

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Iran - ICFTU takes complaints of crumbling respect for workers' rights to the highest level

Brussels, 14th February 2005 (ICFTU Online): Trials behind closed doors (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221177&Language=EN>), denial of visas for international observers (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991220483&Language=EN>), claims of torture as well as harassment of family members are all some of the damning criticisms made of the Saqez 7 case, detailed in a new dossier submitted by the ICFTU to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The trial of the 7 Iranian trade union activists, first arrested while celebrating Labour Day on 1 May 2005 (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991219239&Language=EN>), has been strongly condemned by the ICFTU as unfair and heavily criticised for the trumped up charges being made against the defendants.

Mahmoud Salehi, Jalal Hosseini, Borhan Divangar, Mohammad Abdipoor, Esmail Khodkam, Hadi Tanomand and Mohsen Hakimi - known as the Saqez 7 - stand accused of collaborating with the banned Kurdistan-based organisation "Komala" and are potentially facing stiff penalties. The international trade union movement fears that the collaboration charge, routinely used by Iranian authorities against progressive labour, social and human rights activists, could even result in the death penalty.

The trial occurs against a backdrop of a tightening grip on expression of workers' rights in Iran, further restrained through recent legislation which today leaves approximately 90% of the Iranian workforce without any protection under labour law.

The dossier highlighted the case of Kurdistan textile factory (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221121&Language=EN>) as an example of workers being deprived their rights - as enshrined in the Conventions of the UN's ILO. Workers' protests were quelled by the authorities, agreements concluded with employers have not been honoured and workers' representatives have been subjected to harassment and interrogation by the Intelligence Ministry. This comes amidst speculation that the Iranian authorities intend to privatise the textiles industry and the ICFTU fears that there will be tighter restrictions on worker voice in this sector now that the textile quota system has ended (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991220822&Language=EN>).

The current climate of violations of human rights, including trade union rights, in the country has prompted the international trade union movement to call on the European Parliament to pursue the matter with officials in Tehran, ahead of the European institution's planned delegation to Iran. Supporting the European Trade Union Confederation's (ETUC) dialogue with the European Commission as the EU resumes negotiations with Iran on a Trade and Cooperative Agreement (TCA), the ICFTU underlined the importance of tying trade agreements to Iran's respect for labour standards. The international trade union movement is also using its communication channels with the EU to pressure Iranian authorities to grant essential visas for international observers to the Saqez 7 trial.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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