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ITUC Congratulates Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet on Nobel Peace Prize

Brussels, 12 October 2015 (ITUC OnLine): Trade unions have celebrated with the UGTT, one of the partners of the National Dialogue Quartet awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for a peaceful transition to a democratic future in Tunisia.

Congratulating this year's Nobel Prize winners, Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the ITUC, said the award puts in the spotlight the dialogue that underpins progress in many countries in our world.

Houcine Abbassi was welcomed by the ITUC General Council meeting in Brazil, where he spoke about his countries struggle for freedom, and his reaction to learning about the decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

"The 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was not made to an intellectual, a politician or an NGO, as they could have done.

"This year the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to civil society in a developing country and in this choice they honored the role of the unions in achieving stability and in promoting the solution of peace throughout the world.

"This is an honour for my organisation - but through this it is an award to the whole of the union movement," said Houcine Abassi, General Secretary of the UGTT.

Formed in 2013, the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet brings together the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), along with the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) and Tunisian Order of Lawyers.

"The UGTT in Tunisia were the people who sustained the revolution and then as part of the National Dialogue Quartet mobilized and negotiated the country's democratic transition while avoiding the level of bloodshed suffered in other countries during the Arab Spring.

"Unions were the driving force behind the drafting of a Tunisian constitution which guaranteed fundamental principles such as the separation of powers, an independent judiciary, freedom of association, the right to organise and the right to strike.

"These rights, and the dialogue through which they were achieved, is what the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize is recognising.

"The irony will not be lost on us that many of those governments that choose to praise the winners of the peace prize are at the same time attempting to destroy and undermine social dialogue in their own countries as they close down democratic space," said Sharan Burrow.

Twenty-four hours after learning his organisation was sharing the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, Houcine Abassi, General Secretary of the UGTT, spoke at the ITUC General Council where he outlined how he hoped to use the opportunity that the prize offered unions.

"For some time we will be in the spotlight and we will try and use this to focus on the serious problems that are of concern to us at the moment, and are at the heart of ITUC priorities.

"Firstly, we have a serious concern for refugees and those fleeing countries.

"Secondly, in the wars in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and beyond, we need to find a humanitarian solution as a matter of urgency, and find a way to eliminate the causes of these conflicts.

"We must put an end to the delivery of weapons to barbarian militia where they have transformed entire countries into theatres of war - with the aim of halting democratisation.

"Thirdly, we need to condemn the laws adopted in Gulf countries, which limit freedoms and infringe workers' rights.

"I would like to thank all of the organisations of the ITUC and the solidarity that you have always shown, and I would like to express my appreciation to the Norwegian Nobel Committee for what they have done to recognise the role of unions in peace and stable democracies," said Houcine Abassi.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 328 national affiliates.

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