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## **Iran: End the banning and harassment of independent trade unions**

An Amnesty International report released today, *Determined to Live in Dignity: Iranian Trade Unionists Struggle for Rights*, reveals the harsh treatment meted out to independent trade union activists who speak up for workers' rights under Iran's pervasive climate of repression.

"Independent trade unionists have been made to pay a heavy price by a government that has shown itself increasingly intolerant of dissent," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa. "The harassment and persecution they face smacks of a desperate government attempt to stave off social unrest that could arise from new hikes in the costs of fuel and power to which Iranians are now being exposed."

"The government seems determined to break existing unions while continuing to ban new, independent workers' bodies that have begun to emerge, in gross contempt for its international obligations as an ILO member, and for the labour rights of its own people," said Shane Enright, Amnesty's global trade union adviser.

Leading activists in the banned Tehran bus drivers' union were arrested in the crackdown following the 2009 presidential election, and up to 1,000 union members and their families were subjected to a brutal attack by security forces during a strike in 2006.

Mansour Ossanlu, president of the banned Tehran bus drivers' union, has been repeatedly arrested and by the time of his conditional release last week had been in prison for almost four years. Since organizing strikes in support of pay rises for bus drivers, he has been subjected to enforced disappearance, unfair trials and beatings, and frequently denied medical treatment. On the few occasions when he was allowed medical treatment, he was generally kept shackled to his bed.

"We greatly welcome Mansour Ossanlu's release but he should never have been jailed in the first place," said Shane Enright. "His release must be made unconditional and other trade unionists who are prisoners of conscience must be freed immediately. The Iranian authorities must end, once and for all, their persecution, harassment and imprisonment of trade unionists simply because of their efforts to uphold workers' rights enshrined in International Labour Organisation conventions."

Mansour Ossanlu's union is affiliated to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), one of the global unions campaigning with Amnesty International for Iranian workers' rights.

"The incredible mistreatment meted out to Mansour Ossanlu and his fellow members of the Tehran bus drivers union is a sign of how much some elements in the Iranian authorities fear them as a force for genuine change and reform," said David Cockroft, the ITF's general secretary. "His release is a positive sign but he and his colleagues must now be allowed to freely represent the interests of their members without fear of arrest or persecution."

Independent unions, like other independent organizations and activists, have come under increasingly fierce attack since the mass protests that followed Iran's 2009 presidential election.

The state-owned Haft Tapeh sugar cane processing company in Iran's south-western Khuzestan province was forced to address working conditions after a mass strike led its workers to set up an independent union in 2008. The new union's president Reza Rakshshan has been detained twice in the last two years, and five other leaders were tried and sentenced in 2009.

"The IUF draws continued inspiration from the bravery of Iranian union activists who are risking their lives and their freedom for the rights of all," said Peter Rossman of the International Union of Foodworkers, to which the Haft Tapeh union is affiliated.

Iran's teachers' association was formally banned in 2007 after strikes against low pay, but has continued its work in the face of hundreds of detentions, beatings and other ill-treatment of its members in detention, and even the execution of one member in 2010.

"The Iran Teachers' Trade Associations' members have told us that they will not be defeated by this extreme government intimidation, but that they need solidarity from ordinary teachers like them across the world in their struggle for rights," said Dominique Marlet from Educational International, the global education union federation.

Amnesty International, in partnership with the global unions and the International Trade Union Confederation, is launching a campaign to support Iranian trade unions in their struggle for basic human and labour rights, ahead of the second anniversary of the 2009 Iran presidential elections.