

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

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May Day: Arab Workers Demands for Jobs and Rights Echo Reform Movement Across the Region;

Egypt Celebrations Violently Attacked by Mubarak Thugs

Brussels, 2 May 2011 (ITUC OnLine): Tens of thousands of people across the Arab world have demonstrated to demand decent jobs, social justice and an end to repression on May Day. At trade union rallies across the region, from Iraq in the east to Mauritania in the west, workers from all walks of life added new momentum to the groundswell for democracy and workers' rights following the fall of the dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia.

Some 77 national trade union centres and sectoral trade unions across the region have also signed an "Arab Countries Declaration for Democracy and Social Justice" <http://www.ituc-csi.org/declaration-of-trade-unions-from.html?lang=en> adding even further pressure to change to the Arab Spring movement.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow joined Palestinian workers and their families at the Palestinian trade union centre PGFTU's march and rally in Ramallah, to support their demand for a minimum wage, social protection, labour law reform and the setting up of labour courts to tackle exploitation.

"These matters are crucial to the development of a viable and vibrant economy, and action on these must go hand in hand with the building of a free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine," she said. "This May Day, workers across the world have taken heart from the courage of working people in the Arab countries, and I feel immensely privileged to be able to share in this moment with my Palestinian colleagues."

In Cairo's Tahrir Square, a peaceful rally was violently attacked by thugs believed to be from the Mubarak regime's discredited official "trade union" ETUF. Despite being pelted with stones and bottles, the workers from the new independent union EFITU carried on with their rally, with the crowd swelling to some 50,000 marchers. ITUC Deputy General Secretary Jaap Wienen who took part in the rally said "Despite the disgraceful aggression by the ETUF and the failure of the authorities to properly protect the peaceful assembly, the tens of thousands of workers refused to be intimidated. This provocation only reinforces the determination of the international trade union movement to supporting every way possible the completion of the fundamental transformation which lies at the heart of the Egyptian revolution. We will stand with our sisters and brothers in the new Egyptian trade union movement in their campaign for full respect for fundamental rights for working people." The ITUC, with the Public Services International, which also took part in the rally, released an official statement condemning the violence and reiterating support for the EFITU <http://www.ituc-csi.org/may-day-egypt-statement-of-the.html>

Elsewhere in the Arab world on May Day, according to reports already received by the ITUC:
- in Morocco, thousands of people joined events organized by the three ITUC affiliates to celebrate May Day in Casablanca and Rabat, calling strongly for reinforced social dialogue, which is more important than ever given the demand, especially from young people, for better wages and social protection;

- in Tunis, the ITUC Tunisian affiliate UGTT celebrated the central role played by the union movement in the success of the revolution, re-stated its total commitment to the building of a new society without injustice and repression, and stressed the need for an economy which ensures decent jobs for young people. It also called for urgent reform of the country's labour laws;
- The Mauritania trade unions organized an impressive march in the capital Nouakchott involving thousands workers from the formal and informal economies, giving top priority to ending the exploitation of migrant workers, many of whom took part in the event. The high cost of living, anti-democratic and anti-social legislation and the need for social protection and decent work were also prominent in their demands.
- To see the fotos of the May Day in Irak and the first post revolution May Day in Egypt as well as other fotos of May day in the Arab Wold, please go this link (which will be updated during the day). <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ituc/collections/72157626628180810/>
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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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