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HTUR/MP

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Egypt – Criminal Judgement against Kamal Abbas

Dear Mr Somavia,

I am writing to request that the Office intervene urgently with the military government of Egypt to annul the 26 February sentence against Kamal Abbas, general coordinator of the Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS). The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) understands that a court in the city of Helwan sentenced Kamal Abbas, in absentia, to six months imprisonment for “insulting a public officer.”

The purported basis for the sentence is a public statement made by Kamal Abbas against Ismail Ibrahim Fahmy, Acting President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), while he was delivering a speech to the International Labour Conference (ILC). Mr Abbas denounced Mr Fahmy as not representing the interests of the workers of Egypt. The ETUF had long been viewed in the international labour community as a government-dominated trade union body with little legitimacy.

The ITUC is extremely concerned by the sentence against Mr. Abbas and its broader implications. It is important that worker delegates and advisors to the ILC have the ability to express freely their point of view on questions within the competence of the ILO. If such persons suffer retaliation for the exercise of this right by their government, their work and the work of the ILO could be seriously undermined.¹ It is also unclear how Mr Fahmy could have been acting in his capacity as a “public officer” at the same time he was designated by the government as the official delegate of the workers group representing the ETUF.

¹The Committee on Freedom of Association examined a similar case in which a worker delegate was arrested and sentenced following a speech to the Conference, finding that such acts violated the immunities afforded under Article 40 of the ILO Constitution. See CFA Digest of Decisions ¶ 174.

This sentence marks signals a serious blow to the right of freedom of association in Egypt. The ITUC strongly urges you to persuade the government to immediately annul the sentence and to ensure that Mr Abbas (or other trade unionists) is not subject to any further harassment.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary