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His Excellency Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
`Abdin Palace
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Via fax: +202-390-1998

HTUR/FW

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Real Estate Taxes Authority (RETA) workers' attempts at establishing an independent union thwarted

Dear Mr. President,

The ITUC, which represents 168 million workers through its 311 affiliated organisations in 155 countries and territories, writes to you to protest at the difficulties the workers of the RETA have been experiencing while attempting to establish a union to defend their rights.

The RETA employs some 55,000 workers throughout the whole country. In view of difficulties in their trade union representation, previously by the General Union for Banks, Insurance and Finance Section Employees (GUBIFSE), they freely and directly elected a General Strike Committee (GSC).

As has been pointed out on several occasions by the ITUC, Egyptian legislation imposes undue restrictions on the establishment of independent trade unions. In this case, RETA workers quickly started suffering harassment and other forms of pressure. However, the GSC was able to gain broad support from the workers. It won attention for the inequality between the workers in governorates and their counterparts in the main RETA in Cairo. It also managed to mobilise RETA workers for a general strike and a sit-in action, which were conducted from 3-14 December last year. These actions led to direct negotiations with the Minister of Finance, and a number of workers' demands were met. This encouraged the RETA workers to mandate the GSC to continue its negotiations with the Minister, as well as to start working on the establishment of an independent union.

The workers' actions were characterised by good democratic practice, as was demonstrated by their ability to manage the protests, the democratic selection of their representatives, and the participation of women, also in their leadership structures.

However, the RETA workers' union delegates started facing pressure and intimidation by management and its security officers. Union official **Khaled Mubarak**, from Aswan Governorate, was transferred to the Administrative Prosecution Dpt. because he had collected signatures for the union. **Abdul Nasser Hussein** was summoned by the State Security of Beni Suef Governorate for interrogation on his union activities. In Suhag Governorate, **Mohamed Khalaf** was prevented from collecting signatures, and his colleague **Kamal Abu Eita** suffered several administrative sanctions because of his leading role in the GSC. All of these facts constitute violations of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 and 98, which have both been ratified by your country.

Mr. President, we urge you to remove all legislative restrictions imposed on the establishment of independent trade unions in Egypt, all the more since the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has repeatedly, up till its most recent report in June 2008, stated that it *"recalls that for several years its comments have been referring to the discrepancies between the Convention [87] and the national legislation - i.e. the Trade Union Act No. 35 of 1976, as amended by Act No. 12 of 1995, and the Labour Code No. 12 of 2003 - on the following points: [...] the institutionalization of a single trade union system, and [...] the control granted by law to higher level trade union organisations [...] over the nomination and election procedures to the executive committees of trade unions [...]"*.

We also urge you to take appropriate action in order to ensure the RETA workers' delegates can continue their work in defending the interests of the colleagues they legitimately represent, without fear of reprisals of any kind.

Yours sincerely,


General Secretary