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021/310111

Egypt: ITUC Supports General Strike Call and Welcomes New Independent Trade Union Federation

Brussels, 31 January 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has announced its strong support for the Egyptian opposition's call for a general strike in favour of democracy and fundamental rights today. The opposition's move follows yesterday's general-strike call by the country's newly established independent trade union centre.

"This is a hugely important step for all Egyptians, who have for so long been denied the right to democratic representation at work. Independent unions, which the regime refused to recognise, have organised thousands of local strikes, sit-ins and protests in recent years, and have been a moving force behind the massive mobilisation of Egypt's people that we have been witnessing in recent days," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

The new trade union centre, which brings together existing independent unions of health sector employees and tax inspectors as well as worker representatives from the country's key manufacturing locations, public employees and other sectors, announced its formation at a meeting on Sunday at Tahrir Square in Cairo and immediately issued the general-strike call. It also announced the formation of committees in workplaces across the country to protect workplace infrastructure.

"The union actions will increase pressure for genuine democratic change and respect for human rights. Just as in Tunisia, where the ITUC-affiliated UGTT has been at the forefront of the democracy movement, we salute the courage and determination of Egypt's working people in standing up to an autocratic and illegitimate regime," said Burrow.

The ITUC General Council meeting in Brussels this week will decide on measures to assist the Tunisian and Egyptian union movements to press for democratic transition and full respect for workers' rights.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 301 affiliated national organisations from 151 countries and territories. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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