



Brussels, 8 March 2012
BS/TJ/sw

Baroness Catherine Ashton
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the
Commission
European Commission
BE-1049 Brussels

Letter sent by e-mail: catherine.ashton@ec.europa.eu

Egypt: trade unions

Dear Ms Ashton,

Further to my letter of 13 February about the need for EU support to independent trade union organisations in Egypt, I am writing to bring to your attention the deep concerns at recent developments expressed by our Executive Committee yesterday.

In particular, I am writing to request that you intervene urgently with the military government of Egypt to annul the 26 February sentence against Kamal Abbas, general coordinator of the Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS). We understand that a court in the city of Helwan sentenced Kamal Abbas, in absentia, to six months imprisonment for “insulting a public officer.” The purported basis for the sentence is a public statement made by Kamal Abbas against Ismail Ibrahim Fahmy, Acting President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), while he was delivering a speech to the International Labour Conference last June. Mr Abbas denounced Mr Fahmy as not representing the interests of the workers of Egypt. The ETUF had long been viewed in the international labour community as a government-dominated trade union body with little legitimacy. That view is confirmed by the designation of Mr Fahmy as a “public officer” – demonstrating his lack of independence.

This sentence signals a serious blow to the right of freedom of association in Egypt. It is unfortunately not the only instance of attacks on independent trade unions, but part of what is mounting evidence of a concerted strategy by the authorities.

Deputies from the Freedom and Justice Party, who hold a majority in the Parliament, have presented a new draft law on trade union freedoms, overturning the draft I had referred-to in my previous letter, that had been presented by Dr Al Boreyi in his then function as Labour Minister and that had been drawn up after extensive consultations with the social partners and the ILO, and indeed had apparently been accepted by the FJP, perhaps cynically prior to the elections. This new draft would impose trade union monopolies at enterprise level, in contravention of ILO Conventions, and can be seen as a precursor to an attempted take-over of the trade union movement by the FJP and their Salafist allies in Parliament.

On 29 February, officers of the transport union member of the Egyptian Federation of independent Unions (EFITU), while seeking a negotiation meeting with the public transport authorities, were violently aggressed by politically-motivated thugs under the eyes of officials and police personnel who did nothing to help. There are reasons to believe that this attack is part of a concerted campaign of intimidation against independent unions in the run-up to the Parliamentary debates on the draft law.

I would ask the EU to act urgently towards the Egyptian authorities so that they desist from the course of action that is emerging. I am attaching my letter of 13 February which set down some proposals aimed at advancing trade union freedoms in Egypt and would urge you to give them positive consideration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Ségol".

Bernadette Ségol
General Secretary