



To the Turkish Embassy in Sweden

2010-02-26

Global Solidarity Action Day with Turkish workers

Mrs. Ambassador,

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO-Sweden) and The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO-Sweden) are today on 26 February 2010, which is declared a Global Day of Action in solidarity with Turkish workers, delivering this letter in solidarity with our Turkish Trade Union colleagues, who have seen their trade union rights being violated all too often in the course of the past year.

The case which is currently attracting attention in Turkey and abroad is the case of the workers of TEKEL, the former state tobacco and alcohol monopoly, which was recently privatized. The government decided to close down all the warehouses owned by TEKEL, which meant the loss of 12.000 jobs. Workers, their family members and supporters have been demonstrating in near-freezing temperatures in protest against this decision since December last year. The protest began in front of the headquarters of the AKP, but the police cleared the area on 16 December and forced the demonstrators to a nearby park. The following day, police put up barricades around the park and then used water hoses and tear gas against the demonstrators. Police violence escalated and clubs were used against the demonstrators, many of whom had to be hospitalized. Mustafa Türkel, president of Tekgıda-Is, which represents these workers and is affiliated to ITUC-affiliated national union centre Türk-Is as well as the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco & Allied Workers' Association (IUF), and general secretary of Türk-Is, was arrested, but then released later that evening.

The police violence caused an outcry in the Turkish Parliament, but the government continues to refuse to accede to the workers' demand that they be given alternative employment with their full employee benefits, as the law on privatization provides. The workers have been continuing their actions to date, in front of the Türk-İs offices, for more than 70 days now.

After meetings, on 11 February 2010, between the Chairman of The Turkish Grand National Assembly, Mr. Mehmet Şahin, and The Presidents of national union centre's TÜRK-İŞ, DİSK, KAMU-SEN and KESK on the one hand, and between Prime Minister Erdoğan and Türk-İs President Mustafa Kumlu on the other, the unions denounced the authorities' intransigence towards the workers' demands, and called on them to try to reach a negotiated solution to the problem. To date, their appeal has not been honored; on the contrary, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that his government will not tolerate further actions after the end of February.

Last year has been a very bad year for trade union rights in general in Turkey. The Brussels-based International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has written or co-signed protest letters to the government on no less than nine occasions, without ever receiving a reply. The violations of trade union rights which gave rise to these letters ranged from a plea to the authorities to refrain from violent repression of peaceful May Day demonstrations, over the massive arrests of trade union members and leaders, of which dozens were made to stand trial on charges of supporting terrorist organizations, and the attempted murder of Süleyman Celebi, President of the ITUC-affiliated national union centre Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (DISK), to the ill-treatment of and lack of medical care for detained trade unionists. Furthermore, the ITUC, together with over a dozen representatives from trade unions and Global Union Federations from eight different European countries, a Human Rights officer of the delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, and representatives of Lawyers Without Frontiers and Protection International, joined an international observers' delegation which attended the trial which was held in Izmir in November last year against 31 members and leaders of national public sector union KESK, which is also an ITUC affiliate.

After this trial, the ITUC denounced that "2009 showed an intensified crackdown on the unions by the government. After the KESK arrests in May, there was the arrest and subsequent ill-treatment of Murad Akincilar, a Turkish national working for the Swiss union UNIA, and the assassination attempt on DISK President Süleyman Celebi. Tüm-Bel Sen representative Metin Findik is still in prison after more than five months, without being informed of any charges against him. On 7 December, 13 leaders of one of DISK's most important affiliates, Nakliyat-İs, were arrested (in the KESK case, most important affiliate Egitim Sen is being targeted). There is a true pattern in all of these cases: upon being arrested, all unionists are being treated in a rough manner, or even mistreated; the authorities invoke some legal clause in order to keep the cases "under secrecy", meaning that the defense lawyers can initially not look into their clients' files – even for more than a month, as in the KESK case. And the accusations are all related to some form of "terrorist activity"."


In its most recent Progress Report in the framework of the Turkish EU accession negotiations, dated 14 October 2009, the European Commission stated that *"Full trade union rights have not yet been established in Turkey. The current legal framework is not in line with EU standards and ILO Conventions, in particular as regards the right to organize, the right to strike and the right to bargain collectively, for both the private and public sectors. The ILO Committee of experts called upon Turkey to adopt these reforms and suggested the organization of a high-level bipartite mission to assist the government."* The Swedish trade Union Confederation (LO-Sweden) and The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO-Sweden) strongly states that the establishment of full trade union rights in Turkey and a corresponding legal framework are a prerequisite for the Turkish EU accession.

The deterioration of trade union rights in Turkey is a cause of serious concern for the international trade union movement. International trade union objectives are clear and remain the same. We are calling for full democratic rights for all Turkish citizens, including freedom of association; a halt to all violent repression; the release of all imprisoned trade unionists; and respect for core labour standards and workers' rights, including the TEKEL workers'.

Yours sincerely,



Sture Nordh
President TCO-Sweden



Wanja Lundby-Wedin
President LO-Sweden