

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

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“On the move to Equality” ITUC launches new Arab trade union women’s network

Tunis, 8 March 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC is marking International Women’s Day, 8 March, by launching a new Arab trade union women’s network, in the presence of its General Secretary Sharan Burrow, and with the participation of trade union women from eight Arab countries.

« It is an honour for the ITUC to launch this new Arab women’s trade union network in Tunisia, a country whose courageous revolution and unprecedented transition to democracy has brought the hope of greater social justice and freedoms to the whole of the Arab world. From Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia, the women trade unionists here today are testimony to the front line role of women in the revolutions and reformist movements sweeping the Arab world » stated Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary.

For the ITUC, the struggle for democracy goes hand in hand with the recognition of fundamental workers’ rights, severely flouted in the Arab region, particularly for women. The ITUC has long denounced the absence of real democracy and the violations of fundamental freedoms and trade union rights in the region, as well as the constantly deteriorating socio-economic conditions faced by the majority of workers. The Arab region has the highest levels of gender inequality. It has the world’s lowest rate of female participation in the labour market, at barely 25%. The multiple forms of discrimination against women in the region mean that most are confined to precarious, low paid, unprotected jobs, either in the informal economy, the rapidly developing export processing zones, the services and care sectors, or agriculture. Domestic workers, particularly in the Middle East, and above all the Gulf States, are subjected to unacceptable living and working conditions. The majority of them suffer the additional discrimination that comes from being migrant workers, deprived of their most fundamental rights.

The ever increasing precariousness of the labour market and the steady deterioration of socio-economic conditions, combined with authoritarian polices that deprive the population of their fundamental freedoms, have long been building up, the ITUC believes, to an explosive situation. Last July at its Congress in Vancouver the ITUC therefore decided that it was time to strengthen its structures in the Arab region and, at the same time, to launch a network for Arab women trade unionists. The speed

and historical significance of today's democracy struggles in the region have only served to encourage the ITUC to further strengthen its support. The creation of the new Arab trade union women's network will be an essential tool that will enable them, working together with other civil society organisations active in the same struggle, to develop strategies and concrete action for women's rights, in law and in practice.

Women are poorly represented within the Arab region's trade union organisations, particularly at the decision-making level. This new network, "On the move to Equality" will also be a key tool in improving the role of women in the Arab trade union movement.

"The winds of change, for more democracy, rights, social justice and decent work, now sweeping across the whole Arab region are an historic opportunity for women to win the equal standing that is their due in society, in the labour market and in their trade union organisations. Arab women must be fully involved in this surge towards democracy, in the policies and structures, and the ITUC is committed to giving its full support to this fight for equality in the Arab region" concluded Sharan Burrow.

Read also the report, "Living With Economic Insecurity: Women in Precarious Work" <http://www.ituc-csi.org/living-with-economic-insecurity.html> . It shows that while the initial impact of the crisis was equally detrimental to men and women, increasing numbers of women are now either losing their jobs or being forced into more precarious, temporary, and informal forms of work.

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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