

# **An open letter by the imprisoned workers, Reza Shahabi and Davood Razavi, to the representatives of workers' organizations at the 112<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference**

Friday 31 May 2024, by [RAZAVI Davoud](#), [SHAHABI Reza](#) (Date first published: 27 May 2024).

Greetings to our dear colleagues and friends, and a wish for the victory of workers all over the world.

We were wondering whether it was still necessary to write again about the suppression of the labour movement and the violation of international conventions on freedom of association, collective agreements, the right to live and work, and workers' health and safety in Iran. We were questioning whether it was still necessary to repeat that we and many other workers were fired, harassed, persecuted and sentenced to long and cruel imprisonments on fabricated charges, only because we had demanded our basic rights and were involved in establishing autonomous workers' organizations. Simultaneously, we deeply feel rueful that we are forced to write again about the harassment, prosecution, and long and cruel imprisonment imposed on us.

It has always been a solemn observation for us that despite numerous and reliable reports over many years by the few independent labour organizations in Iran, including our union, the Syndicate of Workers Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, and the umbrella organization of teachers, the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations, as well as by labour unions and federations at the international level, to the ILO in relation to the violation of the basic rights of workers and the suppression of independent labour organizations and the increasing number of child laborers in Iran, why ILO has so far not taken tangible and effective measures even in the framework of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work? The very fundamental principles and rights that "all members have an obligation, arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote and to realize". Why does ILO continue to invite bogus representatives of the government under the guise of representatives of Iranian workers to the annual labour conferences and in many cases they even elect them to be members of its governing bodies and labour committees?!

We recollect that following the mass arrests on and about International Workers' Day in 2022, a petition signed by more than 5,500 people was organized by the Coordinating council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations, which was also supported by the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. The petition was submitted to the 110<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference. The petition called for the condemnation of the Iranian government's violation of the rights of workers and teachers, especially the violation of the right to organize and freedom of association, as well as the violation of the right to free speech and assembly. However, we do not recall any responses from ILO to that petition which was created during a very difficult situation in Iran.

In 2005, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which our union is affiliated to, filed a complaint against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the ILO, concerning the organized attack by the government on our union and violent arrests of our members. Despite the fact that this case has been open since then and new violations have been added to the case, ILO seems to have occupied itself with the Iranian government's evasive responses and false claims. As a result, after nearly two decades, no significant and concrete actions have been taken by the ILO in this regard.

Since we established our trade union, within the framework of international labour standards in 2005, we have been targeted by the employer, the government, and the agents of the Intelligence and Judiciary. During this time, hundreds of our union members were beaten, arrested, their homes were raided by security forces, and dozens were fired, suspended or imprisoned.

The three imprisoned members of the Syndicate in Evin Prison have been the target of this anti-worker policy without interruption and have been sentenced to long prison terms, and despite severe physical illnesses, the prison's authorities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Intelligence officials, deny them even a medical furlough.

Reza Shahabi, a member of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, was arrested following a raid on May 12, 2022, for his trade union activities, as well as meeting with two members of the General Confederation of Labor - Workers' Force (FO), Cecile Kohler and her partner Jacques Paris. He was detained in solitary confinement and interrogated for more than four months in the 209 and 241 sections of the Evin Prison. He was sentenced to 6 years in prison, 2 years of exile, 2 years of a ban on leaving the country and 2 years of ban from trade union activities. The sentence was upheld by the Appeal Court, and he is serving his term in Evin Prison.

Davood Razavi, a member of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, was arrested on September 27, 2022, for his trade union activities, as well as meeting with FO members, Cecile Kohler and Jacques Paris. He was detained for four months in solitary confinement under intense interrogation. The first trial court sentenced Razavi to 5 years of imprisonment and two years of ban from trade union activities. The sentence was confirmed in the Appeals Court, and he is serving his term in Evin prison.

Hassan Saeidi, a member of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, was arrested on May 18, 2022, following a night raid by security agents on his residence. He spent four months in solitary confinement and under interrogation. Saeidi was sentenced by the initial court to 6 years in prison, 2 years of exile, 2 years of ban from trade union activities and 2 years of ban from leaving the country for his continuation of trade union activities and meeting with two French trade unionists, Cecile Kohler and Jacques Paris. The sentence was confirmed by the Appeal Court. Saeidi is currently serving his term in Evin prison. However, the Supreme Court has recently reduced his sentences to three years, six months and one day for the charge of assembly and collusion, and seven months for the charge of propaganda against the government.

In the same period, hundreds of other workers, teachers, students and women's movement activists have been fired, arrested and imprisoned merely for exercising their rights or defending the rights of their colleagues. The few independent labour and teachers' organizations, including our union, which were formed despite suppressive actions by the government, are under constant pressure and surveillance by the security and intelligence forces; therefore, the possibility of open and free activities has been denied to them. Dozens of workers, teachers, students and defenders of children's and women's rights are currently imprisoned in various prisons in the country, some of them who are known to us are: Rayhaneh Ansarinejad, Anisha Asadollahi, Sarvenaz Ahmadi,

Sharifeh Mohammadi, Nasrin Javadi, Nahid Khodajoo, Zeinab Hamrang, Osman Esmaili, Rasoul Bodaghi, Mehran Raof, Keyvan Mohtadi, Kamyar Fakoor, Cecile Kohler and Jacques Paris, and many others.

Yet we see that the agents of the government under the titles such as "High Center of Islamic Labour Councils" and other titles, which are all affiliated to the government and employers, and receive all the financial and logistical facilities and the support from the intelligence forces, the Ministry of Labour and employers, are freely active throughout the country, controlling and restraining the labour movement in order to silence the fundamental demands of workers across the country. The very same government agents - while many workers and teachers like us are in prison or under persecution, participate in the annual meetings of the ILO as representatives of Iranian workers, which is very unfortunate. Therefore, we emphasize that workers of Iran do not have any representatives at the International Labour Conference, either under the designation of the government's so-called "Workers' Delegates" to the ILO or any person or organization that might claim to represent Iranian labour abroad, and we do not recognize them in any way.

We are aware that every year during the International Labour Conference, international labour organizations and supporters of the Iranian working class abroad hold protest rallies in support of the imprisoned workers and labour struggles in Iran. We sincerely appreciate their solidarity and the contributions by all other allies who are supporting the Iranian labour movement. We hope this year, particularly with the proclaimed support from the trade unions in France, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, England and other international labour organizations, we will see wider and more impactful outcomes. We also hope that the grievances related to the suppression of independent labour organizations and activists in Iran will be pursued with more seriousness and urgency and that favourable results will be achieved in support of Iranian workers.

In the end, we would like to express our solidarity with the oppressed workers and people of Iran and the world from inside Evin prison, and especially say that we also join the working class of the world in calling for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the criminal war of the Israeli government against the Palestinian People. We call for an immediate end to warmongering policies in the region by global and regional powers and stand for a lasting peace throughout the Middle East and worldwide, based on the interests of the people of the world and universal human values. The global solidarity and united struggle of workers' organizations and freedom-loving and justice-seeking people is the main guarantor of establishing peace and justice in the region and around the world. Strengthening these organizations and movements is an indelible task for all of us.

With many thanks, and in solidarity.

**Reza Shahabi and Davood Razavi,**

Member of the Board of Directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company

**Evin prison, Tehran, Iran May 27, 2024**

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