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TRADE UNIONS - INTERNATIONAL MEETING CONFIRMS COMMITMENT TO TRADE UNIONISTS' HUMAN RIGHTS

Work with trade unions is at the cutting edge of our activities, said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International in a keynote speech at a meeting of Amnesty International trade union co-ordinators from around the world this month.

"Trade unionists are often in the front line of suffering human rights violations. Amnesty International works for them, and is keen to increase its work with them to promote and protect human rights," he said.

Worldwide anti-trade union legislation in recent years has eroded fundamental freedoms, among which are human rights Amnesty International seeks to uphold. Some governments have also resorted to harassment "disappearance" and killing of labour activists for their peaceful activities.

Amnesty International trade union delegates from 15 countries, including Guyana, India, Tunisia and Bangladesh, met in London on the weekend of 12-14 May to discuss how human rights workers and trade unionists could best cooperate.

Speakers including John Hendy (a barrister and vice-chair of the International Centre for Trade Union Rights), Bill Brett (Chair of the Workers' Group of the International Labour Organisation), and Stephen Faulkner (Education Officer of the Commonwealth Trades Union Congress) talked about the importance of building on existing links between Amnesty International and the trade union movement worldwide.

Delegates concluded that Amnesty International and unions should share and popularise their respective expertise, continue to cooperate on running effective campaigns, and help break down the "false barriers" between formal trade union structures and non-governmental organisations.

Amnesty International currently works closely with trade unions in over 20 countries, as well as with delegates attending the International Labour Conference. On 1 May every year Amnesty International launches a campaigning action for trade unionists suffering human rights violations. This year's action focused on trade unionists in China, Nigeria, Indonesia, Egypt and Colombia. Other recent actions include appeals issued on behalf of hundreds of trade unionists detained under state of siege legislation in Bolivia from the end of April.

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