

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC Statement on Human Rights Day

Brussels, 10 December 2014 (ITUC OnLine): Today, 64 years since the United Nations declared December 10 a Human Rights Day, the world is witnessing an unprecedented attack on one of the most fundamental human rights of all, the right to strike.

Virtually every country in the world recognises that workers have the right to take strike action. Some 90 countries have it enshrined in their national constitution.

From the first struggles for the 8-hour day and for fair wages, for safety and health at work, for weekly rest days and freedom from discrimination and exploitation at work, the fundamental right of working people to withdraw their labour has provided a crucial foundation for social and economic progress. And when people rise up against dictatorship and political oppression, their right to strike has always been, and always will be, a non-negotiable bedrock of democracy.

Only in the most totalitarian of dictatorships is the right to strike denied.

Employer organisations are now seeking to take away that right in international law. They intend to change the balance of power in the workplace and in society for the worse, and forever. When democracy is expanding, workers and their unions have more space to work for economic and social justice and equality. When democratic space is being closed, as is happening in so many countries today, workers and their unions find themselves under attack.

For more than 100 years, when employers and governments have refused dialogue and negotiation and instead imposed their will, workers have still taken the step and faced the risks of withdrawing their labour. That will not change.

Taking away the right to strike removes the final bulwark against oppression. The international trade union movement is firm in its resolve to resist the assault on this most basic right. We are the force of opposition, and we are the force of progress.

Taking away the right to strike would turn us all into slaves. We will not allow that to happen.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 161 countries and territories and has 324 national affiliates.

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