

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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A new Arab Democratic Trade Union Forum: For freedom, social justice and dignity

Brussels/Amman, 16 September 2011 (ITUC OnLine): Fifteen Arab trade union organizations from 10 countries founded today in Amman, Jordan, a new Forum to promote the fundamental values of democratic and independent trade unionism and to increase regional union solidarity and unity. The founding union organizations are from Bahrain (GFTU); Egypt (EFITU); Iraq (GFIW); Kuwait (KTUF); Libya (FLWF*); Mauritania (CLTM, CNTM, UTM); Morocco (CDT, CGTM, UMT); Palestine (PGFTU); Tunisia (UGTT); and Yemen (GFYWTU).

"The transition process to democracy as well as the revolutionary struggles, which are still ongoing, need a better contribution from the Arab trade union movement. Our priorities are to achieve genuine democracy and social justice, to ensure dignity for all in the Arab world," said Tunisian trade unionist Abdessalem Jerad, who was elected President of the new Forum.

The final declaration of the meeting stated:

"A key historic player in many national liberation battles, the independent trade union movement in the Arab world has been struggling for decades under the most difficult circumstances to enforce the freedom of association and the right to organize, as well as to defend fundamental rights at work and decent livelihoods for workers' families and the rest of the society. Free trade union fighters in the region have faced campaigns of heavy repression and exclusion. These oppressive practices have inflicted harm on worker's interests, exacerbated social differences, increased unemployment and poverty, spread informal economy and precarious forms of employment.

"To overcome the challenges and hardships resulting from the repercussions of brutal global capitalism and the failed national economic and social policies, the independent trade union movement finds itself facing new historical responsibilities that require it to be closer to the grassroots. It needs to increase its solidarity and promote its unity and joint action, especially towards the workers and unionists who are facing extraordinary difficulties, as currently in Bahrain and Syria.

"Committed to transparency and democracy in internal union affairs, the democratic Arab trade union movement wants to play a leading and effective role in enacting the laws of democratic transition, develop their mechanisms in the various Arab countries, and ensure they liaise and work jointly with other societal forces which believe in freedom, progress and equality."

In other key points in the declaration:

The founding members of the Forum committed themselves to defend and promote the core principles of independent trade unionism: the right of all workers to form independent and representative trade union organizations, the right to collective bargaining, the rejection of any outside interference in trade union affairs, and respect for public and individual freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful demonstration.

Equality between men and women, elimination of all forms of discrimination, including against migrant workers, genuine social dialogue, efficient social protection for all workers, including those working on the informal economy, are top priorities of the Forum. Shaher Sae'd, PGFTU General Secretary (Palestine), was the elected coordinator of the new Forum.

"We warmly welcome the launch of the new Forum. A stronger and united Arab trade union movement can play a pivotal role in achieving genuine democracy and tackling unemployment, precarity, poverty and inequality, affecting especially youth and women who are at the forefront of these struggles," said Sharan Burrow, ITUC.

*Free Libyan Workers' Federation.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates.

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