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HTUR/JS

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Trade union repression leading to hunger strike

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of its 168 million members in 153 countries and territories, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) protests against the unfair suspension of **Mr. Jamal Ateeq**, President of the PTT Union and member of the GFBTU Executive Committee due to his trade union activities.

The ITUC has been informed by its affiliate the GFBTU that Mr. Jamal Ateeq was suspended for five days without pay for public declarations he made stressing the right of government employees to organise. In protest against the repressive suspension Mr. Jamal Ateeq decided to go on a hunger strike for the period of the suspension, which started on 9 December and will last till 13 December included.

The government has already used suspension without pay against trade union leaders before. Earlier this year Ms. Najiyah Abdul Ghaffar Deputy Head of the Postal Workers' Union was suspended three days for making statements to the press about the hardship faced by postal workers and she still risks further disciplinary sanctions. At the time Mr. Jamal Ateeq was also questioned on 18 March 2007.

Furthermore, the ITUC has been informed that 48 workers including the five branch trade union leaders at the Al Mara'i Dairy Products Company have been dismissed for striking to obtain wage increases. The strike, which lasted one month, only started after the company failed to respect the result of long negotiations between the company, the GFBTU and the Ministry of Labour. The GFBTU also informs us that another 13 trade union leaders have been dismissed for trade union activities recently.

The ITUC is very concerned about the physical well-being of Mr. Ateeq and it believes that the many above-mentioned trade union right violations, especially the intimidation and repression exerted by both government and private employers have made Mr. Jamal Ateeq feel that it is necessary to take such a serious action as a hunger strike. The ITUC would like to emphasize that trade union leaders have the legitimate right to address the needs of their members in public statements and if necessary embark upon strike action to defend their members' interests.



As a member of the ILO, the government of Bahrain is under an obligation to respect the fundamental rights of workers to organise and bargain collectively as enshrined in ILO Conventions 87 and 98. These rights include the right to make public statements on behalf of trade union members and protection from dismissal in connection with legitimate trade union activities such as strike action.

The Government of Bahrain took positive steps when allowing trade unions in 2002 and banning dismissals for trade union activities in 2006. I encourage your government to continue in this direction by ensuring that these rights are respected both in law and in practice and that trade unions are allowed to carry out their activities and defend their members without interference.

I urge you to ensure that the suspension of Mr. Ateeq ceases immediately, and that he be compensated fully for the loss of income during his suspension. In that regard, I also urge you to respect the recommendations of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, to take appropriate steps to compensate Ms Najjeyah Abdel Ghaffar, and to ensure that no further disciplinary measures are taken against Mr. Ateeq or Ms. Abdel Ghaffar. I equally urge your government to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to reinstate the 48 workers at Al Mara'i Dairy Products Company including the five trade union branch leaders. Finally, I also urge you to ensure that all trade union leaders that have been dismissed for trade union activities are reinstated in conformity with the law in Bahrain.

I thank you for your kind and prompt attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary