

## ATUC Report to 4<sup>th</sup> ITUC World Congress

### Regional Context:

I. The degradation of the security situation and the exacerbation of armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya, which shifted the Arab region into a group of zones of tension and military conflicts and caused foreign interference, thus destabilising these countries and resulting in thousands of casualties and increasing numbers of refugees and displaced people. It also dragged these countries into an arms race at the expense of development, exposing the general conditions of the population to deterioration, including the conditions of the Arab working class.

II. The abuse of unilateral decision-making practices and the marginalisation of the role of social dialogue with economic and social partners. This allowed the spread of all forms of corruption and practices contrary to all rules of good governance in economic and social management and the absence of radical solutions to combat poverty, smuggling and the parallel economy.

III. The return to repressive practices and voice stifling in a number of Arab countries. Records have been demonstrating numerous cases of restrictions on trade union freedoms, freedom of organisation and expression. The demand for democracy in terms of peaceful succession to power, the respect for individual and collective freedoms, mainly that of trade unions, remain suspended and pending in most Arab countries.

The Arab situation at the social, economic and trade union levels is thus characterised by:

1- An absence of encouraging signs in the field of collective bargaining in most countries, in light of the still-absent clear legal framework for its establishment and of most Arab governments instrumentalising social dialogue as a mere circumstantial card with a periodicity and an agenda completely adjustable and limited to their interests.

2- The erosion of the social protection systems and the limitations of what it includes in most Arab countries. The financial coherence of many social security systems is being undermined, which threatens their sustainability. This is due to the unilateral policies pursued in their management, and in light of the growth of the informal sector and the large decline in employment rates, and the constant avoidance of workers' tenure, which is depriving workers of their right to benefit from effective social protection in line with international labour conventions, related conventions and even national laws.

3- High unemployment rates, especially among young people. This is the result of an absence of effective development policies and due to the governments' abandonment of their role in the production system and services highlighting a clear trend towards the privatisation of public institutions.

- 4- The significant decline in the effectiveness of the vocational and technical training system in most Arab countries in contributing to the reduction of unemployment rates in the absence of participatory reform plans based on the provision of skills according to the needs of the labour market. Most of these systems abandon their role in developing the skills of workers and their right to develop their career paths.
- 5- Weak occupational health and safety measures and procedures in the workplace, and the non-integration of the roles of occupational health and safety committees as stipulated in the national labour laws, causing high rates of work-related health and safety issues among workers.
- 6- The widespread and alarming prevalence of the informal sector in most Arab countries in the absence of a comprehensive approach to address the causes of this sector's growth and the lack of encouraging and stimulating action plans in legal frameworks.
- 7- The so-called economic transformations and restructuring policies have led to a decline in customs revenues, the aggravation of the phenomenon of tax evasion and the increase in the quantities of tax and social benefits granted to foreign investments. Consequently, the tax systems have lost their role in development and in achieving social justice and have influenced the individual income of Arab citizens negatively through more tax pressures. It has burdened the citizens and weakened their purchasing power, which led to the near total collapse of the middle class in most countries.
- 8- A disruption of the financial balances of most Arab governments and their involvement in solutions that depend on further divestment in productive institutions, resulting in layoffs, abandonment of basic materials and public services, and a failure to adopt plans to involve the concerned social parties in restructuring these institutions and raising their productivity.
- 9- The spread of corruption is accompanied by weak anti-corruption initiatives. Most Arab governments have adopted superficial approaches, which allow corruption to proliferate, with manipulation of public funds, money laundering, smuggling of subsidised basic goods and tax evasion.
- 10- These and other issues have caused an increase in poverty rates, social exclusion, deterioration of the social structure especially within the interior areas, widespread of inadequate housing, slums and poverty belts in most Arab countries, in the absence of fair development policies and lack of infrastructure to encourage productive investment.
- 11- Governments are reluctant to promote the social and solidarity economy despite the economic and social solutions it provides.
- 12- The growing phenomenon of migration, especially in the Arab countries, and the recording of numerous violations of migrant workers' rights and the increasing number of cases of human trafficking, forced labour, wage discrimination and poor working conditions, especially in construction, agriculture and domestic work sectors in a number of countries.

13- In the midst of despair hovering over large groups of Arab youth resulting from the impasse keeping them from obtaining decent work that preserves their dignity, the phenomenon of secret immigration among the Arab youth towards the countries of the North is growing. It has become a real issue in light of the increasing number of victims drowned and imprisoned victims in detention centres in Europe; not to mention those falling into the traps of human trafficking networks.

14- Discrimination against Arab women and their low participation in the labour market. Arab countries have become last in the global order in terms of respecting gender equality as one of the most important branches of social justice and equality among citizens.

### **ATUC Activities**

15- Since its founding congress in October 2014, the Executive Secretariat has been keen to implement activities that cover the full scope of its mandate, whether at the level of the ATUC internal administration or in the field of international cooperation with a special effort to devise new forms and means to enable the Secretariat to carry out its tasks in the best possible manner and within the limits of the financial resources available.

16- In order to achieve the goals set by the founding congress, the Executive Secretariat has been able to undertake at least 174 activities (constitutional bodies, meetings, seminars, campaigns, international participation, projects activities, studies...). Considering the particular difficulties associated with each founding phase, in a crucial regional context, this has been achieved through an exceptional effort to mobilise financial resources through international cooperation with friendly organisations and SSOs.

17- The Executive Secretariat has been keen to make the most of the financial resources available to modernise its work, particularly in the field of information and trade union training (daily monitoring of the latest trade union violations in the Arab region, publishing an annual report on this issue as well as in-depth reports on the social situation). This material is published in three languages on the ATUC website. Furthermore, the Secretariat publishes a monthly electronic bulletin, an interactive map and training videos as well as the "Unionist" application for smart phones with a daily presence on social networks, using modern means of communication. This is a unique experience aimed at taking advantage of the latest innovations in the field of information as well as in communication with member organisations and, more generally, with the trade union movement worldwide.

18- An important part of the Secretariat's efforts has been devoted to research and studies in order to keep abreast of the various rapid and deep transformations that have impacted the labour market in the Arab region and in the world. At the same time, at least 10 studies have been conducted on issues directly related to the status and future of labour relations and trade union rights in the Arab countries. These studies were conducted in collaboration

with member organizations that participated in various seminars held to present the findings and recommendations of each study. In the same context, the Executive Secretariat organized several other training courses benefiting 200 trade unionists, giving priority to youth and women.

19- During the last period, the secretariat established and actively engaged with four regional networks: women, youth, media and also legal which provides legal assistance to the affiliated organisations and supports them in relation to the ILO Standards Committee.

20- Media activity contributed to wider dissemination of knowledge on ATUC and comes as an addition to the efforts to strengthen relations with the ITUC, its affiliates and its regional organisations and to build permanent relationships with international institutions such as ILO, UNDP and OECD.

21- The Secretariat also maintained continuous cooperation with Danish and Norwegian trade union centres, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Belgian trade unions. This cooperation took the form of training programmes for young people and support of the ATUC electronic information system.

22- These activities contributed to the strengthening of the ATUC's international standing. In fact, the Confederation was able to conclude a cooperation agreement that is renewed annually and took part in the implementation of two broad scale international programs in partnership with other organisations and with the support of the European Union.

23- The first project is aimed at promoting social dialogue in the southern Mediterranean over the 2016-2018 period. The Executive Secretariat was entrusted with implementing the bulk of the project's activities.

24- The second program, which extends over the 2018-2020 period, aims to strengthen cooperation between trade union organisations and civil society organisations in the southern Mediterranean.

25- The growing number of activities of various types has given rise to administrative challenges, which the Executive Secretariat has managed to overcome. Throughout this period, the Secretariat was able to implement its program of work and fulfil all its commitments.

26- On another note, the Arab TUC, SARTUC and ASEAN TUC signed an MOU in 2015 and agreed to carry joint trade union actions to advance trade union solidarity and to strengthen cooperation among the parties for protection of both migrant and local workers. The MOU highlights eight (8) priority actions including providing services, advice and assistance to

migrant workers, notably through the establishment of Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs). As a follow up, the ITUC-AP has been supporting the three sub-regional organisations to formulate their joint work plan in protecting migrant workers in the Arab States, South Asia and Southeast Asia Region. The work plans clearly identify five priority actions for affiliates to push for: (1) Ratification of Related ILO Conventions (2) Sharing of Information, Experiences and Good Practices (3) Establishment of Migrant Resource Centre (4) Organizing Migrant Workers and (5) Managing Arrangement for the protection of the rights of migrant workers.

27- Finally, the second congress of ATUC was held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 October 2018, where affiliates adopted an updated Platform and Action plan and the Constitutional bodies of ATUC were re-elected.