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HTUR/JS

4 March 2009

Haft Tapeh sugar workers union arrests

Dear President,

I wrote to you only last month to protest against the court proceedings against five trade union leaders, and now the communication officer Reza Rakhshan, and the executive board member Rahim Beshag have been arrested.

The ITUC understands that Rahim Beshag was arrested on 22 February and on 28 February Reza Rakhshan had his home searched and he was arrested. Mohammad Heidari Mehr, Ghorban Alipour, Feridoun Nikoufard, and Jalil Ahmadi were equally arrested around 2 to 3 March. We also understand that the President of the union Ali Nejati have had to go into hiding. The ITUC has been informed that plans to protest against the continued detention of Rahim Beshag has not been cancelled despite the arrests on 28 February, and there are fears that this could lead to more arrests or the issuance of arrest warrants.

The ITUC further understands that the court case mentioned above against the five trade union leaders was concluded on 1 March at 2.30 pm local time. They were all charged with 'propaganda against the state', for actions related to legitimate trade union activities such as reclaiming wage arrears and defending basic workplace rights. The verdict is supposed to be handed down in the coming days.

The ITUC is also very concerned by the information that it has received that Farzad Kamangar is still in Evin prison and that he has been told to write his will. The ITUC denounces all forms of psychological pressure, torture and the use of the death penalty. It calls for an end too all executions in all countries, including Iran. The case of Farzad Kamangar did not meet the standards of a fair trial, and the Iranian authorities should stay the execution immediately.

Furthermore, the ITUC is also very alarmed about reports that two Executive Board members of the Vahed Syndicate have been summoned by the Secret Police. We recall that the President, Mansour Ossanloo and Vice-President Ebrahim Madadi are still in prison, and that this union has been and is still subjected to severe repression.

The ITUC has on several occasions expressed its deep concern at the level of trade union repression in Iran. Contrary to what government authorities have stated in a recent letter to us, trade union activists in Iran cannot be reduced to a few individuals. The number of activists is significant and they spread over several sectors in Iran, like sugar industry workers, car factory workers, textile workers, the bus workers, metal workers, bakers, writers and teachers.

These union activists are part of a larger movement in Iran trying to address injustices committed against ordinary workers. Unfair working conditions, low wages or back wages. Actions to promote better working and living conditions do not pose a threat to the Iranian state. On the contrary they are aimed at helping the Iranian people and the state in prospering.

Unfortunately, the Iranian authorities have chosen to repress all attempts by workers and unionists to demand for basic workers' rights.

The ITUC believes that your government should reconsider its policy of repression, since Iranian workers will never give up their struggle for fair wages and better living and working conditions. International support will also not waiver. The ITUC will continue its campaign of solidarity with Iranian workers fighting for fundamental workers' rights and should the arrests and detentions continue we see not choice but to call on our members across the world to condemn trade union repression in Iran once more.

I trust that you will pay attention to this important matter and ensure that the police and the justice system, including the courts are not used to condemn workers for legitimate trade union activities.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary

Cc.: Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
Ministry of Justice Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Sharoudi
Ministry of Labour
Ministry of Justice
Leader of the Iranian Parliament
Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN, Geneva
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