

Thursday, 17 May 2012

The Middle East

In the early years of our own country, Australian unions played an important role in establishing a democratic space for workers and guaranteeing the right of workers to have a voice in society. Australian trade unions continue to play a role as one of the key guarantors of a democratic way of life.

The ACTU and its affiliates recognise that trade unions in Egypt and Tunisia are today playing a similar role; creating the conditions for a democratic space and acting as guarantors for on-going democratic values in their countries.

The trade union movement in Australia congratulates the workers of Tunisia and Egypt who, through their unions, have played a central role in the overthrow of despotic regimes in their respective countries and will continue to promote democracy by ensuring the voices of working people are heard in newly established institutions.

The courageous Tunisian and Egyptian trade unionists exemplify the spirit of millions of workers spread across Northern Africa and the Middle East. From Iran to Morocco, and across the Arabian Peninsula to the Gulf countries, these workers are demanding the same rights and privileges hard fought for by their Tunisian and Egyptian brothers and sisters.

Many of these unions – some still underground others operating openly or semi-openly – are looking to the global trade union movement for support for their on-going struggles.

A vitally important Middle East union struggle is going on in Iran today. There is real potential for a democratic union movement to follow close on the heels of the victorious independent Egyptian and Tunisian trade unions, by building effective mass support to bring down the current regime. However Iranian trade unionists continue to be targeted, detained and tortured.

The ACTU and its affiliates will continue to support the cause of independent trade unions seeking workers' rights and the creation of new democratic societies based on respect for human rights across the Middle East and North Africa by:

- Advocating for the aspirations of independent unionists and their struggle to form vibrant, new democratic organisations;

Secure Jobs. Better Future.

- Working with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the broader international trade union movement in providing support for independent trade unions and standing in opposition to attacks on trade unionists;
- Expressing concern about the well-being of several prominent trade union activists across the region experiencing persecution and /or serving prison sentences.