

Ref: GK/GB:dd

8 February 2011

Excellency Omar Metwally
Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Australia
1 Darwin Ave
Yarralumla ACT 2600

Dear Ambassador

Re: Situation in Egypt - violence and intimidation must cease

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is gravely concerned over the situation in Egypt and the escalation of violence which has occurred in recent days.

We have been informed by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) that militias led by elements of the ruling party, have begun to terrorise the population, attack demonstrators, and are trying to stop people from exercising their freedom of expression. Further, we understand that your government has given instructions to all employees in public sector companies and the employees of the government to go out in demonstrations with the intent to sabotage the real protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Violence has ensued and escalated, with deadly consequences.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has long highlighted the gravity of the decent work deficit in Egypt where unemployment, underemployment and informal work are among the highest in the world. The failure to address this situation effectively, with all of its consequences for poverty and unbalanced development, together with limitations on basic freedoms, has triggered this historic outpouring of popular demands.

The restrictive legislation in Egypt which allows the operation of only a single approved trade union federation and obstructs free organization of workers in trade unions of their choice, violates basic worker rights and must be repealed. In June 2010 the ILO Conference regretted that the Government of Egypt had made no concrete progress on these fundamental points and called for tangible steps to be taken forthwith to ensure that all workers may form and join organizations of their choosing without any interference from Government.

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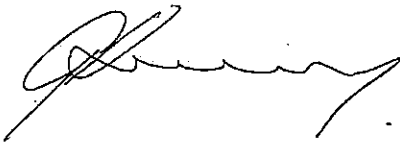
In spite of these restrictions, nationwide mobilizations of recent days have led to the establishment of the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation. It has called for jobs, a living minimum wage, social protection, and freedom of association. The ACTU welcomes this new development in the exercise of the rights of Egyptian working people. Their voices must now be heard.

It is of fundamental concern to the ACTU that no person should suffer discrimination or reprisals of any type for having practised their fundamental rights. We call on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that any such acts are prevented and that all necessary protection is provided to those in need of it.

The ACTU stands by its Egyptian colleagues in independent trade union organisations, who have always stood firm in defence of workers' rights in spite of the extremely difficult and overtly hostile circumstances. We endorse the calls from the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the ILO Ban Ki Moon and Juan Somavia, for the leaders of Egypt to "listen attentively and sincerely to the voices of the people", and to give effect to "their responsibility, first of all, to provide decent jobs and good opportunities to maintain a decent living."

The ACTU calls on the Government of Egypt to exercise its responsibilities to defend its citizens from the militias and to protect peaceful demonstrators. It must also ensure that those responsible for the violence are held to account and do not go unpunished. The ACTU expresses its solidarity with its Egyptian brothers and sisters in this difficult situation. The Egyptian Government must fulfill its obligations under international law and respect trade union rights and fundamental liberties such as freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,



Ged Kearney
President

Cc Hon Kevin Rudd, Minister for Foreign Affairs