

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

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Turkey: Anti-union harrassment: 32 unionists still in prison

Brussels, 27 July 2009: The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) wrote a joint letter (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/09-07-22_Joint_ITUC-ETUC_letter_KESK_arrests.pdf) to the Turkish Prime Minister last week to protest at the constant harrassment, dismissal, random judicial proceedings and arrests of members and leaders of their common affiliate, the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK). At this moment, 32 persons still remain in prison, without access to due process and in contravention of Council of Europe and ILO standards.

Next month, on 15 August, negotiations on working conditions for public sector workers will be initiated in Turkey. The Turkish authorities refer to these as "collective consultative talks", which in itself is already in breach of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention 98 on collective bargaining. The ITUC and the ETUC consider these events as harassment to weaken the union's negotiating position, which constitutes a serious infringement of ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association.

The ITUC had already written to the Turkish government on three occasions (29 May http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/TU_arrests_29-05-09_final_1_.pdf, 15 June http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/TU_arrests_29-05-09_-_follow-up_12_June-2_.pdf and 18 June http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/TU_arrests_29-05-09_-_follow-up_12_June-2_.pdf) protesting the numerous arrests of members and leaders of KESK and one of its main affiliates, the teachers' trade union Egitim-Sen. On 28 May, 35 of them were detained, of which 22 remain in prison to date. Ten KESK members and leaders were already in prison before that time. There has been no response whatsoever to any of these letters.

"It is of course completely unacceptable that the public sector union in Turkey is being targeted ahead of the upcoming negotiations on working conditions, by means of detentions that even contravene Turkish legislation and international standards. Citizens of a democratic country cannot be held arbitrarily without access to due process" said Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary.

The rights of workers' organisations can only be exercised in a climate that is free of violence, reprisals or threats of any kind against their leaders and membership. The ITUC and ETUC therefore firmly urged the Turkish government to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all the arrested KESK and Egitim-Sen members and leaders.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 312 affiliated national organisations from 157 countries.

Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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