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President: Jörg Hofmann
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Geneva, 01 March 2021

Mr. Guy Ryder
Director-General
International Labour Office (ILO)

By email: ryder@ilo.org

IndustriALL Global Union calls on the ILO for its urgent intervention to protect freedom of association and stop repression against independent trade union leaders and activists in Belarus

Dear Mr. Ryder,

I am writing this letter to you as the General Secretary of [IndustriALL Global Union](http://www.industrial-all-union.org), which represents more than fifty million workers in mining, energy and manufacturing sectors throughout the world, including Belarus, to express our deep concern regarding the pressure on the independent union movement and growing repression of union leaders and activists, who are exercising peacefully their fundamental freedoms and human rights in Belarus, and to call on the ILO for its urgent intervention to stop this unacceptable situation.

Trade unions rights and freedoms, including the fundamental freedom of association, the right to organise union activities independently, without any interference or pressure from governmental bodies, are not guaranteed in Belarus now.

The Belarusian authorities have denied the state registration of new trade unions. In August 2020, 200 workers joined the newly established local branch of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU) at Byelorussian Steel Works (BMZ). In response, union activists have been threatened with dismissals and are facing union busting practices. The local union of BITU at BMZ has not yet been registered by authorities, nor recognized by the employer.

Furthermore, repression against civil society has increased dramatically recently. Some workers, who joined peaceful protests, including Ihar Pavarau, Aliaksandr Babrou and Yauhen Hovar, were sentenced to up to three years in jail for participating in a strike. They were accused of organizing, preparing or actively participating in actions that grossly violate public order, as on 17 August they had blocked the road in a protest against election fraud and police violence.

The Belarusian authorities are clearly trying to intimidate everyone in order to discourage people from struggling for democracy and human rights. IndustriALL Global Union continues to receive reports from affiliated independent trade unions in Belarus on detentions of their union activists and human rights defenders.

On 16 February, the office of IndustriALL affiliate, the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union (REP), was raided by the police. All communication devices and laptops were seized, along with almost all basic documentation, including accounting documents. Officials refused to give a copy of the search record, or supply an inventory of the seized items. The same morning, the police searched the home of the REP lawyer for the Brest region, Vladimir Maley, and confiscated his personal equipment, books and money, and he was detained.

The apartment of the chairman of the REP primary trade union at the Minsk Motor Plant, Andrei Komlik-Yamatin, was also searched on 16 February, and he was detained for refusing to open the door. The next day the court sentenced him to 25 days of administrative arrest "for disobedience to an order or request of an official on duty".

According to the state security agency, the Investigative Committee of Belarus, the mass searches and interrogations are aimed at "establishing the circumstances of the financing of protest activities" and were carried out as part of criminal proceedings under Article 342 of the Criminal Code on the "organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order"

The REP union leadership stated that the police planted a hunting shotgun cartridge in a couch in the office kitchen to justify further repression, which may result in allegations of terrorist activity with lifetime imprisonment or death penalty. Considering the ongoing human rights violations and systematic lack of justice, REP chair Vasily Zavadsky was forced to leave Belarus.

IndustriALL Global Union denounces this outrageous attack on independent trade union leaders, activists and human rights defenders, which is clearly an attempt by the state to destroy the country's civil society organizations that have been fighting for fundamental human and workers' rights in harsh undemocratic conditions.

We consider these brutal raids carried out under false pretexts as an act of repression and an attempt to undermine the independent trade union movement, in breach of international labour standards and norms, ratified by Belarus.

The Belarusian independent unions urgently need a stronger involvement and intervention by the international community; otherwise, they may fall victim to the repressive regime. The entire independent union movement in Belarus is under threat.

Therefore, IndustriALL Global Union calls on the ILO to intervene urgently, adopting all possible measures to stop the interference in trade union affairs by law enforcement agencies, and to end repression of independent trade union leaders and activists.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Valter Sanchez". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'V'.

Valter Sanchez
General Secretary