



Mr. Juan Somavia
Director-General
International Labour Office
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HTUR/JS

9 March 2009

Request for ILO intervention with regards to escalating repression against trade unionists in Iran

Dear Mr. Somavia,

The EI, ITF, ITUC and IUF are writing to express our great concern over an escalating pattern of arrests and intimidation of trade unionists in Iran. These repressive actions not only constitute a series of gross violations of rights set out in ILO Conventions to which Iran is a signatory. Given the Iranian government's record for physically abusing prisoners, we have reason to fear for the physical and the psychological wellbeing and even the lives of the latest victims of state repression. For this reason we are seeking the intervention of the Office.

As the ILO is already aware the record of trade union rights violations of the Iranian authorities is very long – the cases of transport union leader Mansour Osanloo and teacher and human rights activist Farzad Kamangar, for example, have been the subject of highly-visible public campaigns by unions and human rights organisations.

The latest wave of repression has targeted the Haft Tapeh union, which is a member of the IUF.

In June last year, five thousand workers at the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation and Industry Company in the Iranian city of Shush formed an independent trade union following a 46-day strike. Official organisations created by the government (Workers House and Islamic Labour Council) have for years utterly failed to protect the workers and their conditions. The Haft Tapeh workers have had to resort to repeated strike action to fight for their basic workplace rights, including regular payment of wages.

The strike last year began when thousands of workers from every department downed tools to protest two months without wages. A petition to the provincial labour department with thousands of signatures triggered mass arrests and repeated interventions by police, security forces and Revolutionary Guards. A mass demonstration on June 16 by workers

and their families ending at an assembly which elected officers of an independent trade union.

Now the government is seeking to crush the union through potentially lengthy prison sentences for 5 elected leaders, charged with acting against "national security" in connection with last year's strike and the formation of the union. The five leaders are Ali Nejati, President, Feridoun Nikoufard, Vice President, Mohammed Heydari Mehr, and Representative for Industry Affairs, Ghorban Alipour, Secretary, and Jalil Ahmadi, Member of the Executive Board.

The 5 elected union leaders were summoned to the Revolutionary Court on December 20, 2008 and charged with acting against national security. They are presently awaiting the verdict.

Haft Tapeh Executive Board member Rahim Beshag was arrested by the secret police on February 22.

Following a low turnout for the February 24 election to the Haft Tapeh "Islamic Labour Council" ordered by the Ministry of labour, security forces struck again on February 28 by arresting communications officer Reza Rakhshan. His home was raided and his computers confiscated. The charges have not been made public.

Feridoun Nikoufard, Mohammed Heydari Mehr, Ghorban Alipour and Jalil Ahmadi from Haft Tapeh union were all arrested around 2 to 3 March, and on the 6 March Mohammad Olyaiefard, the lawyer of the union was summoned to the revolutionary court. We understand that all of them were released on 6 March, but that Ali Nejati, the president of Haft Tapeh union was arrested on 8 March.

We remain very concerned about the death penalty pronounced against the teacher Farzad Kamangar, who has been retransferred to the Evin Prison. We are especially alarmed by recent reports that he has been told to write his will. We denounce all forms of psychological pressure, torture and the use of the death penalty. The case of Farzad Kamangar did not meet the standards of a fair trial, and we are concerned that the government would use his case to intimidate other teachers, and the trade union movement as a whole.

Furthermore, we are very alarmed about reports that two Executive Board members of the Vahed Syndicate have been summoned by the Secret Police last month. We recall that the President Mansour Ossanloo and the Vice-President Ebrahim Madadi are still in prison, and that this union has been and is still subjected to severe repression. Both men have suffered maltreatment whilst in prison and Mansour Ossanloo, who has serious health problems, has on several occasions been denied proper medical care.

Our organisations continue to receive reports from reliable contacts inside Iran of new incidents of harassment of other labour and trade union and human rights activists. We have well-grounded fears for the psychological and physical integrity of all those targeted by this new round of repression.

For this reason, we urgently request your intervention with the Iranian authorities, in order to call for the release of Ali Nejati, but also for the release of long term detainees like Mansour Osanloo, Ebrahim Madadi and others. We also request that the Office would impress upon the Iranian authorities that it must revisit the case of Farzad

Kamangar and refrain from any execution. We would also appreciate it if the Office could impress upon the authorities the need to respect workers' and teachers' fundamental human and trade union rights, and to ensure that the principle of a right to a fair trial is fully respected in the Haph Tapeh cases and that the charges are dropped against all those recently arrested. In light of the complete lack of respect for the principle of a fair trial in former cases against trade unionists, the EI, ITF, ITUC and IUF would request that the Office impress upon the authorities the need to ensure that full legal guarantees, including the right to an appeal, are provided to all trade unionists.

We shall of course inform you of further developments in these cases. In the meantime, we would appreciate it if the Office could intervene as soon as possible with the Government, as requested above.

Yours sincerely,



Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary
EI



David Cockroft
General Secretary
ITF



Guy Ryder
General Secretary
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Ron Oswald
General Secretary
IUF