake of an alarming series of attacks on labour rights and trade unions in India. The Modi government recently reduced the number of labour codes from forty-four to just four. Acting in bad faith, the government published the proposed industrial relations labour code on its website without any formal consultation amongst the trade unions. Under the new code, trade unions would need to represent 75% of the workforce to be recognised as representing a workplace. As a result, all Indian trade union centres have decided to go on general strike on 8 January 2020.

The CGU stands against discrimination in any form and condemns the Indian government for brutal oppression of its citizens and repression of workers and their trade unions. We stand with the protestors - the young people, the working men and women of India - who are fighting for fairness, justice and fundamental human rights.

