

Statement

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)

Swedish Transport Workers' Union

Swedish Municipal Workers' Union

IF Metall

The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO)

Stop the persecution, harassment and torture of Iranian trade union activists

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Swedish Transport Workers' Union have over the recent years followed closely the Iranian workers' struggle for the creation of free and independent trade union organisations and their protests against unpaid wages and against the infringement of fundamental trade union and human rights in Iran. On several occasions, we have expressed criticism and condemned the Iranian rulers regarding the persecution, harassment, imprisonment and torture of trade union activists.

Every protest and strike in Iran are considered to be a threat and conspiracy against national security. They are described as incitement to rebellion and threat to public order and are responded to with brutal violence and questionable trials leading to long imprisonments.

Recently we have been informed about night-time arrests and search of the homes of labour activists at the Sugar Mill Haft Tape and the steelworks "National Steel Industrial Group" in the city of Ahwaz. Moreover, it has come to our knowledge that these labour activists were subjected to brutal torture while in custody.

The arrests and torture of sugarcane workers *Esmail Bakhshi* and *Ali Nejati* as well as student *Sepideh Ghalian* have aroused large protests in Iran and internationally. It should be observed that both the *sugarcane activist Esmail Bakhshi* and *Sepideh Ghalian*, after their temporary release, have publicly told about the brutal torture they had been subjected to and demanded to know who should be held responsible for this brutal treatment they have been victims of. On 20 January both *Esmail Bakhshi* and *Sepideh Ghalian* were arrested again and taken to an unknown prison.

It should be observed that the workers' protests concerned, inter alia, numerous months of unpaid wages for performed work, corruption and privatisation of the factories.

The wave of attacks on and arrests of workers' trade union leaders did not end with the arrests of the steel and sugarcane workers, but it continues. On January 29, *Jafar Ezimzadeh*, leader, and *Parvin Mohammadi*, vice-president of the Iranian Free Workers' Trade Union, were arrested.

We ask ourselves whether it is not every government's duty and responsibility to support and respond to the legitimate demands of these workers?

Is it not the responsibility of each country's judicial authorities to accept lodged complaints and to bring those responsible to justice and to ensure that the neglected rights of citizens and workers are respected?

We find that the judicial authorities in Iran do not seem to apply their basic legal obligations, but punish, imprison and torture the protesting workers!

We protest against and condemn these treatments of the free and independent trade union activists, and we believe that the authorities' actions are a violation of the fundamental and recognised international conventions, inter alia the ILO conventions, that Iran is obliged to implement and respect.

In the light of the above, we demand an immediate end to this action and this treatment of the legitimate demands of the workers, and we urge the authorities to let the workers' complaints be dealt with in a fair and public trial in the presence of their defense lawyers.

We will, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization ILO and the International Trade Union Confederation ITUC, take the necessary steps to ensure that the Iranian workers' trade union and human rights are respected and guaranteed.

We demand:

- unconditional and immediate release of all trade union prisoners, including *Esmail Bakhshi, Ali Nejati, Jafar Azimzadeh, Parvin Mohammadi and Sepideh Ghalian*
- a stop to continued harassment and torture of trade union activists
- an end to claiming that workers' protests are a threat to the country's security
- that the free and independent trade union organisations should be recognised as workers' legal and legitimate representatives.

Stockholm, 6 February 2019