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HTUR/FW

19 May 2008

Trumped up charges against road transport union

Dear Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents over 168 million workers through its 311 affiliated organisations in 155 countries and territories, including Turkey, strongly protests against what it sees as an abuse of the Turkish legal system to target a trade union.

According to our information, Turkish road transport union Türkiye Motorlu Tasit Iscileri Sendikasi (TÜMTIS), which is affiliated to both the ITUC-affiliated Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TÜRK-IS) as well as the London-based International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), has been the target of a foul campaign including dismissals and armed violence against its members, arrests based on false charges, detention without trial, and violations of the rights of the defence.

On 20 November 2007, at around midnight, the Turkish police raided the TÜMTIS offices in Ankara and detained Ankara Branch President Nurettin Kılçdoğan, Secretary Hüseyin Babayigit, Financial Secretary Halil Keten, and Executive Board members Binali Güney, Selahattin Demir, Erkan Aydoğan and Atilla Yılmaz. They were formally arrested only three days later and remain in prison to this date.

After TÜMTIS had started organising transport workers, hundreds of their members were dismissed. Some of them were even clubbed and attacked with knives by management-associated people. Subsequently, employers started to file cases based on false accusations against TÜMTIS leaders and members. After all of these cases were dismissed by the relevant courts, the TÜMTIS leaders were accused of "setting up a criminal organisation." At the same time when the TÜMTIS leaders were detained, ten other members were also put behind bars. They were subsequently released, but some of them now face the same charges.



Even three months after their arrests, no indictment had been formulated against the TÜMTIS Ankara Branch leaders, and their defence lawyers were not allowed to see the file case on the grounds that it was "confidential". Only recently was a date for a first hearing established for 6 June 2008.

In November 2007, the ITF had already lodged a strong protest with your government regarding these arrests, followed by a renewed protest on 21 April 2008. It is with regret that we note that your government, however, did absolutely nothing in order to bring about even the slightest improvement of the situation. In addition, there is still no indication whatsoever that the charges brought against the union are based on anything factual at all; the ITUC therefore adds its voice to that of the ITF and TÜMTIS itself, supporting the view that this is a case of abuse of the Turkish legal system in an attempt to shut down a nationally and internationally recognised workers' representative organisation.

Mr. Prime Minister, engaging in legitimate trade union activities can never be categorised as "setting up a criminal organisation". This is completely counter to International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 87 on Freedom of Association, which has been ratified by Turkey. We therefore appeal to your good office to ensure that basic trade union rights are respected in Turkey, and that the legal system is not abused to make it impossible for trade unionists to operate without having to fear persecution, in itself an infringement of ILO Convention 98 on Collective Bargaining. Should this practice appear to continue, it would, of course, not facilitate the talks Turkey is currently holding regarding its accession to the European Union.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary

cc: European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Brussels
International Transport Workers' federation (ITF), London
Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-Is), Ankara
Mission of Turkey to the EU, Brussels
Embassy of Turkey, Brussels