

**Ayuba Wabba**

President  
Président  
Präsident  
Presidente

**Mr. Guy Ryder**

**Director-General  
International Labour Organization  
Geneva, Switzerland**

**Email: ryder@ilo.org**

**Sharan Burrow**

General Secretary  
Secrétaire générale  
Generalsekretärin  
Secretaria General

**HTUR/LEX/MG/PKD**

**18 January 2022**

**Request for intervention regarding the systematic crackdown on the exercise of civil liberties and trade union rights by the government of Tunisia**

Dear Director-General,

We are seriously concerned about the ongoing and systematic crackdown on civic space and trade union rights in Tunisia and call on you to urge the government of Tunisia to uphold its international labour rights obligations and create conditions where trade unions can operate without interference and in a climate free of violence, pressure, fear and threats of any kind.

Since the beginning of the political crisis in July 2021, we have witnessed a rapid and worrying escalation of repression towards opposition forces and increased systematic interference in internal trade union affairs. On 22 September, President Saïed issued Decree Law 117, which suspends all but two chapters and the preamble of Tunisia's constitution, granting the president control of most aspects of governance, including the right to legislate through decrees and to regulate media, civil society and the courts.

On 9 December 2021, the president issued a circular to all ministries and government institutions prohibiting anyone from negotiating with the trade unions without the formal and prior authorization of the head of government.

On 13 January, the employees of the main public television channel went on strike after having exhausted all possibilities for the renewal of a negotiated sectoral agreement. At 10:00 p.m., a police squadron (50 vehicles) surrounded the television room, questioned the strikers one by one and ordered some back to work in an attempt to intimidate the striking workers and break the strike.

On 14 January, which corresponds to the tenth anniversary of the Tunisian revolution, thousands of Tunisians took to the streets but were denied their right to peaceful assembly and expression as thousands of police surrounded the entrances to the capital's main avenue and attacked the protesters with jets of water, truncheons and tear gas and arrested many. Some protesters remain in police custody and are being processed for the courts.

We are deeply concerned about the growing intolerance of the government for civil society, including independent trade unions defending the economic and social rights and interests of members. This form of intolerance is being translated into such attacks, intimidation and constant efforts to interfere in trade union administration. This is unprecedented in Tunisia since the 2010 revolution.

Moreover, we are gravely concerned that the government is using the courts and other state institutions to pressure trade unions and other members of civil society with the aim of chilling their exercise of civil liberties and labour rights. It is particularly of serious concern that the government is increasingly using military trials to crack down on civilians for the sole purpose of having publicly criticised President Kais Saied. In the past three months alone, the military justice system has investigated or prosecuted at least ten civilians for a range of offenses.

On 12 January, the Tunisian government decided to impose a night curfew and cancel or postpone all events in open and closed spaces. The curfew came into effect on 13 January for two weeks. This was ostensibly part of a series of measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. We recall that in line with international labour standards, measures to address or respond to COVID-19 must be based on social dialogue and respect for human rights and civil liberties, including the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW). This was not the case here.

While the human rights and freedom of association climate is shrinking, the government is also speeding up the implementation of the measures required by the IMF without any formal consultation with the social partners. The UGTT has received the information about the plans to reduce 10% of the wages of public service employees and freeze them for five years, reduce energy subsidies, and privatize certain public companies. Again, the government is violating its obligation to engage in meaningful consultation on a matter with such devastating consequences for the workers of Tunisia.

We urge you to use your good offices to immediately intervene with the Tunisian president and his government and urge them to respect civil liberties and labour rights, refrain from any retaliation against workers exercising their right to strike, release all protesters and drop all charges against them; to take positive steps to create a climate free of violence, intimidation and threats of any kind; to refrain from interfering in trade union affairs; and to engage in meaningful and effective consultations with social partners.

We count on your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Ben' followed by a stylized flourish.

General Secretary