

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Mounting anti-union repression in the port of Djibouti

Brussels, 28 September 2005 (ICFTU Online): The ICFTU strongly protests against the unfair dismissal and arbitrary arrest of 11 trade union leaders along with that of some 165 strikers. Having written to the President of Djibouti (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222843&Language=FR>) barely one week ago to denounce the anti-union repression and non-respect of workers' rights at the autonomous international port of Djibouti, Guy Ryder, the ICFTU General Secretary, sent a second letter (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222842&Language=FR>) yesterday to the Djibouti government concerning this unjustifiable escalation of anti-union repression.

Based on information sent to the ICFTU by the Human Rights Observatory ('Observatoire pour la protection des défenseurs des droits de l'Homme'), workers at the port of Djibouti held a general strike from 14 to 17 September 2005, called by the Djibouti trade unions in protest against working conditions and unfair dismissals. On 17 September, a tripartite meeting between the unions, the port management and the Minister for Employment ended the strike and established the basis for a social dialogue. To that end, a second meeting was held on 24 September at the Employment Ministry, however the port director and his team failed to turn up, stating that they were boycotting the dialogue. On the same day, 11 leaders from the Port Workers' Union (UTP) trying to enter the harbour area were stopped by the police, who confiscated their access cards, and were then told by port management that they had been dismissed for "impeding the freedom to work", a reference to the general strike of 14 September.

In response to what they regarded as unfair dismissals, the port workers called a second strike for 10pm on 24 September. 2 hours later, 110 strikers and union members in the port were arrested by the national police force (FNP) and transported to the police school detention centre at Nagad. On 25 September more strikers and trade unionists were arrested. As of 26 September, almost 160 people were being held at the Nagad detention centre and 6 of the 11 UTP leaders were being held for interrogation at a police station. The six have announced that they will be starting a hunger strike.

According to the ICFTU's sources, this wave of arrests is still going on at the moment. In addition, it would seem that the home of the UTP General Secretary, who had been forced into hiding at the start of these events, has been illegally raided.

Voicing his profound concern, Guy Ryder called on the President of Djibouti to ensure the "immediate release" of all those being held, "to give the sacked trade unionists a chance to contest the legality of their dismissal before an impartial and independent court and to put an end to all forms of harassment and reprisals against trade union leaders and trade unionists".

Noting that these events are violations of ILO convention 87 on freedom of association and protection of union rights and convention 98 on the right to organise and bargain collectively, both of which have been ratified by Djibouti, the ICFTU warned that failing a positive reaction from the President it would be obliged to lodge an official complaint with the ILO.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers through its 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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