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Iran: Support the Global Trade Union Action Day for imprisoned Iranian trade unionists

Amnesty International joins The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in calling for the immediate and unconditional release from prison of trade union leaders Mansour Ossanlu, President of the Tehran Bus Workers' Union, and Mahmoud Salehi, the spokesperson for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions. Both are prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International supports the ITF's and ITUC's the Global Action Day on Thursday 6 March in solidarity with both trade union leaders.

Both men are in prison for taking part in the creation of independent trade unions and for their peaceful promotion of the right of workers to form such unions. The October 2007 confirmation of a five-year prison sentence against Mansour Ossanlu, for 'acts against national security' and 'propaganda against the system' exemplify how the Iranian judiciary uses vaguely worded, security-related laws to repress dissent and imprison human rights defenders such as Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi.

Mansour Ossanlu is the elected leader of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, a trade union founded three years ago, which was reportedly founded in 1979 but only resumed activities in 2004 after a 25-year ban. It is still not legally recognised by the current authorities. Its members have been harassed and its activities restricted. As a result of his peaceful trade union and human rights work Mansour Ossanlu has been attacked, beaten, and repeatedly arrested. He is now serving a five-year prison sentence in Evin Prison, Tehran, following an unfair trial. Despite efforts to secure adequate medical care, he remains in danger of losing his sight in one eye due to a previous beating.

Mahmoud Salehi, a former leader of the Saez Bakers' Union, is one of a number of Kurdish trade unionists to have been imprisoned by the Iranian authorities for the pursuit of their legitimate trade union activities. In March 2007, his conviction and sentence to three years' imprisonment for 'acts against national security' in connection with a peaceful May Day rally in 2004 was reduced to one year. Mahmoud Salehi, who is serving his sentence in Kordestan province, has only one kidney and requires regular specialist treatment, which has not always been provided by the prison authorities.

The ITUC, ITF and AI remain concerned at continued violations against trade unionists in Iran. Colleagues of both men have faced harassment and arbitrary arrest, including in connection with the August 2007 Global Action Day in support of both men, while others, including Reza Dehghan, member of the Painters' Union (*Sindika-ye Naqqash*), have faced arrest. In November 2007, workers representatives of a sugar factory in southern Iran were arrested and later released.

on bail, in connection with industrial action. In January 2008, Ali Reza Hashemi, the Secretary General of the Teachers' Association, had his three-year prison sentence confirmed by the Appeal Court, in connection with peaceful demonstrations organised by teachers in 2007 demanding better pay and conditions. He is not believed to be currently detained.

Trade union rights are restricted in Iran. Government 'selection', or *gozinesh* panels can reject those who wish to stand for trade union bodies, in effect enabling the authorities to bar those of whom they do not approve. Trade union bodies have no independent, national representation capable of raising or defending labour concerns. In its 2008 report on states' implementation of labour-related treaties, the International Labour Organization, of which Iran is a member, expressed concern over gender discrimination in access to jobs, the Iranian authorities' long-standing failure to amend discriminatory regulations - which, among other things, allow a husband to prevent his wife from taking employment, limit women's access to employment in the judiciary.

Freedom for Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi will help independent trades unions move beyond discriminatory practices such as *gozinesh* and will contribute to Iranian human rights defenders' efforts towards having Iran uphold international human rights standards.

The parliamentary election in Iran in the coming weeks represents an opportunity for a review of the labour laws and to bring Iran's law and practice into conformity with the core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation.

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