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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC welcomes social pact in Tunisia

Brussels, 14 January 2013 (ITUC OnLine): A social agreement is due to be signed this Monday 14 January by the ITUC affiliate in Tunisia, UGTT, and the UTICA (Union tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat), under the auspices of the Social Affairs Ministry and in the presence of ILO Director General Guy Ryder.

The signing is highly symbolic as it coincides with the second anniversary of the Tunisian revolution that ignited the Arab Spring. The social contract, covering industrial relations and social protection, employment and vocational training policy, underlines the importance of social dialogue as a genuine pillar of a democratic transition towards greater social justice. It also highlights the UGTT's pivotal role in the construction of a new Tunisia.

Whilst welcoming the signing of the social agreement, the ITUC underlines the importance of implementing the terms of the Declaration. "It is essential that this should not simply be left on paper. The circumstances demand it," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "The social situation remains highly critical. Unemployment and poverty are rising endlessly and labour disputes are all too widespread. Human and trade union rights, and women's rights in particular, are under threat, and everything must be done to stop this as soon as possible."

Just last month, in December, the UGTT was the target of a violent assault by Islamist militants <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article12667&lang=fr> who are largely left to act with impunity. These militias regularly attack trade unionists, journalists, women and opposition party leaders. The signing of this social contract and its vital implementation constitute a major step forward for the democratic transition in Tunisia and should serve as an example for other countries in the Arab world where social dialogue is nonexistent. "Social dialogue is a key element of democracy. It is the right answer to the many expectations raised by the Arab Spring," underlined Sharan Burrow.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 308 national affiliates.

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