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Iran: Release Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi and help end legalised discrimination against independent trades unions

In support of the International Day of Action for Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi on 9 August 2007, Amnesty International joins voices with the ITUC and ITF in calling for the two men to be released immediately and for any charges that have been levelled against them in connection with their peaceful and legitimate trades union work to be dropped.

Mansour Ossanlu, head of the Union of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, and Mahmoud Salehi, Spokesperson for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions and former head of the Saqez Bakers' Union, are trades union leaders who have been detained on vaguely worded charge in order to halt their efforts to build strong trades unions capable of defending the human rights of workers against the discriminatory laws and practices that curtail workers' rights in Iran.

Securing freedom for Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi will help independent trades unions move beyond the discriminatory 'gozinesh', or selection, regulations that enable the Iranian authorities to decide who is able to form trades unions and seek employment in a range of sectors.

In 2003, the ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards reviewed the application of Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958) in Iran. The Workers' Representative called on the Committee of Experts to review the practice known as 'gozinesh', or selection. Gozinesh regulations empower the state authorities to select, on the basis of perceived ideological suitability, those individuals who may be employed in the public sector, hold a wide range of posts, such as lawyers or teachers, and create or join the boards of NGOs and Islamic Labour Councils, (Islamic Councils) which are the only labour organizations permitted in the workplace.

Islamic Councils are a form of collective organization provided for under the 2001 Procedure Code [on the] Manner of Establishment, Limits of Duties, Powers and Manner of Operation of Islamic Workers' Councils (the Procedure Code).

The Procedure Code sets out how workers in productive, industrial, agricultural, service and guild units that employ more than 50 individuals may establish unions, or Islamic Councils.

The functions, duties and powers of the Islamic Councils are set out in the Procedure Code. According to Article 1 of the Procedure Code, they are formed to 'propagate and spread Islamic culture and [to] defend the achievements of the Islamic Revolution'. They are more concerned with the furtherance of a religious and ideological programme, therefore, than with the promotion and protection of workers' rights.

Article 10 of the Procedure Code contains *gozinesh* criteria which impose discriminatory restrictions on who is eligible to be a member of the central committee of a given Islamic Council. Article 10c requires that applicants be of "good reputation and the disposition required for growth" relating to the council, and Article 10d, that they have completed a year's experience in the work of the council. However, Article 10a requires candidates to have practical engagement towards Islam and the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* [or Leadership by a religious jurisprudent] and the Constitution (Article 10a), and Article 10b requires that they have a record of being present and active in various fields of the Islamic Revolution.

The activities of Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi are testimony to the engagement of trades unionists in reaching beyond discriminatory practices, for the benefit of workers and for all of Iran, and above all, for the advancement of human rights in Iran.