

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Anti-union repression in Iran and Colombia denounced today around the world

Brussels 6 March 2008 (ITUC OnLine): Union organizations in 45 countries around the world are taking part in a world-wide Day of Action in support of detained Iranian trade unionists. The ITUC, ITF and their Belgian affiliates gathered at Iran's Brussels Embassy on Thursday, as part of the global action.

"Iran's embassy in Brussels is one of the few Iranian diplomatic missions around the world which systematically refuses to meet international trade union representatives to discuss the situation of trade union and human rights", an ITUC representative told about 100 trade unionists and human rights activists assembled in front of Iran's embassy in the Belgian capital this morning.

The meeting came as part of a world-wide Day of Action on Iran initiated by the ITUC, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and supported by Amnesty International to demand the release from prison of two key Iranian trade unionists. They are Mansour Ossanloo, President of the Tehran Bus Drivers' Union (Syndika Sherkat-e Vahed) and Mahmoud Salehi, co-founder of the Bakery Workers' Union in the city of Saqez (Iranian Kurdistan Province). Both have been repeatedly detained and sentenced to long prison terms for their independent trade union activities and their health has deteriorated severely in prison in the last few months. International union mobilisation has however proved critical in obtaining several temporary transfers to hospital in recent weeks for both Ossanloo and Salehi.

Today's picket in front of the Brussels Embassy brought together some 100 union leaders and activists as well as human rights defenders from the ITUC, ETF (European branch of the ITF) and its affiliates in Belgium BTB and Transcom, the three ITUC-affiliated national centres ACV-CSC, FGTB-ABVV and CGSLB-ACLVB, the Global Union Federations Education International and ICEM and the Belgian francophone section of Amnesty International, AIBF. They listened to speeches by various union leaders before holding a candle-lit vigil. The embassy refused to meet the delegation, arguing it had not been warned in advance. When told it had not replied to a letter from ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder, in which he had asked for such a meeting two weeks ago, an embassy official refused to reply and simply cut the communication. The delegation then put a joint letter and an accompanying "Note verbale"

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Note_verbale - letter_to_the_Iranian_Embassy_05-03-08.pdf addressed to the Iranian authorities in the embassy's mailbox. The sequence was the exact repetition of what had occurred last August during a similar union picket in front of the embassy.

The Iran Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, for its part, accepted to meet an ITUC-GUF delegation this morning, comprising representatives from the ILO Workers' Group, BWI, IUF and PSI, acting also on behalf of UNI and the IMF.

Unions also mobilizing on Colombia:

Meanwhile, actions are also being taken by ITUC affiliates in several countries in support of a National March organized by the Colombian human rights' and union movements to protest at murders of trade unionists by paramilitary death squads. Trade union solidarity actions were planned to take place today amongst others in Australia, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, where a gathering of ITUC affiliates, Amnesty International and Colombian NGO's took place in the early afternoon.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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