



Geneva, 20 December 2017

Mr. Guy Ryder
Director-General
International Labour Organization (ILO)
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Global Unions IndustriALL, ITUC, IUF and PSI request for urgent intervention with the Government of Algeria

Dear Mr. Director-General,

On behalf of Public Services International (PSI), International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and IndustriALL Global Union, we are writing to request that you urgently intervene with the Government of Algeria concerning the serious and ongoing attacks on the independent union of electricity and gas workers SNATEGS, which organizes workers at the state energy company SONELGAZ. The attacks on SNATEGS are unfolding within a general policy of repression against independent trade unions in the country, in open defiance of decisions and recommendations of the ILO governing bodies.

The Government of Algeria is currently attempting to entirely eliminate SNATEGS as a legally-constituted trade union organization. On 3 December 2017, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Security announced that SNATEGS had held a meeting to dissolve itself. This decision can only be taken by a national Congress, and no such Congress has taken place. Further, it is the latest in a long series of government attacks on the union's members, representatives and elected officers.

In December 2016, the SNATEGS President, Mr Raouf Mellal, was sentenced in absentia to six months in prison after being accused of illegally obtaining documents. These documents, which were freely available on the internet, exposed the inflation of electricity bills by the state-owned energy company, SONELGAZ, over a ten-year period, affecting 8 million customers. However, instead of being commended for uncovering corruption, he was being persecuted; an appeal against his sentence, examined in May 2017, was unsuccessful.

Since the beginning of 2017, SNATEGS has staged a series of strikes across Algeria to demand higher wages, trade union freedoms and better safety standards after numerous deaths of workers on electricity lines at the company. In retaliation for the strikes organized by the union in March and April this year, 93 union leaders were fired and a further 663 SNATEGS members faced legal action.

On 16 May 2017, just days before a planned five-day strike, the Minister of Labour withdrew SNATEGS' registration and dismissed Mr Mellal, in violation of international standards. SNATEGS leaders and members face ongoing physical harassment and persecution by the security forces for carrying out their legitimate union activities and exercising their right to strike.

On 20 July 2017, some 5,000 police officers were deployed to stop the March of Shame against state energy company SONELGAZ in the city of Bejaia, arresting more than 600 union members and citizens in the process. Mr. Mellal was one of the hundreds of people arbitrarily arrested in a strategy to prevent the trade unionists' right to peaceful assembly.

In December 2017, the second instance court issued a verdict in Mr. Mellal's favour, saying that he should be reinstated at SONELGAZ in his previous position and that he should be able to continue his trade union activity.

In the conclusions concerning Algeria of its June 2017 report, the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards "expressed serious concerns over the persistence of restrictions on the right of workers to join and establish trade union organizations...noted with concern that progress towards compliance with Convention No. 87 remained unacceptably slow....[and] regretted that the Government did not satisfactorily respond to the Committee's 2015 conclusions."¹

While the Committee called upon the Government of Algeria to take strong measures to improve compliance with Convention No. 87, the Government has since then only escalated its attack on SNATEGS.

IndustriALL, ITUC, IUF and PSI are deeply concerned with the continuing and escalating belligerent behaviour of the Algerian government. We believe the situation can only deteriorate further without your urgent intervention. We call on you to urge the government to respect the right to freedom of association. In particular, we request that you urge the government to stop the war on SNATEGS, respect the union's rights and legal status, drop all charges against Raouf Mellal and union members and representatives facing prosecution solely in retaliation for their union commitment, and reinstate all those dismissed for carrying out their union activities and exercising their rights.

Yours sincerely,



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General Secretary
IndustriALL Global Union



Sue Longley
General Secretary
IUF



Rosa Pavanelli
General Secretary
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Sharan Burrow
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¹ ILO Provisional Record, Report of the Committee on the Application of Standards, 106th Session, Geneva, June 2017