
TUC Aid project in Somalia
Start-up report
February 2017

Human and trade union rights in Somalia

TUC Aid and the Trade Union Unit Trust (TUUT) are supporting the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) to produce a second annual review of human and trade union rights in Somalia covering developments in 2016. The report will record and analyse information of trade union rights violations to raise awareness of trade union rights abuses nationally and internationally and lobby for measures to address such abuses.

According to ITUC-Africa, Somalia remains the most dangerous place in Africa for trade union activity, with systematic use of violence and intimidation against union members and leaders. The campaign of anti-union repression, led by the Federal Government in Mogadishu, is carried out with impunity, and none of those responsible for the appalling human and union rights violations were held accountable.

FESTU intends to produce a report on human and trade union rights situation in Somalia for the year 2016. The report will document cases of attacks on trade unions and trade unionists, violations of freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly as well as laws & policies curtailing trade union rights.

After all the data is collated, the federation will work with the ITUC and ITUC-Africa on the production of the report. A thousand copies of the report will be printed, for use in lobbying domestic politicians and opinion-formers, and domestic staff of international organisations. An electronic version of the report will be distributed within the international trade union movement and international community.

It will be incontrovertible evidence of the human and trade union rights situation in Somalia.

The importance of recording and publicising abuses

In an economic environment that prioritises security, counter-terrorism and growth, ensuring human and workers' rights is a major challenge. Somali trade unions are working to ensure that workers are able to exercise their full spectrum of rights, including International Labour Organisation (ILO) Core Labour Standards. Respect for the clearly enshrined international legal rights

afforded to all workers must be at the foundation of democratic, stable, peaceful, secure, economic, and social development in Somalia.

The report will be distributed to Somali trade unions who are mostly based in Mogadishu, the UN mission to Somalia, the ILO country office for Somalia in Addis Ababa, the diplomatic community accredited to Somalia, IMF, World Bank, African Union Mission, ILO HQ, OHCHR and international trade union community. The report will be submitted to the President of Republic, Prime Minister, Ministries of Justice, Labour, Internal Security and Foreign Affairs and Federal Parliament.

As an ITUC affiliate, FESTU and its affiliated unions have the unique ability to raise awareness of worker rights in the workplace, in the society and in the international community, and to represent their workers by advocating for their rights at the national policy level as well as international level.

The situation facing Somali unions

Somali workers around the country are standing up for their rights and forming free and independent trade unions to make life better for themselves and their families, defend their civil, political, economic and social rights. FESTU serves as a nationwide advocate for union activists, defending worker rights, promoting human and union rights, administering training programs for organising, sharing information with unionists, and providing support for struggling unions.

But in a country where human rights are abused with impunity, Somali trade unionists are always in the firing line. The federal government of Somalia has continued its efforts to institutionally undermine freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and collective bargaining, and has been busy forming yellow unions, organising attacks on trade unions and helping to ensure that union-busting remained rife.

The Somali government has tried to restrict legitimate trade union activity, through outright bans on freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly, to intimidation, smear campaigns and threats against trade unionists. Fundamental ILO rights are flouted across the country, depriving millions of working people of their rights to trade union representation, and thus fair wages and decent working conditions, and the voice that can speak for workers freely, the trade unions, is being oppressed.

In Mogadishu, trade union meetings were monitored and banned without prior approval of the Ministry of Internal Security, unionists were constantly under pressure and union leaders were repeatedly intimidated by the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).

FESTU work on human and trade union rights

Due to the gravity of the oppression, ITUC-Africa and LO Sweden teamed up to train 10 human and trade union rights monitors for FESTU in Kigali, Rwanda, to thoroughly monitor, document and report on cases of human and trade union rights. With the support of LO Sweden, FESTU also produced its first (2015) report on human and trade union rights.

As the attacks on trade union rights continue unabated, FESTU intends to produce similar report on attacks of human and trade union rights situation in 2016 to highlight the gravity of the rights violations and to use it as a campaigning tool to end the cycle of trade union rights violations that has further intensified during the past year.

How the report will be used

Collecting evidence of human and trade union rights violations and putting them in a report is a vital component of the work of Somali trade unions. The report will be used as an advocacy tool. It is hard to reject advocacy work which is based on hard facts about the reality of workers' rights and freedom. The main reason for documenting human and trade union rights violations is to trigger reactions or responses that can help prevent such violations from being repeated.

The international community, particularly those interested in protection and promotion of human and trade union rights in Somalia, will use the findings of the report to base their bilateral/multilateral human rights engagement on Somalia. The media will have detailed information on the labour rights situation which they can report on by broadcasting/publishing news stories.

The Somali government will be sensitive to the report because it cares about its image with the international community which bankrolls the government.

Trade union officials and activists will use the report to advance the cause of workers, to advocate conducive working conditions and to remedy abusive labour rights situation when engaging the international community, employers, Federal government and Federal States. Like-minded civil society groups will join forces with the trade union movement in demanding an end to violations of labour rights as specified in the report.