

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
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Rights Under Unprecedented Attack in the Arab World

Brussels, 8 September 2014 (ITUC OnLine): Human rights are under sustained and unprecedented attack across the Arab world, as thousands of young people, members of a generation of dispossessed, are drawn into the vicious embrace of violent jihadists seeking to bring the entire region under their control.

The conditions for the current crisis in the region, described by UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay as the “murderous summer” of 2014, represent a collective failure of government, both within the region and in the international community.

“Islamic State” which has received huge financial support from within the Gulf State monarchies is now building its own financial base through robbery, extortion, human trafficking and the sale of captured oil reserves to its friends and enemies alike. It and other violent sectarian groups, also supported by the Gulf monarchies, are aiming to subjugate entire nations through extreme violence and intimidation. The peoples many Arab countries are increasingly caught between fundamentalist, misogynist extremists on one side and autocratic dictatorship or absolute monarchy on the other. Human rights, democracy and any prospect for economic and social development are being suffocated under this duopoly of tyrannical forces.

Responsibility for the situation today is not however limited to within the region itself. Those countries which have been staging points for foreign fighters entering the region’s conflict zones must be held to account. And the world’s major economic and political powers share a heavy burden of blame for a catalogue of political and economic failures in recent decades which have deepened instability and helped create the conditions for the swift and unprecedented rise of the jihadists.

The popular uprising against the Syrian dictatorship has been eclipsed by fundamentalist groups which have exploited the mounting chaos, supported by outside interests intent on fighting proxy wars on Syrian soil. With nearly 200,000 killed, 3 million refugees and a more than 3 million displaced Syrians trapped inside the country, the UN’s Antonio Guterres has described the crisis as “The biggest humanitarian emergency of our era, yet the world is failing to meet the needs of refugees and the countries hosting them.” In Iraq, more than 6,000 people, the vast majority of them civilians, have been killed in the past three months alone and the humanitarian crisis continues to grow.

The vast majority of people in the Arab world, like people everywhere, aspire to live in peace and mutual respect and to have the means and possibilities to build decent lives for themselves and future generations. These aspirations are under relentless attack from those who seek to create and aggravate sectarian divisions, exploiting economic inequality and social exclusion.

The independent and democratic trade union movement, with its deep and unwavering commitment to peace, equality, human rights and non-discrimination, is a bulwark against division, violence and exploitation. It is no coincidence that trade unions, in the Arab world as elsewhere, are amongst the foremost targets of those who seek to destroy these enduring values. The international trade union movement will remain steadfast in its support and solidarity for the trade unions of the Arab world, and will redouble its demands on the entire international community to bring economic and social justice to the region, and defeat bigotry, subjugation and repression from whatever quarter it may come.

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