To: The International Labour Organization  
A Message from Egypt  
To the Labour World Convening in Geneva

While the Egyptian workers face severe living conditions which challenge their ability to survive, their low wages are insufficient to meet their minimum needs in shade of high rates of inflation and soaring prices of food materials, their calls increasingly demand higher wages and better working conditions and their movements struggle for fair wages and honorable life, and while they are in dire need to express and negotiate their demands, they find that their right to be represented in the International Labour Conference is monopolized by those who turn their backs to the workers’ suffering and struggles, abuse them and deny their demands.

The Egyptian trade union organization is at the present time headed by Mr. Hussein Kassim Aly Megawer who became president of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) since about 18 months ago according to a decision of the ruling party. He occupied a leading position in that party for quite a long time. Regardless to his reputation before presiding over ETUF and regardless to the deterioration of ETUF and its discourse which became very antagonistic to any opposing current or voice, there are certain facts concerning the President of ETUF which are highlighted as follows:

❖ Mr. Hussein Megawer is the president of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation. At the same time he is a member of the board of directors of Suez Cement Company (Italy Cement) as a representative of the Government of Egypt (one of the partners of the Company). In June 2006 he was appointed member of the board of directors Turah Cement Company (which is owned also by Italy Cement as its representative and according to its decision). Consequently, the president of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (who is supposed to be the first representative of the workers) is representing capital for the benefit of the owners and investors of the largest cement companies in Egypt.

❖ The dual role of the president of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation - as a representative of the workers and the employers at the same time in one of the major industrial sectors in Egypt (cement) and in one of the major companies which almost monopolizes the cement industry in Egypt – raises serious questions about the justification of acquiring and keeping both posts particularly that one of his sons who owns a transportation company (with a
capital of Egyptian Pounds 65 million) entered into a contract agreement with the Italy Cement Co. to transport its cement products in Suez and Helwan.

During the privatization process of the Suez Cement Co. (whose shares were sold mainly to one anchor investor which is Italy Cement) Mr. Hussein Megawer (the then board member of the General Trade Union for Building and Wood Industries Workers and is currently the President of ETUF) was rewarded by the company’s management by the amount of Egyptian Pounds 200 000 for facilitating the service termination of hundreds of workers according to the early retirement scheme. Amongst these workers were members of the trade union committee (the plant union) of the company to the extent that the union was dissolved. It is worthy mentioning here that Mr. Sayed Taha Hassan president of the General Trade Union for Building and Wood Industries Workers helped Mr. Hussein Megawer in his mission against Egyptian Pounds 140 000.

Many Egyptian circles announce their surprise by the several posts which ETUF’s president occupies not only in ETUF’s institutions and in the cement companies but also as a member of the parliament for the ruling party and Chairman of its Manpower Committee, Assistant General Secretary of the Arab Labour Organization “ALO” (as a precedent and blatant violation of ALO’s regulations which prohibit the combination of this post with the presidency of a national federation). Many people expected that Mr. Megawer would resign his post as ETUF’s president in compliance with ALO’s rules but they were surprised that he remains not only in the two posts but also in all the seats he occupies which are more than ten,

Several independent and opposition newspapers wrote about the big rewards which ETUF’s president gets from Italy Cement Company (in addition to what he gets as a president of the Workers’ University, the Workers’ Education Association and the Tourist Institution owned by ETUF and his compensations as a member of the Parliament and the general secretary of the Club of the Suez Cement Company). The hugeness of these amounts attracted the attention of the Egyptian society to the degree that a member of the Parliament requested a parliamentary interpellation in the subject. The interpellation is still pending on the agenda of the People’s Assembly “the Parliament” as an apparent example of corruption.

In spite of the compensations which Mr. Megawer and other board members of ETUF in their capacity as president and board members of ETUF’s institutions, the condition of these institutions is deteriorating. Most of them are almost paralyzed. One of these institutions is the Workers Education
Association which gives each board member an amount of Egyptian Pounds 600 as expense allowance in addition to the amounts they get for any action they may perform. The deteriorating Association has become problematic to the extent that the budget deficit reached Egyptian Pounds 17 million.

It is worthy mentioning that some of ETUF’s board members take compensations from ETUF’s institutions. For example, Mr. Mustafa Mungy vice-president of ETUF gets a monthly compensation of Egyptian Pounds 6000 and another Egyptian Pounds 6000 as incentives from ETUF’s Tourist Village. In addition, Mr. Mohamed Sharkawy President of the General Trade Union of Tourism Workers gets a monthly compensation of Egyptian Pounds 3000 and another Egyptian Pounds 3000 as incentives. The responsibility of these members for these institutions does not exceed the trade union functions according to the division of work in ETUF. Such functions are supposed to be voluntary because they have no relation with the technical and administrative functions performed by full time specialized employees.

Mr. Hussein Megawer in his capacity as ETUF’s president and the president of its financial and banking institution (the Egyptian Workers Bank) adopted the idea of merging the bank with the Industrial Development Bank - in spite of the opposition of many members – for the following causes:

- The trade union organization owns more than 52% of the share capital of this bank. There is no doubt that it is the workers’ money (trade union subscription fees). So, the merge should have been at least discussed in a more democratic way with the grassroots of the T.U. organization. Some of the old trade unionists presented suggestions to save the bank in order to preserve the money which was paid by millions of workers year after year. These suggestions included the following:

  “To give the bank a period of one year in order to increase its share capital as required by the law.

  “Mr. Ahmed Abdel Zaher former vice president of ETUF and president of the General Federation of Cooperatives suggested the participation of cooperative federations in increasing the bank’s capital. He paid the price of this suggestion by a plot which excluded him from the new formation of ETUF in its 2006/2011 term.

  “There was a suggestion to borrow an amount from the Central Bank of Egypt to cover the deficit – similar to the Industrial Development Bank (the loser bank which merged with the
Some old trade union leaders suggested to borrow of Egyptian pounds 150 million from the government, which is a part of the workers’ share in the profits of the public sector that was deducted and saved annually throughout many years in order to finance services rendered to the workers (which has never happened).

However, all of the above suggestions were ignored. There were not given a serious opportunity for discussion or consideration.

If the merger is justified by the failure of the Workers Bank to develop its capital, this same justification necessitates calling to account those who caused such a failure.

The Industrial Development Bank (a public sector bank) who is decided o merge with the Workers bank is one of the biggest loser banks in Egypt. So, we will witness the formation of a loser institution which will definitely collapse.”

The collapse of ETUF’s institutions is not the only sign for the deterioration of ETUF itself. The most serious situation is that of ETUF’s president vis-à-vis the Egyptian workers. He monopolizes their representation and refuses very strongly any opinion that may differ with his opinion concerning these workers. Following are some of these situations:

- Instead of developing its committees and increasing its membership, ETUF turns its back to the workers. If they try to organize themselves and register their trade union, ETUF’s president refuses to recognize it. For example, the workers of the Fluvial Arsenal for Ship Repairs (in Armant, Qena Governorate) convened a general assembly and elected the board members of their trade union committee. But ETUF’s president refused to recognize it as a member T.U. Committee of ETUF.

- ETUF’s president refused to make elections in seven trade union committees of the General Trade Union of Land Transport. They were excluded from the T.U. organization.

- The real estate tax workers announced their protests and strike during December 2007 asking for equal pay with the other tax employees. The number of those who went in strike exceeded 50,000 workers from all the governorates of Egypt. They gathered before the Cabinet of Ministers premises and announced a set-in for about ten days until
their demands were satisfied. ETUF’s president, as usual, raised doubts about the legality of the workers claims and the possibility of realizing them. He even instigated the state bodies against them so that they rejected him as a representative for them. Negotiations took place between the Ministry of Finance and some of the workers chosen directly during the sit-in period.

- The workers of Misr al Mehalla Spinning and Weaving Company (Mehalla el Kobra) announced to go in strike on 6th April 2008. They called for increasing their wages and the cash allowance for their meal. ETUF’s president called some of the trade union leaders of the company and obliged them to sign a pre-prepared statement. Regardless to the contents of the statement, the worker who refused to sign it was arrested and detained.

- ETUF’s president did not take any action when three workers of Misr al Mehalla Spinning and Weaving Company were arrested and investigated for accusing of calling for the strike of 6th April. The prosecution released them, but they were rearrested again. The three workers who are: Kamal el Fayoumy, Kareem el Beheery and Tarek Ameen, were detained for 54 days. Different alive powers, democratic activists, civil society organizations (except the ETUF) have announced their solidarity with those workers. When the days gone without responding, the detainees have no other way but to begin a hunger shrike that extended six days until they were released today, Saturday, 31st May.

The Egyptian Workers Assembly (Tagammu’)
for Trade Union Reforms
On behalf of the Tagammu’:
Saeed Gomaa
Former President of the General Trade Union for
Engineering, Metallurgical and Electrical Industries
And former Vice President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation.
Saturday, 31st May. 2008
Message from the Workers of Mahalla
To the International Labour Organization

The Egyptian Trade Union Delegation Does Not Represent Us

We the workers of Misr al Mehalla Spinning and Weaving Company hereby send our message to the ILO Conference in Geneva to announce that the 18 members of the Egyptian trade union delegation participating in the 97th session of the ILO Conference do not represent us for the following reasons:

We, the workers of Misr al Mehalla Spinning and Weaving Company (27 thousand workers) suffered for over 15 years from low wages which barely reach the poverty line. In addition to the depreciation of the Egyptian Pound, our wages were not increased and they can hardly sustain us. Neither the Egyptian Trade Union Federation nor the General Trade Union of Textile Industries Workers tried to call for improving our conditions or negotiate for them.

The election of our trade union committee held last October for the term 2006/2011 witnessed unprecedented violations which reached counterfeiting our own will. Votes sorting took place in a building surrounded by security forces and it was restricted to approach that building and people were kept more than 500 meters away from it. Sorting took pace under complete supervision of the security forces. None of the candidates was allowed to monitor the process or follow it up by any means.

After the elections, we the workers of the Company informed the company’s management that we will not accept the reward for the end of the year if the management did not fulfill its promise to make the reward equivalent to two months’ salary according to a decision issued by the Prime minister to this effect. We said that we will go in strike if the management does not enter into negotiations with us before the date of the strike. our call was ignored. We had to go on strike on 7 December 2006. the ETUF and the General Trade Union took an antagonistic stand against our movement. The ETUF was more royal than the king when it announced that our claims are illegal. Nevertheless, our strike succeeded to start successful negotiations which ended by realizing our demands.

Based upon the above, the company’s workers refused to be represented by the trade union committee of the company whose members were announced winners in the forged elections which were full of violations. Over 14 000 workers signed to withdraw confidence from that committee. A delegation of the company’s workers went to the General Trade Union of Textile Industries Workers, handed over the
lists of signatories officially and called to suspend that T. U. Committee. The General Union ignored all this.

The movement of Mehalla workers continued throughout last year calling for higher wages, removal of the Company’s chairman because he was involved in well known corruption cases which were proved when he stood at last before the prosecutor and was sent to the court later on. We organized the strike of 27th December 2007 which succeeded to realize some of our demands. We agreed to another round of negotiations which out to be completed before the sixth of April. (It is worthy mentioning that a committee of 100 members was chosen by us to negotiate with the management in stead of the official trade union organization and the trade union committee).

Some opposition powers announced the 6th of April a day for public protests indifferent governorates due to the increasing security tensions. The negotiation round of 30th March 2008 succeeded to increase the Meal Allowance. As a result, the strike date was postponed, and the door was opened again for a new round of negotiations. But ETUF’s president, instead of activating the negotiations and supporting the workers demands, called some of the trade union leaders of the company and obliged them to sign a pre-prepared statement to stop the call for strike.

On the sixth of April three of the company’s workers were pulled down to an ambush (under the pretext that a television channel wants to make dialogue with them). Then they were arrested and sent to the prosecution for investigation. They were accused of calling for strike and destruction. The prosecution office released them, but they were rearrested and they were detained for 54 days at Burg al Arab Prison (nearby Alexandria). The company’s management dismissed them because of their absence from work. The official trade union organization kept silent towards their illegal detainment while all civil society organizations have announced their solidarity with those workers. Recently, On Saturday, 31st May the workers were released after resorting to a hunger strike for six days.

We call for the immediate release of our three colleagues Kamal el Fayoumy, Kareem el Beheery and Tarek Ameen and their return to their work and call upon the international labour and trade union movements to consolidate with them. At the same time, we announce that the members of the Egyptian trade union delegation do not represent us for the aforementioned reasons.

Workers of Misr al Mehalla Spinning and Weaving Company
Sunday, 1st June 2008