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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Iran: Ahmadinejad to be criticised over unionists' detention at regional summit in Bishkek

Brussels, 16 August 2007 (ITUC OnLine): Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is likely to face unexpected criticism of his government's human rights record today, when he attends the annual summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. National trade union organisations in a number of SCO states have renewed pressure on Iran to release two detained labour leaders, Mansour Ossanloo and Mahmoud Salehi. The initiative forms part of a worldwide trade union campaign aimed at securing freedom for the two prisoners, kicked off last week with trade unions taking action in over 30 countries worldwide. The ITUC said in Brussels today that the campaign was already showing results and vowed to keep up pressure on Iran, together with the London-based International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and their affiliated organisations throughout the world.

The Federation of Trade Unions of Kyrgyzstan, which enjoys associated status with the Brussels-based ITUC, yesterday wrote to the President of Kyrgyzstan, Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiev, asking him to "make President Ahmadinejad aware of the serious concern of Kyrgyzstan workers" about the two imprisoned Iranian trade unionists and to "insist that Iran follow the rules of international law, since these rules are the basis of any international co-operation". Meanwhile, Russia's 28 million-strong trade union confederation FNPR (affiliated to ITUC) protested in similar terms last week to the Iranian authorities and the country's two other ITUC affiliates, VKT and KTR, reiterated these demands on the occasion of the SCO summit. Similar trade union action has taken place in India and Pakistan. The SCO, established in June 2001, brings together Russia, China and the four Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadzhikistan and Uzbekistan. Iran, which is seeking full SCO membership, takes part in the Bishkek Summit in an observer capacity, as do Mongolia, India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the ITUC and ITF welcomed the fact that Mansour Ossanloo, detained in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, had been allowed to make a phone call to his wife last Monday and to meet his lawyers on Tuesday. According to one of his lawyers, Yussef Moulaye, his client, who is President of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Drivers' Union (Syndika Sherkat-e Vahed), was in good psychological and physical shape, though he still bore marks of a severe beating incurred during his arrest, on 10 July 2007. The meeting also confirmed that Ossanloo was in possession of official union correspondence at the time of his arrest. Tehran justice officials claim he was detained for distributing "anti-regime pamphlets" and maintain that his union is "illegal".

The ITUC said however it remained very concerned at the lack of progress in the case of Mahmoud Salehi, former President of the Bakery Workers' Association in Saqez (Iran's Kurdistan Province) and co-founder of a Committee to Establish Workers' Organisations. Salehi, who has been

sentenced for meeting with an international trade union delegation and organising a May Day demonstration in 2004, is being refused medical care in the prison of Sanandaj, capital of Kurdistan Province. The ITUC also condemned the detention of at least seven trade union and human rights' activists last week, when they had attempted to visit Mansour Ossanloo's house in Tehran, as part of a solidarity event convened by the Sherkat-e Vahed trade union to coincide with the ITF-ITUC International Day of Action on Iran on 9 August.

"We will maintain pressure on Iran's government until all our colleagues are released and Iranian trade unionists are allowed to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of threats, intimidation or arrest", ITUC Deputy General Secretary Jaap Wienen said in Brussels today. "Our Bishkek operation is part of that campaign, and President Ahmadinejad is likely to keep hearing from us wherever he goes, until Mansour, Mahmoud and their colleagues are free and allowed to resume their trade union work unhindered ", he added.

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

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For an update on the ITF-ITUC Iran Campaign, please see:.

<http://www.itfglobal.org/solidarity/osanloo2.cfm>