

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Bahrain: Urgent ITUC Mission Warns of Slide into Dictatorship

Brussels, 18 April 2011 (ITUC OnLine): ITUC Deputy General Secretary Jaap Wienen, on an urgent visit to the Bahrain's capital Manama this weekend, has pledged a comprehensive package of international actions in support of the fundamental rights of Bahrain's working people, as the trade union movement in the Gulf country faces an all-out assault from the government.

"Bahrain is sliding rapidly towards absolute dictatorship, and the authorities seem intent on creating and deepening sectarian divisions. The Bahraini trade unions have been at the forefront of the movement for dialogue, peace and reconciliation, yet the government has clearly decided to try and destroy them. The international trade union movement will not simply stand by and allow this to happen. If the government does not change course, the global diplomatic and economic consequences will be severe," said Wienen.

Some 2,000 workers in 30 mainly government enterprises have been sacked for joining trade union actions in support of dialogue and an end to violence, including 6 members of the Executive of the ITUC-affiliated General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GFBTU) and 22 local trade union leaders. The ITUC understands that employees of the key employer body, the Chamber of Commerce, have also been dismissed.

The campaign of intimidation by government-sponsored groups has intensified in recent days, with the appearance of billboards including names and photographs of opposition leaders, calling for "no mercy and execution". Journalists are being dismissed and are facing persecution and arrest, and reports continue to emerge of extreme violence by the authorities against people in detention, including the deaths of four detainees.

As ITUC member organisations around the world prepare solidarity actions with the GFBTU and its member unions in different sectors, the ITUC is already planning high-level action at the International Labour Organisation.

"Bahrain has ratified ILO Convention 111 which forbids discrimination in employment. The authorities are clearly targeting and discriminating against workers due to their involvement in union activities. Bahrain is also required, as an ILO member state, to respect freedom of association but regrettably the government seems intent on violating these international legal obligations. We will therefore be pursuing this case as a matter of urgency at the ILO as well as in regard to Bahrain's governmental and commercial relations," Wienen added.

As a first step, the ITUC is calling for the establishment of an ILO Commission of Inquiry into Bahrain's violations of Convention 111. Such a Commission, which can be convened under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution, is one of the most powerful instruments within the UN system, and the ITUC call reflects the extreme level of concern at the government's actions.

“We are seeing governments around the world now turning their attention to the worsening situation in Bahrain. The trade union movement remains open to serious dialogue to ease tensions and deal with the underlying problems in the economy and society. The government should abandon the path of violence, threats and confrontation including against GFBTU leaders before it is too late,” said Wienen.

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

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