



**INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION**

Mr Giorgi Kvirikashvili
Prime Minister of Georgia
7 Ingorokva St
Tbilisi 0114, Georgia

By e-mail: letters@gov.ge

cc.:

- Mr Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General, ryder@ilo.org
- Ms Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission, federica.mogherini@ec.europa.eu
- Mr Irakli Petriashvili, GTUC and PERC President, info@gtuc.ge
- Council of Europe, pressunit@coe.int

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), we would like to express our deep concern about dispersion of the peaceful protest action of workers of Georgian Railways and trade union and community activists by the police on 24 August 2017.

Workers of Georgian Railways U. Khvtisiashvili, V. Tsiskarishvili and A. Charelashvili were informed by the management of the company about the change of the place of their employment, transferring them about 150 kilometres, without any provision for daily transport arrangements or allowance. According to Georgian labour legislation, all substantial changes to working conditions require the prior consent of the workers affected. While workers and the Independent Railway Workers tried to negotiate an amicable solution, the management of the company, which is fully owned by the Republic of Georgia, dismissed all the talks with the workers. That prompted the union to initiate legal action against the company, which, however, would involve lengthy and resource-intensive procedures.

Under those circumstances, the workers started protest actions against the company and launched a hunger strike by sitting in front of the company headquarters. This protest received significant attention and support from trade unionists and community activists.

Instead of mediation and proactive measures to resolve labour conflict, the authorities sanctioned demolition of the tent that the protesters had installed to protect themselves from the heat and rain. Furthermore, on 24 August the police dispersed the protest, and detained ten activists, including trade union and students movement leaders. At the same time, the management of the company started defamation campaigns against the unions and their leaders, including against I. Petriashvili, president of the ITUC-affiliated Georgian Trade Union Confederation and its Pan-European Regional Council (ITUC-PERC).

Regretfully, the tripartite council, which was established with the support of the ILO to facilitate conflict prevention and resolution, once again proved its inability to fulfil its mission in the case of Georgian Railways, just as it has failed in many other labour dispute cases. These failures led the GTUC to announce that it would leave the council.

Georgia signed the EU Associate Agreement aligning the country with the EU values and principles. The recent lack of respect for social dialogue and the failure to guarantee the rights of workers for peaceful assembly and protest actions give an opposite picture. We urge the government of Georgia to intervene to make sure that the management of Georgian Railways respects the rights of workers, that the police are not used to discourage freedom of speech, assembly and peaceful protest, and that social dialogue becomes the cornerstone of the industrial relations in the country. Only then can the trust of workers in state institutions, which should serve to promote the rights and interests of Georgian citizens, be restored.

We will inform the EU, the ILO, the Council of Europe and other relevant international institutions about the workers' rights violations and will be ready to support formal complaints lodged by our Georgian brothers and sisters.

Sincerely yours,



Sharan Burrow
General Secretary
ITUC



Luca Visentini
General Secretary
ETUC and PERC



Stephen Cotton
General Secretary
ITF

The ITUC represents 181 million workers in 163 countries and territories and has 340 national affiliates.

The ETUC is the voice of workers and represents 45 million members from 89 trade union organisations in 39 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations.

The ITUC-PERC is the regional structure of the ITUC for Europe, *covering trade unions from both EU Member States and other European countries, including Georgia.*

Around 700 unions, representing over 16 million transport workers from 150 countries, are members of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).