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Iraq: Upcoming Trade Union Elections to be Held Under Saddam's Laws

Brussels, 19 February 2009 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has expressed deep concerns over the planned holding of trade union elections in Iraq in March under the legal framework inherited from the regime of Saddam Hussein, in violation of international law on freedom of association. The elections are set to be held under "Law 52", which prohibits workers in the public sector from forming or joining unions. In fact only six mainly private sector unions, all affiliated to the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, will be allowed to participate. Other affiliates of the IFTU and those affiliated to other national trade union centres are excluded. Moreover, the three Northern Kurdish provinces will be excluded from the elections.

"The Iraqi authorities may well be aiming to move forward on much-needed improvements on workers' rights, but this is completely the wrong way to go about it. They need to ensure that workers in Iraq have the full rights and protections enshrined in international law, in particular Conventions 87 and 98 of the ILO" said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

The ITUC understands the Chair government committee supervising the elections has said that he would not prevent public sector workers from organising their own trade union elections, but that these unions would not be recognised since Law 52 does not allow it. As a result, some public sector unions have indicated they wish to hold trade union elections, while others have decided not to in light of the legal situation. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there are both private and public sector workers in the membership of the six unions which are holding officially-recognised elections. In addition, the controversial August 2005 Order 8750 freezes all trade union assets and financial accounts. The application of this order would only be re-assessed and possibly suspended after union elections are held, and only for those unions allowed to take part in the officially-recognised elections.

In a letter sent to the Iraqi authorities http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/09-02-17_Iraqi_TU_elections_March.pdf the ITUC has informed Prime Minister Jawas Al Maliki, Prime Minister, that it has asked the UN's International Labour Organisation to offer the Iraqi authorities assistance in bringing their laws into compliance with international standards.

"Workers in Iraq have too long been denied their legitimate rights, and we trust that the authorities will now work with the ILO to ensure that

these rights are fully respected," added Ryder.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 312 affiliated national organisations from 157 countries. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
<http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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