

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Iran: Amnesty International and international labour organisations welcome release of Mahmoud Salehi.

The ITUC, ITF and Amnesty international today welcomed the release from Sanandaj prison, in Iran's Kordestan Province, of independent labour activist Mahmoud Salehi, after one year of imprisonment. Salehi, one of the co-founders of the Bakery Workers Trade Union in Saqez, had been the object of strong international lobbying by the international trade union and human rights' organisations since 2007, when the ITUC, ITF and Amnesty International launched a series of joint demonstrations and protests in front of Iranian embassies around the world.

Salehi was originally sentenced to four years of imprisonment for having organised an independent workers rally on International Labour Day, in Saqez on 1 May 2004. His sentence was reduced on appeal to one year prison and three years suspended, which he finally started serving on 9 April 2007 in Saqez, before being transferred to a high security prison in Sanandaj, capital of Kordestan Province. His state of health severely deteriorated while in jail, after prison authorities repeatedly denied him proper medical care for acute kidney failure and other serious ailments.

An international Day of Action on 6 March 2008 had brought trade union and activists into the street in 35 countries, demonstrating for Salehi and President of the Tehran bus drivers' union (Sherkat-e Vahed), who remains in detention at Tehran's notorious Evin Prison. One week later, the authorities levelled new charges against Salehi, who had originally been due for release on 23 March. Observers believe the new charges were brought against him as a reaction to the Day of Action and in retaliation for solidarity messages which Salehi had managed to smuggle out of jail. Salehi was eventually released on Sunday 6 April, reportedly on bail, and has since returned to Saqez, where he was met by family and friends.

The ITUC, ITF and Amnesty International express their satisfaction at Salehi's release, but remind Iran's authorities that Mahmoud Ossenlu (or, Osanloo) and other unjustly imprisoned trade unionists must be freed and all other threats of imprisonment against independent trade unionists for their legitimate activities are lifted. The three organisations are currently investigating detention orders transmitted orally by Iranian security officials against at least two senior Sherkat-e Vahed leaders. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), which had recently intervened with the authorities in Tehran on behalf of the prisoners, is expected next May to examine a number of international trade union complaints lodged against the Iranian government for violations of the internationally-guaranteed right to form and join trade unions.

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