
Solidarity
International Workers' Day
May 2010

May Day around the world

May Day – 1 May – is traditionally the day for workers' demonstrations around the world. And this year was no exception. The ITUC [called](#) for social justice to emerge from the global crisis.

History was made in Turkey when the four main trade union confederations joined together to march to Taksim Square – scene of brutal repression in the past - for the first time in decades. Demonstrations were stronger in Iraq and Palestine this year, too.

But in countries like Iran and Swaziland, repression continued – leading in one case to a death in police custody. But no amount of repression will prevent workers around the world from demonstrating, and nothing will break the bonds of solidarity that unite the workers of the world.

Iran

Education International's Dominique Marlet reports that "As becomes a tradition, leaders and members of the Iranian Teacher Trade Associations have been arrested and detained in the days preceding Labour Day and the National Teachers Day, celebrated on 2 May in Iran. Nevertheless the statement released to mark the National Teachers Day included seven demands focusing on the continued detention and unfair sentences of the teacher unionists, including the death row for Farzad Kamangar. The Coordinating Council of Iranian Teacher Trade Associations also announced that its executive members would be on hunger strike from 2 to 8 May to highlight their demands."

Iraq

Iraq's leading woman trade unionist, Hashemeya Mohsen Al-Saadawy, Vice-president of Basra Trade Union Federation, led the May Day demonstration in her home town of Basra, and sent this message to the world: "Dear Brothers, we have the pleasure to extend you our greetings on the occasion of the first of May- the International Labour Day. We wish that peace and security to spread throughout the world as well as more unity and cohesion for the workers. Today, the 1st of May, Basra Trade Union Federation started a march from Cornich street in El Ashar district in the city centre to the headquarters of the federation. The day has

witnessed many programs and speeches where workers' suffering has been highlighted in such a difficult period. Voices called upon officials to achieve justice. For further struggle!"



Palestine

On the first of May, the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions ([PGFTU](#)) organised several activities, celebrations, festivals and workers' marches in different districts of the West Bank and Gaza. Tens of thousands of workers participated in these activities - especially women and youth. Events took place in Hebron, Qalqilia, Jerusalem, Ramallah and finally, Nablus, where the PGFTU is based. PGFTU President Shaher Sae'd promised to do his best to secure decent work for Palestinian workers, called on Arab investors to invest in Palestine to create jobs for thousands of unemployed workers, and declared his support for the Palestinian President's decision to boycott the products from the settlements, explaining the importance of a legal clinic established with ILO support to defend the rights of the workers who work in settlements.

Swaziland

Unions and workers in Swaziland, however, were on the receiving end of more brutal state repression that ended in the death in police custody of young opposition PUDEMO activist Siphho Jele. Earlier, in a move which infuriated members of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) and the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT), the police disrupted the celebrations at the Salesian sports ground in Manzini, by arresting four invited guests and workers

and confiscating their recording equipment. The reason given for taking in these four for questioning and disallowing them from taking part in the celebrations was the bizarre allegation that they were not employed and thus should not participate in a workers' event! Other workers, however, were also detained and charged.

An unidentified man from Ncabaneni was arrested and charged for contravening the controversial Suppression of terrorism act by wearing a t-shirt bearing the PUDEMO logo. Another unidentified man was also detained for unknown reasons but was later released without being charged. A teenage girl who was part of a drama group that performed at the event was saved by throngs of workers from the police who wanted to arrest her under the terrorism act as well for merely shouting the words "VIVA" to one of the proscribed entities. While all this was going on, a group of workers from SNAT, the teachers' organization were taking pictures. This did not go down well with the police who confiscated the camera and only agreed to give it back to its owners after they had deleted all the pictures that showed their barbaric actions.

Turkey

And lastly, the Turkish trade union movements affiliated to the ETUC and ITUC came together in a show of unity to demonstrate in Istanbul. 150,000 workers marched from three directions into Taksim Square in Istanbul, marking the first time in 33 years that the historic square was officially open for Workers' Day. May Day was officially designated as a workers' holiday by Turkey's government in 2009, and with it came reopening of the symbol that marks Turkish worker rights – Taksim Square. It was on "Bloody May 1" of 1977 that 37 workers were killed celebrating May Day in Taksim and a few years later, the military banned demonstrations inside Taksim. Only two years ago, in 2008, small groups of trade union leaders attempted to assemble there. They were met by tear gas and police force. Over 500 were arrested.

Mustafa Kumlu, President of the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TÜRK-İŞ), spoke: "We remember the friends we lost from the depths of our hearts. We rejoice in the fact that Taksim Square has been opened, and we thank our friends who struggled for this cause."

