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## **June 6, 2012 protest outside the ILO Conference**

Five French Trade Union federations, CGT, CFDT, FSU, Solidaires and UNSA organized a demonstration outside the headquarters of the International Labour Organization, ILO, on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, on the occasion of the 101st session of the International Labour Conference - taking place in Geneva from May 30 to June 15th, 2012. Trade unions from other countries including Switzerland, Senegal, Egypt, Algeria, amongst others, also supported this call and spoke at the event. Their demands included: The release of imprisoned trade unionists; the right to form independent trade unions; a presence at the ILO by the real organizations of the workers of Iran that truly represent their interests and not of alleged "workers' representatives" who are actually accomplices of the Iranian regime. Messages from Reza Shahabi and other imprisoned labour activists were read to the audience and distributed at the event. Thousands of bulletins and flyers on intolerable working conditions in Iran and violation of workers' rights were distributed amongst ILO delegates.

The demonstration organised by French trade unions, on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, in defence of worker's rights in Iran and imprisoned labour activists, showed once more, that Iranian workers are not alone. We consider international solidarity amongst workers to be our key priority. IASWI wholeheartedly supported and took part in this important solidarity demonstration.

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## **CUPE Ontario adopted a strong resolution in solidarity with workers in Iran**

Delegates at the 49th Annual CUPE Ontario Convention, May 23-26, 2012 adopted resolution 21 in solidarity with workers in Iran. This is an important resolution that will hopefully help strengthen worker-to-worker solidarity amongst the Canadian and Iranian labour movements. International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran supports this resolution and expresses its gratitude to our friends and comrades in the CUPE for adopting the resolution. We are ready and prepared to provide any necessary information and support to further the objectives of this resolution.

### **Resolution No. 21**

**Submitted by Local 4400 and International Solidarity Committee**

CUPE Ontario will:

- **Condemn the persecution of labour activists in Iran by the Iranian government and support the right of Iranian**

workers to freely establish independent workers' organizations.

- Work with independent labour organizations in Iran to strengthen worker-to-worker solidarity, as part of the world-wide struggle against the capitalist and neoliberal agenda.
- Take a clear stand against economic sanctions and any attempts by the U.S. and its allies, including Canada, to pursue military interventions against Iran.

Because:

- The government's anti-worker and repressive policies have consistently been violently imposed on workers in Iran.
- Iranian workers have no right to organize or strike and often face persecution, arrests and imprisonment.
- Economic sanctions and military intervention against Iran will be disastrous and unacceptable under any pretext and its main victims are surely the working and ordinary people of Iran.
- The US and its allies' drive to wage war against Iran has been a pretext for increased attacks on workers' and human rights by both sides of the current dispute.

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*Reza Shahabi's Defense Committee- Communiqué # 30*

### **Reza Shahabi's letter to workers participating in the International Labor Conference, June 2012**

To all my fellow workers, participating in ILO's annual conference,

My name is Reza Shahabi. I'm a board member of Tehran Bus Workers' Syndicate and its secretary treasurer. Due to my trade union activities I was arrested and incarcerated on June 12, 2010. I was brutally attacked and beaten during my arrest, and severely afflicted, physically and psychologically. Subsequently I spent eleven months in solitary confinement, without my family having any information about my whereabouts during that entire period of time. Finally I've been sentenced to six years of imprisonment, banned for five years from any trade union activities and a fine of 7,000,000 Tomans (approximately \$4000). Because of all the beatings and physical and psychological abuses I have endured, I'm suffering from severe back and neck pain, and the left side of my body is practically paralyzed. Currently I am in hospital waiting for an operation.

Dear fellow workers, have I done anything outside the accepted protocols and conventions of ILO?

The query I have from you, my dear fellow workers participating in ILO's annual conference, is that: what role ILO and workers' representatives participating in its conference, shall perform in such circumstances?

My fellow workers, the only time we are of any significance to Capitalist systems is when we're producing goods and services for them, and contribute to their interests, otherwise we get incarcerated, like myself, and all benefits and protections for our families are cut off, so as to force us to give in to their demands.

My fellow workers, what crime have I committed to be incarcerated for six years and banned from any trade union activity for five years?

Are demands for wage increase and benefits according to international standards and cost of living adjustments a crime?

Is collecting membership dues from members in our syndicate a crime?

Is asking for implementation of laws protecting workers from hazardous work environment a crime? Is demanding job classifications illegal?

Is asking for equality between women and men, and abolition of child labor a criminal act?

Is compliance with health and safety codes and educating others in Labor relations a crime?

Is aspiring to have a dignified honorable human life compatible with international norms and standards illegal?

Is going to Labor ministry and attempting to resolve labor issues through dispute settlement panels and in Court of Administrative Justice as a representative of workers, and defending their rights, deemed illegal?

Is creation of an independent, autonomous workers' organization considered a crime?

The query I have for all of my fellow workers, participating in this annual conference of ILO, is that: have you asked this body and the representative of the Iranian government; based on what charges have workers and labor activists, such as myself or Messrs, *Ali Nejati, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, Rasol Bodaghi, Mehdi Farahi Shandiz, Shahrokh Zamani, Mohammad Jarahi, Alireza Akhavan, Fariborz Raisdana,...* have been arrested and incarcerated?

And what role shall ILO and the workers' representatives at the International Labor Conference perform in such circumstances?

In the end, I would like to thank all workers and labour activists in Iran, France and from all over the world, who have been actively supporting us and working towards my freedom and freedom of all other incarcerated workers in Iran.

Reza Shahabi,

Board member and secretary treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company  
June 4, 2012, hospitalized at Imam Khomeini Hospital-Tehran

Published by Reza Shahabi Defence Committee

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Translated by IASWI.

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### ***Ali Nejati's letter to workers and participants in ILO's annual conference, June 2012***

Workers and workers' organizations!

All participants in ILO's gathering!

These days when ILO's annual gathering is under way, these days when workers' issues are being discussed, there are more than a few workers caught up in worst possible life and work conditions.

Workers like me, who in pursuit of obtaining their own rights and rights of their fellow workers have resorted to our collective power and created an independent workers' organization, are now under severe physical-psychological and economical pressures.

My name is Ali Nejati. I'm a Sugarcane worker, employed in *Haft Tapeh Company* for 24 years. About three years ago I and other workers began demanding payment of our delayed wages. Some were not paid up to six months. Consequently we *Haft Tapeh Company* workers created our own Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Workers' Syndicate.

Majority of workers participated in the elections and elected 9 representatives. These representatives were subjected to encounters with security forces a number of times. On one occasion I and four other colleagues were incarcerated for six months, charged with propaganda against the system. Whereas all we had said was to have our

wages paid. Our “crime” was being elected by workers as their representatives. I have been expelled from work for three years now, due to my labor activism, and my family is experiencing a very difficult situation. My other colleagues Messrs, *Jalil Ahmadi, Feriedon Nikofard, Mohamad Heidarymehr, Reza Rakhshan*, have also been either expelled from work or incarcerated.

In addition to my initial six months of incarceration, I was also sentenced to another one year imprisonment, based on same phony charges, and I have been incarcerated in Dezfol prison once again. By now I’ve spent seven months of the second sentence.

I had a heart attack right before my incarceration, and had to go for an operation, all paid by myself. All expert physicians, prison’s medical examiner, and all other medical authorities have warned that, in order for my condition to improve I have to be spending time outside of a prison environment. Now I’m experiencing clogged arteries and chest pain. I have been taken to prison’s doctor on emergency basis more than a few times. All official medical examiners of the Judiciary have also ruled in my favor, but I’m still incarcerated and once in a while am allowed to spend a few days away from my cell, thanks to thousands of letters by my family. But I still need to be regularly examined by specialist physicians. All, official and private, physicians have ruled that I cannot endure a jail sentence, and I should legally be set free, but this is not happening.

My colleagues and I, whom also have been expelled from work and are subject to intense psychological and economic pressures, have been struggling only and only as workers’ representatives, trying to obtain our basic legal rights. In response we have been brought up on phony charges, and expelled from work, arrested incarcerated.

Doesn’t Iranian government always profess to abide by protocols 87 and 98 of ILO?

Shouldn’t workers enjoy this basic right to form an autonomous organization of their own, independent from government and the employers?

Why isn’t Iranian government questioned about any of these?

Are workers in other parts of the world and participants in this gathering unaware of all that has happened to workers in Iran?

Is it a crime to establish a workers’ organization?

It might be very obvious for many as to the real and practical function of ILO, and how it supports workers’ right. I leave the answer to this query to all the participants in this conference. The final outcome will determine whether the workers and workers’ organizations participating in ILO’s conference were willing or able to take some measures in realization of the most fundamental workers’ rights, i.e. freedom of association and the release of all jailed workers, in Iran.

Today this reality is starkly presented to you: A worker like me, with 24 years of seniority, experiencing a life threatening illness, has been expelled from work for three years, his family experiencing severe difficulties, is still incarcerated only for a “crime” of advocating for workers’ right, and organizing for independent workers’ organizations. Other board members of our independent syndicate have also been expelled from work and subjected to harsh conditions.

In the end I would like to thank all those who have defended incarcerated workers in Iran, and urge all my fellow workers and colleagues to continue their efforts to free all imprisoned workers in Iran.

With respect

Ali Nejati, imprisoned worker; board member of *Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Workers Syndicate*

## **IRI and the ILO's International Labour Conference:**

There are proven records that the entire delegation from Iran to the International Labour Conference is made of the agents of the IRI. The so-called "worker's representatives" among Iranian delegates are representatives of government-sponsored organizations like the "Islamic Labour Councils", "Workers' house" and their "trade associations", which have had a direct role in the suppression of the labour activists and workers' struggles in Iran in the past thirty years. Although there are indications that the ILO's workers' group and Labor Standards have been pushing for protection of workers' rights in Iran in recent years, the ILO as a whole, particularly representatives of governments and employers, have been collaborating with the Iranian government by electing Iran as an alternate member of ILO's Board of Directors and the chair of ILO Committee on Employment and Social Policies despite the continued gross violation of workers' rights in Iran. There are reports that at the current 2012 ILC, Iran has been elected to chair the Selection Committee of the ILC.

In the past number of years, workers in Iran have been sending numerous protest letters to the ILO without witnessing any positive changes in their terrifying conditions. The election of Iran at the ILO's governing body and its selection committee is considered another slap on the face of Iranian labour movement. Workers' activists in Iran are determined to voice their concerns in this regard in any possible ways they can.

### **Some background information:**

In October 2009, Haft Tapeh Workers' Syndicate wrote: "We are asking the International Labour Organization:

- Is the Iranian government permissible to violating fundamental conventions like 98 and 87?
- Isn't the Iranian government a permanent member of the ILO?
- Has the Iranian government ever been held accountable for its actions?
- Why are workers being jailed, fired, persecuted, interrogated and tortured for creating their own independent trade organizations?
- Shouldn't the Iranian government be accountable for its repressive actions against the representatives of the Vahed Workers' Syndicate including Mansour Osanloo and Ebrahim Madadi...?
- Shouldn't the Iranian government be told that it cannot imprison workers (over 150 in Tehran May Day event) for organizing a peaceful commemoration of the International Workers' Day? That they must not put on trial, flog or jail workers for celebrating the May Day, (for instance Mahmoud Salehi who was jailed for one year)?
- Is the ILO aware of the government actions against teachers' representatives and the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association? ... And so on and so forth.

We, workers and members of the board of directors of the Haft Tapeh Workers' Syndicate, are writing this letter while the police is involved in intimidating and terrorizing our families. The police have been acting, in our cities of Shoush, Haft Tapeh and Andimeshk, as though we are criminals and fugitives. We are writing this while awaiting to be arrested and sent to prison for the above unjust sentences; and while our names have been put on the company's entrance as offenders that are not allowed to enter the workplace. If we go to our work the police will arrest us and that will give them another excuse to further penalize us. It is very strange that if we go to work they arrest us and if we don't they'll treat us as absentees which would justify sacking us altogether which would lead to our arrest and imprisonment. This vicious cycle has been orchestrated in a way that at the end of the day we will be both sacked and imprisoned. Thus, we don't know when you're going to be reading this letter whether we would be in jail or not."

Last year, on June 6, 2011, workers in Iran Khodro, the largest vehicle manufacturing company in the Middle East and

Central Asia, wrote to the ILO's Director General, stating, "In the previous years we have repeatedly voiced our concern in regards to the violation of the most basic labour rights by the Iranian government. We believe as a part of the Labour society, we have the right to internationally recognized human rights. We, workers of Iran, have witnessed these commotions and denial of human rights and see it our duty to remind the world of these issues in order to regain our denied rights. Although your organization's mission is to address workers' and employers' legal rights, we have unfortunately witnessed lack of attention to workers' conditions. As you may be aware, the Islamic Republic has violated labour rights for years and has brutally repressed this segment of the society and this is while Iran is a member of ILO and sends their appointed representatives to your annual conference despite the fact that they have no legitimacy among Iranian workers. We expect you to obligate your members to abide by the laws of this organization and hold them accountable for the apparent denial of human and workers' rights.... Your Excellency, according to media, at the International Labour Conference held in Geneva, unfortunately yet again a group is representing Iranian workers that have not been elected in any form of democratic election. Hereby, we, the workers of Iran Khodro, one of the largest manufacturing companies with more than 30 thousand workers, declare the illegitimacy of these so called "workers' representatives" of the Iranian government and strongly condemn their presence at the International Labour Conference. A group of Iran Khodro workers, 06/06/2011."

On June 10, 2011, the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organization wrote to the ILO: "Iran is a member of the ILO but the government of Iran continues to violate international conventions on the protection of the rights of workers. Therefore, we are once again respectfully asking the Director-General of the ILO to address these violations of workers' rights according to the Iranian government's constitutional and international obligations."

We therefore echo the voices of the labour activists in Iran and protest loudly and strongly against this repressive regime and its delegates at the International Labour Conference, who are nothing but agents of the IRI.

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### **Amnesty International Document: Iran must release imprisoned trade unionists:**

On the occasion of the 101st session of the International Labour Conference - taking place in Geneva from 30 May to 15 June - Amnesty International is renewing its call on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release trade unionists who have been imprisoned solely for their peaceful trade union activities in Iran. The Iranian authorities have arrested dozens of trade unionists in recent years, some of whom have been sentenced to long prison terms, and have maintained a long standing prohibition on the establishment and recognition of independent trade unions and associations.

The document is available on AI's website via the following link:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/037/2012/en>

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Send a protest letter to the IRI: Demand the release of imprisoned labour activists

### **Sample Protest letter:**

I (we) have been informed that:

- After being incarcerated for more than 23 months, Reza Shahabi has been sentenced to 6 years imprisonment, by Judge Salavati of the Branch 15 of Tehran's "Islamic Revolutionary Court". This includes a year's prison sentence on charges of "propaganda activities against the system" and five years in prison on false charges of "conspiracy with the intention of acting against national security". Also in this court order, Reza Shahabi has been sentenced to

prohibition of activities for five years, which only means an attempt in silencing this labour activist. Reza Shahabi's only crime is to be representing workers and defending the rights of workers and members of his union. Reza Shahabi, treasurer and a board member of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburb Vahed Bus Company, has been in custody in the notorious Evin prison since 12 June 2010. As a result of mistreatment of Shahabi in jail, his health has deteriorated significantly. There is a growing fear that Reza might become paralyzed as a result of his worsening health conditions.

- Mr. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, member of The Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations, and a Children's Rights advocate, has received five years prison term, by a "Court of Appeals." Mr. Ebrahimzadeh has been incarcerated in Evin prison since June 2012, based on false accusations. He has been under immense psychological and physical pressures.

- Mr. Ali Nejati has been incarcerated in Dezful's Fajr prison since November 12, 2011. Mr. Nejati, a board member of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Workers' Syndicate, had already spent six months in jail based on the same bogus charges. While imprisoned, new charges were brought up against him, and although he was cleared of all charges in the preliminary court proceedings, subsequently he was sentenced to spend another year in prison. Mr. Nejati was sent to jail while he's suffering from severe heart ailment. Due to his condition he has to follow a certain daily diet, accompanied by medications, plus monthly check up by his physician.

In addition, two well-known labour activists in City of Tabriz, Shahrokh Zamani and Mohammad Jarahi, both members of the "Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organisations", who were imprisoned and released on bail last year, were arrested again in January 2012 and been detained in Tabriz prison since then. Shahrokh Zamani is facing 11 year imprisonment and Mohammad Jarahi is facing 5 year jail time.

There are many others in imprison, like Ali Akhavan, Mehdi Shandiz, Fariborz Raeisdana, and many others being persecuted on daily basis. I (we) strongly condemn the unjust sentences against these labour activists. I (we) also denounce ongoing persecution and arrests of labour activists in Iran including the repression of May Day demonstrators on May 1st 2012. I (we) demand the immediate and unconditional freedom of all labour activists in Iran.

Print Name	Union/Local/Organization	Signature

Send Copy of your Protest Letters to: [info@leader.ir](mailto:info@leader.ir), [info@judiciary.ir](mailto:info@judiciary.ir), [dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir](mailto:dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir); [iran@un.int](mailto:iran@un.int); [ijpr@iranjudiciary.org](mailto:ijpr@iranjudiciary.org), [info@dadiran.ir](mailto:info@dadiran.ir), [office@justice.ir](mailto:office@justice.ir), [support@irimlsa.ir](mailto:support@irimlsa.ir); [info@humanrights-iran.ir](mailto:info@humanrights-iran.ir); [avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir); [bia.judi@yahoo.com](mailto:bia.judi@yahoo.com); [info@mlsa.ir](mailto:info@mlsa.ir); CC: [info@workers-iran.org](mailto:info@workers-iran.org)

### About IASWI:

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) is a progressive and non-partisan campaign formed in 1999 and formally launched in January 2000. The IASWI has been working in collaboration with many labour and progressive organizations and activists in Iran and around the world to strengthen worker-to-worker solidarity in defence of workers' rights and struggles in Iran and against the repressive anti-worker policies and practices of Islamic Republic of Iran. The IASWI is an independent organization and does not receive funding from any government or government-affiliated organizations, corporations or political parties. While we pro-actively support workers' struggles against the repressive Islamic Republic of Iran, IASWI opposes economic sanctions and military interventions by Western forces/allies against Iran. The economic sanctions and threats of war are nothing but inhuman instruments in the hands of world capitalism against the working class. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to use the threat of war and policy of economic sanctions as an excuse to further repress workers and disadvantaged people in Iran and intensify fear and intimidation throughout the country.