

RESOLUTION NO. 11

Labor Rights in Iraq: Speak Out!

After more than six years of military occupation with nearly \$650 billion of taxpayer funds being spent on the military occupation of Iraq, and more than 4,300 U.S. troops deaths, as well as a million or more Iraqi lives having been lost, the real democracy in Iraq still remains more of an aspiration than a reality.

One of the fundamental building blocks of a democratic society is the right of workers to join unions of their choice free of government interference, domination, harassment or repression.

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. nullified most of the repressive Saddam-era legal code, but kept on the books and continued to enforce a 1987 law that Saddam Hussein imposed making it illegal for public sector and public enterprise employees to join unions or negotiate the terms of their employment.

The subsequent Iraqi Interim Governing Authority continues to enforce this undemocratic denial of worker rights, and the newly elected Iraqi government imposed additional restrictions on worker and union rights, including seizure and freezing of union bank accounts and assets.

U.S. and Iraqi forces have raided, ransacked union offices, assaulted and detained union leaders and management of public enterprises, including the oil industry, and have been directed not to recognize or bargain with unions.

A vibrant, pluralistic, and independent labor movement continues to grow in Iraq despite harassment, beatings, kidnappings, detention, torture and even murder of trade union activists.

Article 22, Section 3 of the new Iraqi Constitution promises respect for worker rights, the foremost freedom of association, and calls upon the Iraqi government to enact a law that guarantees the right to form unions.

Iraq is also a 1962 signatory to International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 98 on the right to organize and collectively bargain (which the U.S. has yet to ratify), thereby also imposing a treaty obligation to respect worker rights under international law.

The ILO assisted the Iraqi government to draft a basic labor law that conforms to the requirements of the Iraqi constitution and international norms for respect of labor rights, and yet the Iraqi Parliament has failed to act on the law or even release a draft to the public.

These transgressions of fundamental labor and human rights have taken place for more than six years without a word of criticism from the U.S. government to Iraqi authorities and it is long past time for the U.S. government to speak up for the rights of Iraqi workers and unions.

Coalition of Labor Union Women
15th Biennial Convention
Los Angeles, California
October 14-17, 2009

Respect for and enforcement of labor rights anywhere encourages respect for and enforcement of labor rights everywhere, including in the United States.

On May 20, 2008, former AFL-CIO President John Sweeney wrote to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki to say:

“The continued use of the legislation to hinder workers' fundamental rights, together with the issuing of new decrees which build on this legislation is a direct affront to democratic values. As a member of the ILO, the Iraqi government has the obligation to respect the principles contained within its core conventions and allow the existence of trade unions and refrain from interference in trade union activities. The AFL-CIO calls upon your government to take immediate steps to adopt a labor law which will bring Iraq into compliance with ILO core labor standards before trade union elections are carried out.”

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

CLUW requests and urges the U.S. government to strongly call upon the Iraqi government to live up to the terms of its own constitution and international treaty obligations by:

- Respecting the right of free association and other worker rights defined by ILO Conventions for all Iraqi workers;
- Ceasing all repression of Iraqi unions, union leaders and activists;
- Releasing union funds and assets that have been frozen or impounded and permitting unions to operate normally;
- Directing management of public enterprises and government jurisdictions to recognize and bargain with unions freely chosen by their employees;
- Promptly adopting a basic labor law that enshrines these rights and obligations in the legal code of Iraq;

CLUW will communicate these concerns to the U.S. government through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, with an additional copy to the Iraqi government through its embassy in Washington, D.C.;

CLUW requests that the AFL-CIO and other Labor Federations initiate through the International Trades Union Congress and other bodies with which they are associated, an international campaign in defense of labor rights in Iraq and for a basic labor law that conforms to the standards established by the International Labor Organization conventions on the rights of workers;

CLUW will participate in the campaign for labor rights in Iraq by circulating the petition* in support of those rights initiated by U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW) and will make a copy of this resolution available to its affiliates and request they also participate.

* <http://uslaboragainstawar.org/laborrighspetition>

Submitted By: Philadelphia CLUW Chapter
Committee Recommendation: Concur
Convention Action: Concur
Committee Assignment:

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