

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Iraq - murder of oil trade unionist and wave of kidnappings mark surge in worker intimidation

Brussels, 25 February 2005 (ICFTU Online): Iraq is an increasingly dangerous place for trade unionists, said the ICFTU today as it condemned the latest murder of the Iraqi labour leader Ali Hassan Abd (Abu Fahad). The unionist, a prominent and outspoken member of the Oil and Gas union, was murdered on his way home, close to the Al Dorah Oil Refinery in Baghdad. Ali Hassan Abd was one of the first activists to organise trade unions in the oil industry, encouraging union voice in a post-Saddam Iraq as early as April 2003.

Following the assassination of Hadi Saleh, International Secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221117&Language=EN>, the torture and murder of labour leaders in Iraq has become a troubling trend in a country where trade unionists still operate under anti-union legislation which dates back to the Saddam-era.

The ICFTU is deeply concerned by the wave of kidnappings of Iraqi trade union leaders. Moaid Hamed, General Secretary of the Mosul branch of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), is the most recent labour leader to be kidnapped, abducted on 11 February 2004. This followed the kidnap and subsequent release of other senior trade unionists from the same organisation. The international trade union movement fears that the climate will worsen - according to the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI), an extremist group has been planning to abduct several labour activists in Basra.

Estimates from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) indicate that 72 journalists and media staff have been killed in Iraq since the conflict began - at least half of them Iraqi. 2004 also saw fatal attacks on rail workers in Basra and Mosul. Furthermore, the uncovering of the bodies of 18 workers in Northern Iraq on 5 January 2005 drew strong condemnation from the international trade union movement. The workers, residents of Baghdad, had travelled to Mosul on the promise of securing jobs in the city. All 18 victims had been shot in the head.

Iraqi workers continue to be exposed to unparalleled levels of insecurity and a serious lack of personal safety. These incidents, increasingly affecting the oil and gas sector, are testament to the dangers facing Iraqi trade unionists and workers in the country, under attack from those opposed to workers' rights. Iraqi workers play a crucial role in the reconstruction of the country and the authorities must ensure that they are able to work without fear of harassment or physical violence, stressed the ICFTU.

Following its 6-10 February meetings in Jordan which brought together representatives from all of Iraq's trade union organisations, the ICFTU again pledged its commitment to closely monitoring the situation in Iraq and will report on the status of worker security and workers' rights in the Middle Eastern country in this year's Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights.

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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