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Mauritania: Call for an Urgent Return to Democracy

Brussels, 30 March 2009 (ITUC OnLine): "It is urgent that the entire international community send a very strong message for a return to democracy in Mauritania," said Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC. Fearing that the unstable situation in Mauritania could have a domino effect on the region, the ITUC has addressed an appeal to the United Nations, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and, together with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), to the European Union.

The country's democratically elected president was ousted by military troops on 6 August 2008. Since then, the ITUC's affiliated organisations in Mauritania (UTM, CGTM and CLTM) have been campaigning through the grouping of democratic trade union centres, the Coordination des Centrales syndicales démocratiques, for the urgent restoration of the rule of law.

Recent attempts by the African Union to mediate a solution (without trade union involvement) have failed, but the need to find a solution to the crisis is all the more urgent in light of the attacks on the exercise of basic rights and freedoms. The government emerging from the coup of August 2008 is pushing for an amendment of Article 432 of the Labour Code, in a bid to directly undermine and dissuade the exercise of trade union rights and freedom of expression through sanctions against trade union leaders.

The trade union movement considers the only way out of this crisis to be the holding of early presidential and legislative elections, but these must be preceded by President Ould Cheikh Abdallahi's return to power. The involvement of the trade unions is also essential if there is to be any hope of reaching a solution. These measure should be coupled with the application of individual and targeted sanctions against all those, be they civilian or military, acting with a view to maintaining the unconstitutional status quo in Mauritania.

"It is crucial that the whole international community unite behind the position of the African Union," said Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, general secretary of ITUC-Africa. Following the joint appeal of ITUC-Africa and the ITUC last week, the Security Council of the African Union voted on 24 March in favour of applying sanctions against the members of the junta, establishing a deadline of one month for the drawing up of the list of those targeted by the sanctions.

ITUC letter to Abdou Diouf, general secretary of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2009-03-20_Letter_to_Abdou_Diouf_cc_Mauritanie.pdf

ITUC letter to the African Union: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2009-03-20_Letter_to_African_Union.pdf

ITUC letter to Ban Ki Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2009-03-20_Letter_to_Ban_Ki_Moon.pdf

ITUC letter to Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2009-03-20_Letter_to_Louis_Michel_cc_Mauritanie.pdf

ITUC letter to Josep Borrell, chair of the Committee on Development. http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2009-03-23-Josep_Borrell_-_Mauritanie.pdf

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