



January 7, 2005

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H.E. Seyed Mohammad Khatami
President
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress I wish to express our solidarity with the 350 striking workers at the Kurdistan Textile Factory, in Iran's Sanandaj City, Kurdistan Province.

The strike, which started on 22 December 2004, is the latest in a number of strikes during the last two months. The current strike is to protest against the sacking of long-term employees, who are being replaced with temporary workers, not protected by the labour legislation. Last year 175 workers were dismissed under such circumstances. The striking workers are demanding better severance pay for the dismissed senior workers or their reinstatement, an end to temporary contracts, better working conditions and improved occupational health and safety for the factory's workers.

The international body to which the CLC is affiliated, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), has already protested last November on behalf of the workers in Sanandaj and against the exclusion of temporary contract workers from labour legislation protection. Security forces had at the time surrounded the factory. The CLC and the ICFTU fear that similar government action may now be taken in order to crush the strike.

According to our and the ICFTU's Iranian sources, workers at Kurdistan Textile have elected a Council of Workers to defend their rights, but security forces and the employer are already putting pressure on them to end the strike. The Council's Chairperson, Mr. Shis Amani, has been questioned and threatened several times. Our sources believe that only the workers' support and solidarity have thus far prevented his detention.

Several other Council members, including Messrs. Hadi Zarei, Iqbal Moradi, Hassan Shariati, Farshid Beheshti Zad and Ahmad Fatehi have also been threatened. The ICFTU said it was concerned that a commission created by the Department of Labour and other government agencies to deal with the strike is threatening to expel workers from the factory, instead of trying to facilitate negotiation between the parties.

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In a letter sent yesterday to the Sanandaj Workers' Council, ICFTU General Secretary, Guy Ryder assured the striking workers of the international trade union movement's full solidarity and vowed to monitor the situation closely, especially if the situation should escalate and violence be used against striking workers.

The ICFTU said it was also closely monitoring other cases involving trade union rights in Iran. On 29 December, the ICFTU had protested to Tehran's government about the resumption of a trial against seven independent union activists in the City of Saqez. They had been arrested as they were celebrating international Labour Day on 1st May 2004, two days after meeting with an ICFTU delegation visiting the country. In his most recent letter to President Mohamat Khatami, Guy Ryder demanded that the charges in this case be dropped, or that entry visas be granted to an ICFTU international observers' team, which the authorities have refused since the trial initially started, in September last year.

Finally, Mr. President, you must be aware that workers in the Kurdistan Textile Factory are being supported by other colleagues in Sanandaj and the city residents, as well as by the international trade union movement. These workers are being deprived of the right to form independent and democratic labour organizations contrary to the International Labour Organizations' (ILO) conventions. We urge you to intervene on their behalf and guarantee their trade union rights.

Yours sincerely,



Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

cc. CLC Officers
CLC Executive Committee
The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour
The Honourable Aileen Carroll, Minister for International Cooperation
ICFTU
Embassy of Iran in Canada
Canadian Embassy in Iran

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