

**Letter from Independent Trade Unions of Egypt
to the Director General of the ILO**

To: Mr. Gilbert F. Hougbo

ILO Director-General

The independent trade union movement in Egypt cherishes its relationship and strong and continuous cooperation with the ILO not only for its important and effective role in defending freedoms of association and the right of workers to organize in independent organizations that expresses their interests and defends their rights via social dialogue and voluntary collective bargaining, but also for the principles, values and standards it established since its foundation in 1919 .The Constitution of the ILO states that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.” ILO Declaration of Philadelphia of 1949 states that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity”.

In its quest to achieve social justice, The ILO strengthened the capabilities of peoples and countries to achieve independence from colonization and all forms of injustice and discrimination. We would like to highlight in this regard the role the ILO played in combating the apartheid regime in south Africa, and its eagerness to engage national liberation movement in the International Labour Conference (ILC) especially the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), as well as the resolution concerning the implications of Israeli settlements in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories in connection with the situation of Arab workers, adopted by the ILC at its 66th Session (1980). That Resolution required the Director General to submit annual reports about the conditions of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories pursuant to the provisions of that resolution .

Your Excellency Mr. Director General

As independent trade unions, we express our willingness and desire to more cooperation with the ILO to achieve the objectives it was established for. However, we have to express our astonishment and sorrow regarding your last unbalanced statement on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory issued on the 27th of October 2023 . Unfortunately, that statement was not based on the reports of the ILO regarding the situation of Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories, in particular your report to the 111th session of the ILC in 2023. In the preface of that report, you expressed your sorrow that hope is lost as “the situation of workers under occupation remains dire,” and

that“ conflict, violence and tension continue to pervade the Palestinian world of work and have become an integral part of workers’ lives. Their rights are severely restricted by settlement expansion. The occupation is stifling the labour market, which in turn is not delivering what it could or should. Labour market outcomes as a whole remain poor. Unemployment persists at high levels and Palestinian livelihoods are at risk. Women and young jobseekers are particularly disadvantaged. Nowhere, however, is the situation as dismal as in Gaza. Workers in the blockaded enclave are trapped in poverty, with few prospects for jobs, let alone opportunities for decent work.” As you pointed out in several parts of the first chapter of your Report, “Palestinian workers continue to suffer under an entrenched and expanding occupation, now 55 years old. Movement of people and goods remains restricted, workers’ rights are still being infringed and job creation continues to be constrained. There is a continuing lack of livelihood opportunities. High unemployment and poverty persist. Currently, 2.1 million, or almost 40 per cent of Palestinians, are in need of humanitarian assistance.” As you noted, “Modern Palestinian history is defined by the Israeli occupation. While Gaza remains blockaded by land, air and sea, the West Bank has become ever more spatially fragmented. Movement of goods and people, including workers, is constrained by Israel through physical obstacles (such as roadblocks, gates and checkpoints) and administrative ones .Jerusalem has been cut off from the West Bank by the Separation Barrier. Area C, which remains out of bounds for most Palestinians and accounts for most of the land foreseen for a future Palestinian state, is now home to more Israeli settlers than Palestinians. A restrictive and discriminatory planning regime hampers any footprint of Palestinians in Area C. One third is designated as closed military zones (firing zones). Demolitions of Palestinian property, not only in Area C, but also in East Jerusalem, continue unabated, as do evictions of Palestinians from their land. The year 2022 saw the highest number of demolitions ever recorded ”.

The statement ignores that what is going on now in Gaza, and Palestine in general, is a crime of genocide that Israeli occupation forces is committing against the Palestinian people. It also ignores the responsibility of occupation, its aggressive and disgraceful practices for decades against the Palestinian people which are the real reasons that drive this people to struggle for its right to self-determination, and the building of its sovereign and independent state on its own land, which are the most basic rights stipulated in the International Bill of Rights. What happened on the 7th of October didn’t happen in a vacuum, as pointed out by the UN Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres, in his recent speech before the Security Council.

Your Excellency ,

ILC Resolution concerning trade union rights and their relation to civil liberties adopted in 1970 stated that war, colonial hegemony ,new colonialism and racial discrimination are main obstacles before the well-being of workers and severe impediments against the work of the ILO. The ILC also issued two important decisions that we call upon you to recall :

- ILC Resolution concerning the policy of discrimination, racism and Violation of Trade Union Freedoms and Rights practiced by the Israeli Authorities in Palestine

and in the Other Occupied Arab Territories (1974): That Resolution referred to racial discrimination faced by indigenous people in South Africa, Guinea Bissao, and other African countries subjected to colonial regimes or foreign domination as the conditions of life and work of people in those places were similar to the conditions of Arab workers under Israeli occupation. That Resolution condemned the policy of racial discrimination, violation of freedom of association and infringement upon basic human freedoms applied by Israeli authorities against Arab peoples.

- ILC Resolution concerning the Implications of Israeli Settlements in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories in Connection with the Situation of Arab Workers :(1980) That Resolution demanded Israel to immediately put an end to the establishment of settlements in Palestine and other Occupied Arab territories , including Jerusalem, and dismantling of existing settlements. It called upon all countries not to provide Israel with any assistance that it could particularly use for settlements in occupied Arab territories .

Ambiguous stances that equalize between the victim and the perpetrator actually endanger the right of the Palestinian people to seek freedom from occupation with all possible means, just like all peoples that struggled for liberation and independence. People's resistance in Europe against Nazism and Facism was one clear example of the legitimate right to resist. International silence and neglect of the implementation of international legal resolutions about Palestine, and disregard of all criminal practices of the occupation, are nothing but an alignment with occupying forces that give them more political support and assurance to continue the project of obliterating and displacing the Palestinian people .

Mr. Director-General

Admitting the savage practices of the Israeli occupation and its continuous aggressions against the Palestinian people for decades, the undersigned Egyptian independent trade unions are completely convinced that justice and peace in Palestine and the Arab region may not be achieved in the absence of a clear and decisive international stance against the occupation and its practices... a stance that supports the rights of the Palestinian people to freedom and self-determination including having its own independent state on the land of Palestine. So, we hope that you – as you lead the ILO – correct the stances of the organization and affirm the following :

-Termination of the war of genocide against Gaza and the people of Palestine, and opening safe corridors for humanitarian aid to enter immediately.

-Condemnation of occupation, settlements, apartheid and oppression policies and practices against the Palestinian people by Israeli occupation, and acknowledgement of its legitimate rights.

-Stopping the establishment of illegal Israeli settlements, dismantling of existing settlements, dismantling of the illegal Separation Barrier and releasing of prisoners.

-Stopping the aggressive war against Lebanon and Syria, and withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Lebanese and Syrian territories.

Our knowledge of your have deep commitment to values of justice, peace and solidarity among peoples, and social dialogue, and your abidance by the principles and the Constitution of the ILO, makes us confident that you will have a quick and positive intervention against the war of obliteration and displacement against the Palestinian people, and the deterioration of the situation in the region as a whole. We also reaffirm our willingness to cooperate with you to achieve these goals.

With all due respect

The Signatories:

- Trade Union of Workers in the Federation of Unions of Workers in the Ambulance Authority
- The Union of Workers in Telecom Egypt (WE)
- The Union of Workers in Leoni Wiring Systems
- The Union of Workers in Mondelez Egypt
- The Trade Union Committee for Damietta Fishers
- The Professional Trade Union Committee of fishermen in Gammaleyya
- The Professional Trade Union Committee of fishermen in Ras El Bar and Ezbet el Borg
- The Professional Union of Tourism Professionals in Cairo
- The Professional Union of Tourism Professionals in Giza
- The Union of Workers in External Trading and Commercial Agreements in the Ministry of Trade and Industry
- The Trade Union Committee of Workers in the Adult Education Authority
- The Independent Union of Architecture Workers in Mahalla
- The Union of Small Farmers in Menia
- The Union of Workers in the Hostels of Al-Azhar University
- Trade Union Committee of Workers in Suez Canal Clubs
- The Union of Workers in Real Estate Taxation in the Governorate of Kafr El-Shiekh
- The Union of Workers in Real Estate Taxation in the Governorate of Ismailia
- The Occupational Union for Drivers' Services in Qalyobeya
- The Independent Union of Workers in Quality Authority
- The Professional Union of Workers in Local Development Department in Menouf
- The Independent Union of Workers at Ain Shams Faculty of Law
- The Committee for Defending Trade Union Freedoms and Labor Rights
- The Permanent Conference for Working Women
- The Center for Trade Union & Workers' Services (CTUWS)