
**Speech to mark TUC/Amnesty
International Memorandum of
Understanding**
Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary
25 February 2009

Trade union rights are human rights

Speaking at the launch of the TUC-Amnesty International (UK) [Memorandum of Understanding](#), TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said:

Kate, colleagues, thanks for this morning's breakfast, but thanks much, much more for what you and your colleagues are doing about human and trade union rights.

It shouldn't come as any surprise to people here that trade union rights are human rights, but there are a lot of people – and a lot of politicians – who don't make the connection.

One of the first people to do so was Peter Benenson, who pretty much founded Amnesty, and who had, a few years earlier, been sent by the TUC to observe the show trials of trade unionists in Franco's Spain.

In the best traditions of what Amnesty has achieved since, he got those trade unionists set free.

We've worked together many times since then, but especially over the last couple of years, and that really is a testimony to what you, Kate, have done at Amnesty – not least bringing in Shane Enright – a bit of a refugee from the trade union movement! – as trade union officer.

We've worked together on the rights of Iranian trade unionists – especially Mansour Osanloo, the imprisoned leader of the bus workers' union in Tehran.

We've worked together on issues such as LGBT rights and violence against women.

And we've worked together on countries like Colombia, the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist.

Some people might therefore ask why we're signing the Memorandum of Understanding, if we're working together so well. Is it just a publicity stunt? Perish the thought.

No, the original idea for this agreement came when the TUC's Assistant General Secretary Kay Carberry addressed the Amnesty trade union conference last year.

The idea was to build on the shared campaigning, on our common objectives and on the mutual trust which we had developed, and set some challenging targets for us both, so that we can't rest on our laurels.

The MOU requires us to work together on Urgent Actions for trade unions at risk in 25 countries every year, getting our members to make their voices heard in a co-ordinated way.

It requires us to promote Amnesty among trade union regions and branches to increase trade union affiliations by 10% a year.

And it requires us to take part in each others' events and conferences – like the Amnesty AGM in Swansea in a few weeks, and our Annual Congress this September.

I wish the TUC and Amnesty didn't have to work together so much. I wish this MOU was unnecessary.

But in countries all over the world – in Guatemala, in Zimbabwe, in Turkey – trade unionists face obstruction, harassment, violence and worse.

While they are not free, we are not free, and we stand in solidarity with them all.

It gives me great pleasure to sign this memorandum of understanding and make *our* commitment to end oppression everywhere.

See *Amnesty International UK Chief Executive Kate Allen's [speech](#) at the same event*