

ITUC STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) condemns the government of Bahrain for denying visas to numerous trade unionists from around the world, including from the ITUC, and representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) that are seeking to attend the Congress of the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) from September 29-October 1. The GFBTU is an affiliate of the ITUC and has a representative on the ILO governing body. *“The Bahraini government’s move to deny visas selectively in order to prohibit the GFBTU from receiving international trade union visitors is a violation of the right of freedom of association. It will be unsuccessful though if it believes that by denying visas it can hide from the international community the fact that violations of trade union rights continue, and that the union’s efforts to achieve reconciliation after the events of last year have been largely ignored,”* explained Sharan Burrow. *“The government will certainly have a lot to explain to the ILO.”*

Last year, thousands of workers, many of whom were trade unionists and union leaders, were illegally fired based on their political opinion and/or in violation of the right to freedom of association. In November, as a result of international pressure, an ILO tripartite committee was established to review the cases of dismissal with an aim of reinstating those workers who had been wrongly terminated for their involvement in the protests. While many workers in state-owned industries were reinstated, they were not necessarily reinstated to the same jobs on the same terms and conditions. Progress on reinstatement appears to have stalled. Workers in the public and private sector remain unemployed well over a year later.

The government has also committed to considering ratification of ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Convention 98 on Collective Bargaining. To date, we have seen no efforts to ratify those conventions or to bring the laws into conformity with those conventions.

Public vilification of the trade union movement continues, as billboards, articles and blogs baselessly accuse the GFBTU and specific leaders of acts including treason. This has created an extremely hostile environment for the trade union movement. In this context, the government has now supported the creation of a new, pro-government trade union with the aim of marginalizing the GFBTU.

The ITUC calls on the government to:

1. Immediately implement the tripartite agreement with regard to reinstatements and ensure all workers illegally fired are returned to their work at the same wages and conditions of work. The government should also work to ratify Conventions 87 and 98 and ensure that their laws are in full conformity. Recently-passed legislation does not accomplish this goal.
2. Immediately implement the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry.
3. Engage with trade unions and civil society in a good faith process of national reconciliation.

Failure to make these steps means that the ITUC will maintain its request for an ILO Commission of Inquiry under Convention 111.