

ITUC Statement on International Human Rights Day 2008

On 10 December 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ITUC celebrates the 60th anniversary of Declaration, a distinguished instrument that is the cornerstone of international human rights standards and still holds immense value today.

Through the 60 years the instrument has been used to improve the enjoyment of human rights for all, and has inspired many legal systems, as it sets down the fundamental and basic rights of all human beings.

On this day of celebration it is important to also pay tribute to the many human rights defenders, whose struggles and sacrifices, have led to the enjoyment of these rights for themselves and their fellow citizens. Amongst them were brave trade union leaders in countries like Poland, South Africa and many more, but tribute must also be paid to all those who are still struggling for these rights today.

The universal and indivisible nature of human rights is important to recall as it is necessary to continue to strive for the full realization of all human rights, including economic social and cultural rights. Social and economic deprivation and poverty deprives human beings of fundamental human rights, and in the world of today far too many people do not enjoy the most basic human rights. Social and economic rights go hand in hand with civil and political rights, and although the right to form trade unions is explicitly recognized in Article 23 of the Declaration, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech are essential to the existence of trade unions. Full enjoyment of the protection against arbitrary arrest and the right to a fair and public hearing in an independent and impartial tribunal equally protects trade unionists in their fight for economic and social rights.

The Declaration is universal and applies to all regardless of color, creed or origin, and we must continue to fight to expand its reach also within the world of work. Fundamental workers rights are human rights!

Workers' fundamental human rights are also protected in the Core Labour Standards of the ILO. ILO Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948 (no. 87) is equally celebrating its 60 year anniversary this year, and next year ILO Convention on the Rights to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949 (no. 98) will equally turn 60. These two conventions set out the rules for democracy and participation at the work place and the ITUC is also paying tribute to the immense impact of these instruments for the trade union movement.

Whilst we pay tribute to these important instruments, we must be mindful that many challenges still lie ahead. The ITUC has just recently released its Annual Survey of

violations of trade union rights mentioning among other severe violations the 91 trade unionists who were murdered for defending workers' rights.

The ITUC and all of its member organisations are committed to the realization of human rights for all, to fight repression and poverty everywhere.