

The General Federation of Workers Unions in Iraq (GFWUI)

22 January 2015

Statement Regarding the Crises Experienced by Iraq and the Impact on Iraqi Workers and Their Future

Since its inception after April 2003, our association has worked hard to build an independent and strong trade union organization in order to represent workers in all sectors in Iraq, to defend their rights and interests, and to seek participation in the economic and social policy development of the country. Because of its direct impact on the lives and the future of Iraqi workers and their families, however, our association (the General Federation of Workers Unions in Iraq) and other unions were met with legal obstacles that confiscated the rights and freedoms of association and prevented trade union organization in the public sector, which was based on the laws and decisions of the former regime.

We and the rest of the trade unions have struggled and will continue the struggle for the cancellation of these laws and for the issuance of new laws in line with international standards to ensure the rights of workers at all levels. We collided again with the desires and practices of the government, which has proven over the past decade that they are stuck with the laws and decisions of Saddam Hussein's regime, which was hostile to workers and their organizations. This hostility toward trade unions was represented by punishing workers in the public sector for their affiliation with or their formation of labor union organizations, and the government justified this with the existence of laws that clearly need to be changed. On the other side, we see dozens of other parties enter the political process and become decision-makers without any law regulating their work. It is a clear double standard in dealing with labor issues, although the unions do not need to ask for their rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants and the International Labor Conventions states that clearly in a way that does not need jurisprudence or interpretation.

With all of that, our association worked with other unions to follow the new labor legislation to be agreed upon by Parliament and participated in the process of amending the labor law and the drafting of a proposed law for the freedom of association with expert support from the International Labor Organization and the International Trade Union Confederation and the Solidarity Center. These efforts culminated in putting necessary amendments to the Labor Law after the successful joint work between the previous Parliamentary Labor Committee—which acted justly with workers for the first time in their history and defended their rights—and representatives of the Iraqi trade unions and the International Solidarity Center. Unfortunately, these amendments have not been collected by the Legal Committee of Parliament as of yet due to unknown reasons, and voting on the Labor Law has not been completed because of the political crisis that gripped the country in 2014 and due to the lack of a quorum of Parliament in several sessions where the law was listed on the meetings' agendas.

After the election of the new Parliament and the resumption of its work, the Labor Law received its first reading again and was waiting for the second reading and the vote on its articles, which must be consistent with international standards in full without deleting any of the amendments made by the unions, which have been built on a high level of labor consultation, citing the technical notes of the International Labor Office in Geneva, which was presented to the Iraqi Parliament in 2013 and 2014.

The law as it is now, without these amendments, is very bad and inconsistent with international standards and international labor conventions ratified by Iraq. It will cause the violation of workers' rights again under the framework of freedom and democracy advocated by the political system in Iraq, and this is one of the big risks for Iraqi workers

and trade union organizations at this stage. Also, any law contrary to international labor agreements in general and those relating to the rights and freedoms of association in particular will be rejected in any form by trade unions and Iraqi workers in all sectors, although the issue of trade union organization in the public sector is a guaranteed right in international conventions and is not a requirement that workers should struggle to get.

Our Champion Workers

Our association and some of the other unions have pointed out since 2004 the seriousness of government policies in the economic sphere and the reliance on a unilateral economy, and the neglect of the agricultural, industrial, and commercial sectors. Contrarily, relying on an open import policy has turned Iraq into garbage for bad commercial goods. This, accompanied by the absence of a law to protect national products, caused the migration of professional workers from Iraq and the closure of a large number of industrial facilities and projects. All of these factors caused an increase in Iraq's unemployment rate and the decline of economic developments that rely on multiple economic policies. As a result, nearly 250,000 workers—who work in self-funded companies associated with the Ministry of Industry and Minerals—along with their families now face very difficult circumstances and unknown fates because they have not received their salaries over the past three months from the government. Add to this the signs of privatization and restructuring of these 74 companies, and the future of the workers and their families is of significant risk due to the fact that restructuring and privatization might be accompanied by mass layoffs. This has been strongly rejected by our association and the trade unions because what happened is not the workers' fault.

Since 2004, trade unions have demanded that the government develop appropriate solutions to reactivate factories and increase production rates; however, the government intended to halt these factories to get rid of the responsibility of managing them. We are sure that in the near future other sectors will face the same fate if the government does not undertake serious and extensive economic reforms to avoid any economic losses and builds a multi-stable economy that protects the country and the workers from these crises. The country faces real challenges in this aspect, especially after the June 2014 crises concerning Daesh and their takeover of several towns and villages in the provinces of Nineveh, Diyala, Anbar, Kirkuk, and Salahuddin, and also because of the costs to be paid to face those terrorist gangs and the magnitude of the devastation caused by them in those cities, the killing and displacement of people, the destruction of infrastructure and public and private property, and the halt of economic activities in those provinces. This crisis will have a negative economic impact on the future of those cities in general and especially on workers in those cities. Because they have been displaced and lost their jobs and homes, they will need a long time to recover part of what they spent years building.

This is a challenge and a huge risk surrounding workers in those areas; rights at work will be zero, because of their need for any job under any circumstances in order to support their families. For this reason, our association and the trade unions confirm the importance of the legislation of a new labor law that protects workers from those conditions, as well as for a trade union freedoms law.

Our association and its public trade unions and branches in other provinces demand that the government uphold its responsibilities to displaced people who are mostly poor and working class, end their suffering by providing housing requirements so they can live in dignity until the end of this crisis and until Daesh is defeated, and secure the usurped areas in order for the return of displaced people to their homes. We also demand that the international community and the Arab and international trade union organizations stand with Iraq in its war on terrorism and provide the necessary support for the Iraqi people to overcome these crises and all future negative effects because Iraqi workers and their organizations are directly affected by these events. Daunting tasks await trade unions after the end of the military operations in this regard. Trade unions will be tasked with

the mission of maintaining pure vocational democratic trade union organizations separated from any sectarian divisions because the unions are already shaped perfectly for a unified Iraqi society that stays away from political and sectarian quotas.

Our Dear Iraqi People

Our association and its trade unions are raising our voices again to demand unity and to keep the separation from internal divisions to prevent the enemies of Iraq from tearing at the fabric of society. We are raising our voice against the dangerous ideas that Daesh seeks to implement within Iraqi society, and we are giving priority to a national voice and entrenchment of the principle of citizenship and peaceful coexistence among all Iraqi people. While our association renews its commitment to defend minorities and their rights in their own country because they are the sons of Iraq, Daesh tries desperately to uproot them out of the country and to change the demography of Iraq and obliterate civilization and the historical heritage of minorities of all components.

Long live Iraq and its people, one and united

Long live Iraqi workers—the symbol of struggle and national unity

The decisive victory over the enemies of Iraq and terrorist gangs

Glory and eternity for the martyrs of Iraq and the martyrs of the Iraqi working class

(Eingegangen beim LabourNet Germany am 14. Februar 2015)