

26 June 2009

His Excellency Ambassador Mahmoud Movahhedi
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
PO Box 705
MAWSON ACT 2607

Via facsimile: (02) 6290 2825

Dear Ambassador,

Re: Persecution of Iranian trade unionists

I write on behalf of The Australian Workers' Union - Australia's oldest union and this country's biggest blue-collar union – to express my deep concern about the persecution and harassment of trade union activists in Iran.

The AWU supports today's global protests by union members in many countries demanding justice for Iranian workers.

The AWU calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to respect basic labour rights under the International Labour Organisation (ILO) charter to which Iran is a signatory.

These are basic labour rights which unfortunately working people in Iran do not currently have:

- freedom of association;
- the right to organise;
- collective bargaining;
- abolition of forced labour;
- equality of opportunity and treatment; and
- other internationally-accepted standards regulating conditions across the entire spectrum of work-related issues.

The so-called Islamic Labour Councils and Workers' Houses are a mockery of worker representation – they are used largely to police the religious habits of working people in their workplaces and their homes.

These Islamic Labour Councils are used as a discriminatory mechanism against religious minority groups, including the Baha'I and Jewish communities who are not allowed to enjoy equality of treatment in the workplace.

The Islamic Labour Councils monopolise workplace representation, and ensure that almost all attempts at independent trade union organisation is met with repression.

It is no wonder that last week in Geneva the International Labour Organisation (ILO) placed Iran on a short list of countries that consistently violate internationally recognised standards for the protection of women, children, religious minorities, as well as workers and trade unions.

I am particularly concerned about the current reports that the heroic representatives of my brother unions, the Food Workers' Union and the Haft Tapeh Sugar Workers' Union, are currently in jail.

Mr Ebrahim Madadi and Mr Farzad Kamangar are currently imprisoned, with five more sugar workers leaders recently given one year jail sentences.

Mr Mansour Osanloo, the President of the Tehran Bus Workers' Union, who has been characterised as the Lech Walesa of Iran, has spent more years in the Evan Prison – a well known hated centre of torture in Tehran - than he has been in freedom since he formed the union in 1995.

Their only crime has been to demand their democratic right to form a trade union and campaign for respect and dignity in their workplaces.

Despite all the tactics of the Islamic Republic these good and decent people have been able to organise the nucleus of democratic trade unions representing the interest of their members.

But the Islamic Republic has sought to shut down this opportunity for democratic civic activity by independent unions, using extreme repressive tactics.

I believe that defending the rights of these workers is part of the current struggle for freedom, democracy and economic development in Iran.

We have been witnessing daily on our television sets this struggle, since the so-called Presidential elections in Iran.

I hope that you will soon be able to respond positively to my letter saying that the protestors in the street have been able to declare victory, and the dictators Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei has been overthrown.

I hope with the arrival of democracy to be able to extend an invitation to the leaders of the the Food Workers' Union, and the Haft Tapeh Sugar Workers' Union, to address the next national conference of The Australian Workers' Union.

The introduction of democracy, and the establishment of internationally-recognised human rights in your country, are a prerequisite to solving the current political and economic crises in Iran.

The AWU strongly urges Iran to comply to the numerous calls by the ILO to provide information on how that country will conform to already ratified employment and equality-related Conventions.

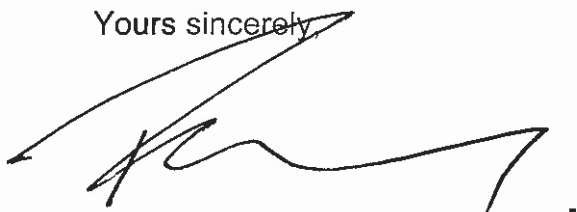
Further, the AWU strongly urges commencement of a process with the ILO to ratify Convention 87 on the Freedom of Association and Convention 98 on Collective Bargaining.

The world needs to hear from the leadership of your country that Iran intends to join the international community in respecting freedom of thought and expression.

The AWU wholly endorses the organizations of rallies and public demonstrations - in Canberra and across the globe - in support of such an outcome.

I join the international community in asking for an end to the repression of your citizens, especially of those who speak up to defend human dignity and justice.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paul Howes', written over a horizontal line.

Paul Howes
NATIONAL SECRETARY
THE AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION