



IRAN: continued harassment of trade-unionists ahead of International Labour Day

Paris-Geneva, April 30, 2015 - On the eve of the International Labour Day 2015, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) and the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI) deplore the ongoing harassment of trade-unionists in Iran.

Over the past two days, several leading independent unionists have been arrested in Iran: Messrs. **Mahmood Salehi**, founding member of Bakers Association in the City of Saqqez and **Osman Esmaili**, spokesperson of the Committee for Defending Imprisoned Labour Activists in Mahabad, were both arrested on April 28; Mr. **Pedram Nasrollahi**, member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations, was detained in Sanandaj on April 29; and Messrs. **Ebrahim Madadi** and **Davood Razavi**, respectively deputy president and Board member of the Syndicate of the United Bus Company of Tehran and Suburbs (known as 'Sherkat Vahed'), were arrested in Tehran early in the morning on April 29. Messrs. Madadi and Razavi are believed to be in detention in Ward 209 of Evin prison, which is under the administration of the Ministry of Intelligence¹.

On the other hand, Mr. Jafar Azimzadeh, secretary of Board of Directors of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence on 29 April. He was released after several hours of questioning about "the joint resolution of independent unions for May 1" and a big rally the FUIW organised in front the Parliament on 28 April. During the rally, which several hundred retired teachers also joined, the participants had echoed the resolution's demands, and finally formally submitted it to the Parliament after it was read out by one of the organisers.

These arrests came in the wake of public statements issued by a number of independent unions this past week, in which they outlined their grievances and demands. In the 17-point "joint resolution of independent workers' groups and organisations for May 1, 2015", which seven groups² signed, the unions called on the government to:

- raise the government-set minimum wage for the current year by almost four times to cover the costs of living and to match the poverty line;
- lift restrictions on forming independent workers' organisations;
- allow unconditional freedom of assembly, expression and opinion, especially for parties and the press, including for the organisation of strikes and protests ;
- provide job security through full coverage of the Labour Code for all workers;
- raise the safety standards employers must provide for workers;
- abolish discriminatory laws against women and establish full equality of men and women;

1 Messrs. Madadi, Razavi, Salehi, and Nasrollahi have been detained or served prison terms in previous years and been addressed in Observatory press releases and Urgent Appeals, e.g. Urgent Appeal of December 21, 2007, and Press Release of December 2, 2011, UA of July 6, 2012

2 These are: Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), Kermanshah Electrical and Metal Workers Association, Syndicate of Workers of Haft-Tappeh Cane Sugar Company, Alborz Province Painters and Decorators Union, Defenders of Workers Rights Centre, Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Labour Unions (CPELU), and Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations (CCHFOW). The largest independent union, Syndicate of Workers of the United Bus Company of Tehran and Suburbs, with a reported membership of half of the company's workforce, i.e. nearly 10,000, issued a separate resolution, which largely concentrated on economic and the Syndicate's specific issues.

- abolish the death penalty and flogging;
- abolish all the laws discriminating against women;
- abolish child labour;
- release all political prisoners, and imprisoned workers and stop judicial prosecutions against them;
- designate May 1 as a public holiday and lift all restrictions on its celebration.

While the latest arrests are believed to be aimed at preventing the free and independent celebration of May 1, independent unionists and unions have already been facing great pressure over the past year, largely because of the growing protests and strikes at different factories and plants across the country. By some accounts, there have been more than 360 strikes, demonstrations and other forms of protest organised in the past 12 months against layoffs and demanding timely payment of wages, wage increases, and improvements in contracts and working conditions.

The authorities have been frequently summoning and threatening a number of labour activists over the past few months, while several others have been arrested. Some of them have been released after a month or two in detention and are likely to be tried soon. In such cases, unionists are most often charged with offences such as acting against national security, spreading propaganda against the State, insulting the Leader etc.

As of April 30, 2015, at least 25 unionists were serving prisons terms after grossly unfair trials, or were otherwise detained in Evin prison (Tehran), Rajaishahr prison (near Karaj), Mahabad prison, and Sanandaj prison (western Iran) awaiting trial.

Unionists in detention, for unclear reasons, in addition to the five individuals detained on April 28 and 29, include:

- six members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations (CCHFWO) arrested in the western city of Sanandaj in March and April: **Reza Amjadi** (arrested April 25), **Hamed Mahmoodnejad** (arrested April 18), **Aram Zandi** and **Fuad Zandi** (both arrested April 14), **Nezam Sadeghi** (arrested April 8), and **Kurosh Bakhshandeh** (arrested March 7).
- In addition, Mr. **Saeed Shirzad**, another labour and child rights activist, was arrested in the North-Western city of Tabriz on June 2, 2014 and spent two months in solitary confinement. He has been transferred to Rajaishahr prison, but has not been tried yet.

There are at least 13 unionists who have been convicted of crimes related to their work defending labour rights and are currently serving prison terms³, including:

- Mr. **Reza Shahabi Zakaria**, Treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of United Bus Company of Tehran (serving a 6 year prison sentence);
- Messrs. **Shahrokh Zamani** and **Mohammad Jarrahi**, two members of CPELU and founding members of the Painters and Decorators Union (serving 11.5 years and 5 years imprisonment respectively);
- Messrs. **Yousef Ab-Kharabat**, **Vahed Seyedeh**, and **Ribvar Abdollahi**, members of the CCHFWO (serving 2 years, 2 years and 1 year respectively);
- Messrs. **Mahmood Bagheri** and **Abdolreza Ghabari**, two members of the TAI (sentenced to 4.5 years and 15 years respectively).
- Mr. **Alireza Hashemi**, secretary-general of Iranian Teachers Organisation, was convicted in 2010 to 5 years in prison on charges of "acting against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the State," but he was never summoned to prison to serve his sentence. On April 19, 2015, Mr. Hashemi was finally arrested in Tehran in order to serve his prison sentence. The authorities apparently decided to implement his sentence in the wake of massive demonstrations of teachers demanding a pay rise in front of the Parliament in the capital Tehran as well as outside the Education Departments of numerous cities in late March 2015.

3 For more information and cases of other unionists, see the Observatory Urgent Appeal of January 23, 2015

- Ms. **Manijeh Sadeghi**, women's rights, child rights, and labour activist, was arrested in Sanandaj on 30 March to serve a 91-day prison sentence.
- Mr. **Behnam (Assad) Ebrahimzadeh**, a member of the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Labour Unions (CPELU) and a child rights activist, is serving a five-year prison sentence since June 2010⁴.
- Mr. **Rassoul Bodaghi**, Board member of Teachers Association of Iran (TAI), is serving a 6-year prison sentence in Rajaishahr prison,
- Mr. **Mehdi Farahi-Shandiz**, a member of the CPELU and of the TAI, was serving a three-year prison sentence which he completed in late October 2014, but the authorities refused to release him.

Of the above imprisoned unionists, some have been facing further judicial harassment while in prison:

- Mr. **Behnam (Assad) Ebrahimzadeh** is suffering from neck and back problems and suffered internal bleeding in late March. Officials of Rajaishahr prison have transferred him to a prison ward for common criminals, contrary to the provisions of the Prison Code. In December 2014, Mr. Ebrahimzadeh was notified that he faced an additional 9 years and 4.5 months in prison for charges including contacts with UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed, and contacts with an opposition group abroad, the latter of which he has denied in absolute terms.
- Mr. **Rassoul Bodaghi** is slated to complete his prison sentence and be released in about three months. He was summoned by a judge on April 25 and April 26, where he was informed of new complaints filed against him by the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Intelligence. He was warned that those complaints could be retracted 'if he announced in an interview his withdrawal from activities of teachers. On April 26, Mr. Bodaghi was transferred from his cell to an unknown location and his whereabouts were still unknown as of April 30.
- Mr. **Mehdi Farahi-Shandiz** was not released when his prison sentence was completed in late October 2014. On January 3, 2015 he was tried for allegedly "insulting the Leader" and was sentenced to another prison sentence of three years.

Other unionists, who have been sentenced to prison terms or other punishments for their work defending labour rights, include:

- Messrs **Yadollah Samadi** and **Eghbal Shabani**, members of CCHFOW and Board members of Bakers Association of Sanandaj and Suburbs, were sentenced to 30 lashes in late March, and a five-month prison sentence against them was suspended for five years. Another CCHFOW member, Mr. **Mehrdad Amin-Vaziri**, was said to have been sentenced to imprisonment of 5 years and 91 days. In March 2015, Mr. **Jafar Azimzadeh**, secretary of the Board of Directors of the Free Union of Iranian Workers, was sentenced to six years imprisonment and a two year ban on all kinds of activities, on charges of "acting against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the State." Mr. **Jamil Mohammadi**, another member of the same Union, was sentenced to three years and six months imprisonment and a fine on charges of "acting against national security". They are waiting for the outcome of their appeals.
- Mr. **Khaled Hosseini**, member of CCHFOW, and two senior members of the TAI, Messrs. **Ali-Akbar Baghani**, and **Mahmood Beheshti-Langaroudi**, have been sentenced to prison terms and are awaiting the outcome of their appeals.
- Prison sentences have also been upheld against several members of the CCHFOW, who are at risk of arrest: Messrs. **Hassan Rassoulnejad** (sentenced to 1 year), **Jamal Minashiri** and **Hadi Tanoumand** (sentenced to 3.5 years each), **Ghassem Mostafapour**, **Ebrahim Mostafapour** and **Mohammad Karimi** (sentenced to 2 years each).

⁴ For more information and cases of other unionists, see the Observatory Urgent Appeal of January 23, 2015, and the Observatory Press Release of April 30, 2014.

The Observatory and LDDHI call upon the Iranian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally all the above-mentioned unionists, as their detentions are arbitrary and appear only aimed at sanctioning their legitimate human rights activities. The Observatory and LDDHI also call on the Iranian authorities to put an end to any kind of harassment - including at the judicial level – against the above-mentioned unionists and any other human rights defenders in Iran.

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