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Syria: Regime's Promises of Partial Reform Insufficient

Brussels, 25 March 2011 (ITUC OnLine): Partial reforms promised by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad are unlikely to quell the anger spreading across the country, nor satisfy demands for democracy and human rights. Dozens of protestors are believed to have been killed by the regime's security forces since unrest began following the arrest of several children for painting anti-regime slogans on walls in the town of Deraa. Scores of people have been detained since the protests began, although the regime has said they will now be released.

Despite promises by the regime to introduce limited reforms, reports from Syria indicate that security forces are still using live ammunition against demonstrators as protests spread across the country including to Damascus. Heavy restrictions on journalists trying to report on the situation remain in place.

"Just as in other countries in the region, people are rising up in protest at repression of fundamental rights and the lack of decent jobs and prospects for the future. It is time that the Syrian authorities respect fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to form and join genuine trade unions to represent their interests. The Assad regime must immediately stop its violent repression, open a dialogue with its opponents, and allow the development of legitimate civil society organisations," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

A large proportion of Syria's population lives below the poverty line, with unemployment around 30%. The country has existed under a state of emergency since 1963, with heavy restrictions on civil and political rights, and the trade unions under the full control of the regime.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 305 affiliated national organisations from 151 countries and territories. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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