

ITUC OnLine

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ITUC Strengthening its Presence in the Arab Region, to Better Defend Trade Union Rights

Tunisia, 16 April 2010 (ITUC OnLine): Nine Arab trade union organisations affiliated to the ITUC met in Hammamet, Tunisia, from 14 to 16 April, together with six guest union organisations from the region. Open and constructive discussions were held with ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder on the ITUC's strategy for the Arab region, within the framework of preparatory discussions ahead of the ITUC Congress in Vancouver (Canada) in June.

"These discussions allowed us to establish our shared resolve to develop a strong permanent ITUC presence in the Arab region, through our office in Amman, which is set to become a regional secretariat with a strengthened mandate to promote a space for exchange and cooperation based on the fundamental principles of free and independent trade unionism," said Guy Ryder. "The delegates to the conference unanimously confirmed their commitment to the fundamental principles that underpin the unity between the ITUC's affiliates," underlined Guy Ryder.

The ITUC general secretary expressed "his admiration for the many trade union leaders in the Arab region who fight with courage, day after day, to defend these fundamental principles, at the risk of having to oppose the authorities in place, which reject democracy and social dialogue".

Guy Ryder also reaffirmed the ITUC's commitment to take advantage of the forthcoming ITUC Congress in Vancouver to hold constructive discussions, within the framework of the debate on the peace agenda, on the plight of Palestinian workers and to call, once again, for the strict application of international laws in the Palestinian territories, and respect for fundamental workers' rights for all Palestinians, including those who work in Israel.

ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder, and Jaap Wienen, deputy general secretary of the ITUC, also invited the Global Union Federations and ILO representatives in the Arab region to take part in an exchange of views on international cooperation with a view to developing a trade union cooperation strategy that responds to the needs expressed by the affiliates and that integrates ITUC priorities across the board, including the integration of women and young people, who remain underrepresented in the region's trade union structures. Many of the solidarity support organisations present in Arab countries also took part in the discussion, responding to the need to develop information sharing and coordination, to ensure greater overall coherence in trade union cooperation in the region.

The abrupt economic changes affecting Arab countries are undermining fundamental rights and the interests of the region's workers, resulting in increased pauperisation, unemployment, and the casualisation and informalisation of work. Too many political regimes in the region continue to be marked by authoritarianism and a democratic deficit, hindering the recognition and full exercise of trade union rights.

In accordance with its fundamental objective to defend trade union rights around the world, the ITUC and its Arab affiliates expressed their will to develop a regional and sub-regional network to promote cooperation in the defence of trade union rights. In line with this objective, the ITUC announced the forthcoming launch of an observatory to monitor trade union rights violations in Arab and Middle Eastern Countries. By supplying quick and relevant information on trade union rights violations in the region, this observatory

will contribute to raising media and public awareness about trade union rights and denouncing anti-union practices, with a view to promoting national, regional and international mobilisation to foster greater respect for human and trade union rights in the region.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates. <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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