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Nobel Prize to Tunisian Quartet a Huge Win for Democracy and Rights

Brussels, 10 December 2015 (ITUC OnLine): Today, International Human Rights Day, the international trade union movement celebrates the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo to the Tunisian “Quartet”, which led the country to democracy and the adoption of a Constitution based on fundamental human rights.

Houcine Abassi, General Secretary of Tunisian national trade union centre UGTT and ITUC Vice-President, said, “Tunisia is an exception so far in the Arab Spring countries, but this doesn't mean that it may not be replicated in other countries.”

In accepting the award, quartet members stressed the vital role of dialogue in combatting terrorism and violence. The Nobel medal will be kept on display at the Bardo museum in Tunis, scene of a terrorist atrocity in March that cost the lives of 22 innocent people.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, “Our feelings of pride in no way make us forget our horror and grief at the horror of war and the wave of terrorist attacks we have witnessed in recent times. Solidarity, cooperation and partnership amongst nations are required to find solutions to the immediate challenges, as well as the underlying factors of inequality, exclusion and repression. Above all, the world needs to stand firm against the undermining of democracy and peace which is taking root in every region.”

In his speech accepting the award, Abassi stressed the need for dialogue between nations and cultures, in the framework of diversity, and peoples' rights to freedom, dignity and work. He said that the award was not just for the Quartet, but also in recognition of the victims during the Jasmin Revolution and of jihadist attacks, the women and youth of Tunisia, the political parties and the whole of Tunisian society.

“Governments in many countries are closing democratic space, weakening democracy and imposing authoritarianism. This has extremely dangerous consequences for the peoples of those countries, and for the trade unionists and human rights defenders who are being targeted. It is tragic that today, just as a national trade union leader from Tunisia is being acclaimed in Oslo, his counterpart in Korea, KCTU President Han Sang-gyun, was forced by a massive police operation to leave the sanctuary of a Buddhist temple and taken into detention. Han and hundreds of other unionists in Korea are being persecuted for standing up for the very same principles upheld by Houcine Abassi and other courageous leaders the world over,” said Burrow.

The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, established on the initiative of the UGTT, also includes the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers.

See interview with Houcine Abassi: <http://www.equaltimes.org/how-social-dialogue-led-to-the#.VmmFAeKhvqk>

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