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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Iran: More workers arrested as unionists picket embassies around the world

Brussels, 9 August 2007 (ITUC OnLine): As trade unionists and human rights activists around the world joined in an international "Iran Day of Action" today, demanding the release from prison of two prominent Iranian trade union leaders, Iranian authorities reacted by stepping up repression against the country's independent trade union movement.

Early this morning, state security agents arrested five executives of the Tehran Bus Drivers Trade Union ("Syndica Sherkat-e Vahed"). Tehran police also prevented union members from attending a support rally called at the house of Mansour Osanloo; President of the Sherkat-e Vahed trade union and one of the two whose release is being demanded by international trade unionists. He was arrested last July, shortly after returning from London and Brussels, where he had addressed a meeting of the ITUC General Council. The other is Mahmoud Salehi, co-founder of the Co-ordinating Committee to Form Workers' Organisations. He has suffered very severe judicial persecution for organising workers' activities on May Day in 2004. Previously arrested and released, he was finally detained in the Sanandaj prison on 9 April 2007 and has since then been denied medical treatment for a severe kidney condition.

As reports of demonstrations continue to reach the ITUC and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF, London) about union pickets at Iranian embassies around the world, European and international trade union leaders strongly condemned this morning's arrests in Tehran. Speaking shortly after a 50-strong demonstration in front of the Iranian embassy in Brussels this morning, John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) said that "by arresting five union leaders this morning, Iran's authorities have once more reacted with brutal force to the legitimate demands of the country's workers. Neither our Iranian colleagues nor their European colleagues will be deterred by their tactics". "Osanloo, Salehi and all their colleagues can continue to count on our support", he added. Monks was accompanied this morning by Jaap Wienen, ITUC Deputy General Secretary, who stated: "Trade union leaders from around the world were deeply impressed by Osanloo when he addressed here last June. He told us he knew of the risks he was taking by travelling to Brussels then going back to Iran. His country's security apparatus has unfortunately proven him right. We will not let him down now!".

Monks and Wienen were accompanied this morning by leaders and activists from Belgium's three national union centres, CSC-AVC, FGTB-ABVV and CGSLB-ACLVB, as well as transport workers' union members and a delegation from the Brussels-based ICEM (International Chemical, Energy and Mineworkers' Federation). Also was present was a delegation from Amnesty International's Belgian (Francophone) section. In what the ITUC said was a "historical first", Amnesty International's London-based International Secretariat earlier this week called on the organisation's members worldwide to support the ITUC-ITF Iran Day of Action. As was the case today in most capitals where action was taken, the Iranian embassy in Brussels refused to meet with the international and Belgian union delegation. Questioned by Belgian television (RTBF) as to its reasons, it replied that it considered the demonstration as "illegal".

In Geneva, an international union delegation composed of leaders and representatives of the ITUC and several Global Union Federations (PSI, IUF and UNI, affiliating unions from the public services, food workers and services sectors worldwide, respectively) met with Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Replying to the delegation's concerns about the arrests in Iran, Ambassador Sajjapour said Iran was "under pressure by forces wanting to overthrow the government." He added that "the Executive has no responsibility for the actions of the judiciary authorities, the two powers being independent".

Photo gallery from the demonstration at the Iranian embassy in Brussels: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1349>

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: www.ituc-csi.org

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