

ILO expresses deep concern at ‘suspension’ of labour laws

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- **Appeals to Modi to uphold international commitments.**
- **The Director-General of International Labour Organization Guy Ryder has expressed his deep concern at the “unilateral suspension” of labour laws by various State governments.**

In a letter to the trade unions, Karen Curtis, Chief, Freedom of Association Branch of the ILO, said the ILO Director-General has immediately intervened, “expressing his deep concern at these recent events and appealing to the Prime Minister to send a clear message to Central and State governments to uphold the country’s international commitments and encourage engagement in effective social dialogue.” The trade unions had complained to the ILO against the Ordinances passed by some State governments suspending labour laws.

“I shall not fail to keep you informed of any observations or comments that may be made by the Indian authorities on the matters that you have raised,” Curtis added in the letter.

Meanwhile, in a joint representation filed on Monday, the trade unions provided more “concrete details” to the ILO on their first complaint. Documents such as the Ordinance of the Uttar Pradesh government and a press release on the Cabinet decision; Ordinances of the Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan governments; the order of the Karnataka government; the notification of the Bihar government; an advisory issued by Union Labour Secretary; and the Uttar Pradesh Government’s order under the Essential Services Maintenance Act have also been sent to the ILO by the trade unions.

Global labour conference

Formal complaints received by the ILO’s supervisory system are discussed at the International Labour Conference held once in a year. The 109th Session of the International Labour Conference, originally scheduled from May 25 to June 5, 2020, has been deferred to June 7 to 18, 2021.

“There are clear reasons to understand that with the endorsement from, rather insistence of the Central Government on the so-called ‘labour law reforms’ ‘on priority basis’ the State governments have dared to attack the basic rights of the workers. The Labour Secretary of the Central Government has sent communication to all State governments in this regard, vide letter no Z-200025/34/2015-LRC (PL) dated 5-05-2020. Hence, the onus and responsibility of the entire exercise of virtually nullifying most of the labour laws and violation of the basic International Labour Standards through that exercise also falls on the Central Government,” the trade unions said in the second complaint.

The trade unions said there are umpteen instances that reflect the government’s refusal to follow the procedures of the ILO as if the government has no obligation to the labour rights watchdog. “We also draw your pointed attention to the inhuman miseries of the tens of millions of inter-state migrant workers during the lockdown period, reducing the most productive workforce along with their family members, both in the organised and unorganised sector of industries and services, into job-less, earning-less and even shelter-less and penny-less non-entities, not having even a full meal a day; in desperation, millions of them have been walking hundreds of miles on the highway, rail tracks, or even

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through jungles to reach their home-states and hundreds of them have died on the way, owing to hunger, exhaustion and malnutrition-related ailments, besides in road and railway track accidents,” the letter said.