A Report on the International Seminar of CTUWS about:

The Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining

A Possible Better World.... Starts Here
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25th – 26th March 2010, Cairo
“The Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining
... A Possible Better World ... Starts here.”

Under this title, the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS) had organized an international seminar on 25 and 26 March 2010, in Cairo, in the frame of celebrating its 20th anniversary.

The seminar was attended by representatives of international federations, (International Trade Union Confederation ITUC and Public Services International PSI), trade unionists from (CC.OO Spain, CGT, CFDT France, CGIL Italy, FNV Netherlands, AFL-CIO USA, and PGFTU Palestine), and international organization (Oxfam Novib, Christian Aid, The American Center for International Labor Solidarity and Rosa Luxemburg) as well as Egyptian trade unionists from (Real Estate Taxes Authority 'RETA' Union, Pension Holders 'under foundation' Union), labour leaders from (the Committee for Defending Rights of Administrative Education workers, El Mahalla Spinning Company, Tanta Linen, Flax and Oil Company and other working sites), CTUWS activists, journalists, civil society leaders and Eric Lee the head of Labour Start website.

The First Day, Thursday 25 March 2010:
At 10:30 Am, on 25 March, the opening session began and included addresses of CTUWS, ITUC and ETUC. Mr Salah El Ansary, member of CTUWS activists' council, moderated the session.

"The right to organize, and collective bargaining, if we look deeply to these two issues which are on the top of our seminar, we will find out that they are central issues in Egyptian society" said Kamal Abbas, General Coordinator of CTUWS, in his address to the participants, which he started with a brief overview on the history of CTUWS and the development of its supporting workers mechanisms through the last 20 years which witnessed a great change in both labour market and Egyptian labour movement. Then he added "without the right to organize, there is no collective bargaining, and without collective bargaining there is no stability in Egyptian society. This why when we put, 4 months ago, the strategic plan for the next three years in CTUWS, we put on top of our objectives 'supporting those who want to organize themselves and upholding collective bargaining in the society'. And I think that CTUWS activists did well with giving priority to these, because all labour protests, strikes and sit-ins in front of Egyptian parliament and in workplaces are result to two main reasons: the first one is deteriorating economic and social conditions of workers and the second is the absence of real trade union organization that can represent workers and negotiate on behalf of them in a real collective bargaining. But how comes workers negotiate without having the right to organize? For this we held this seminar."

"Today we face an economic crisis which has put tremendous pressure on workers and of course on their organizations. And the struggles that are faced by working people here are the same struggles that are faced by other working people in many other parts of the world. But of course, in many other parts of the world, workers enjoy the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining" said Stephen Benedict, the director of human and trade union rights department at ITUC, who brought to the participants in the beginning of his address the greetings of Mr. Guy Ryder, General Secretary of ITUC, then he added "I am a Canadian worker, I worked in a factory that produces airplanes, it was always interesting as trade union representative in the factory to see that when we organize meetings with workers to meet with trade union, we would be very lucky if 10% of the workers came to our meetings. However when we were in negotiations with the employer and workers could exercise their right to collective bargaining, then we always had 99.9%
of workers present. There is one thing that workers do understand, and that is their interest. Anyone who thinks otherwise doesn't know what workers want. What workers want is to be able to negotiate better life for themselves and their families."

"Screening the Egypt trade union situation gives reason for hope. The establishment of RETA brings light in a tunnel that seems not to be endless. More and more industrial conflicts demonstrate that there is life in the Egyptian working class", said Peter Seideneck, the advisor at European Trade Union Confederation ETUC, in his address which he sent it via email, and Mr. Gian Franco Benzi, representitve of CGIL, read it on behalf of him. Peter after he had paid tribute to the sincere and relevant action of the Center for Trade Union and Workers’ Services as an important pillar for change in the civil society in Egypt, he added "The ETUC is actively involved in the Euro-Mediterranean process. We required including a strong social dimension in that exercise. This was done. It is still on paper but we will work on that. The Euro-med Trade Union Forum required setting up a social dialogue structure. That had a positive start two weeks ago in Barcelona."

Around 12pm, the first session opened under title “Right of Egyptian Workers to Form Their Independent Unions”. Mr. Stephen Benedict, Director, Department of Human and Trade Union Rights at the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) moderated the session.

In his presentation on freedom of association in the Arab world, Mr. Jean Francois Courbe, Responsible for Euro-Mediterranean Activities at CGT France, spoke about the obstacles that face the Egyptian workers in organizing themselves and forming their own union, and he said that he knows a lot about the situation of Egyptian workers. As he explained, the Overlapping and combing positions among official trade union leaderships and the absence of democracy, lead to the separation between leaderships of official trade unions and workers and to underestimate the independency and democracy of trade union organization that are indispensable for any real trade-union organization.

Courbe gave an example on overlapping and combining positions, “it is common to find a head of trade union organization, a member in the ruling party or in the parliament at the same time”. Courbe pointed that this head in case of contradiction between the interests of his positions, he usually chooses his own interest not the interest of people whom he represent.

He also referred to the inactivity of law provisions that provide workers with the right to organize themselves in trade union organizations and to join or withdraw freely a union membership.

Courbe concluded with emphasizing on the necessity of continuing struggle for obtaining the right that provided by international conventions to organize and form trade union organization.

Then, Dr. Ahmed Hassan El Borae’i, Professor and Head of the Social Legislations Department, Faculty of Law, Cairo University, spoke about the compatibility of Egyptian legislatives, Trade Union Law in particular, with international labour standards, reviewing the remarks of the committee of ILO experts on the application of conventions No. 87 and 98 in Egypt.

First, El Borae’i mentioned that the freedom of association is not an exclusive right to workers but it is also a right for employers to form their organizations that can truly participate in the collective bargaining.

Then he pointed at several insufficient aspects of the law of trade unions No. 35 for the year 1976, as the following:

The current law put the financial supervision on trade union organizations, as article 65 states, in the hand of the Central Accountancy Authority, the general trade unions, and the official federation,
with the assistance of the Ministry of Manpower if needed. Such article, as El Borae'i explained, contradicts with the freedom of workers to manage their subscriptions money.

The Trade Unions Law gives, as article 14 states, the general trade unions the authority to monitor, direct and supervise the activities of the trade union committees.

Moreover, the law states that all trade union organizations shall be under the umbrella of one single national federation, which contradicts with the article No. 5 of the convention No.87 concerning freedom of association. The Article stipulates that “Workers' and employers' organizations shall have the right to establish and join federations and confederations and any such organization, federation or confederation shall have the right to affiliate with international organizations of workers and employers”.

Also, he pointed out that the subscriptions are obligatory deducted from workers' wages, as article 52 states ‘The enterprise in which a worker is employed shall, according to a written demand of the general trade union, cut-off the trade union subscription fees from the worker's wages and shall transfer 90% of the value of the cut-off subscriptions to the general trade union and the remaining 10% to the general trade union federation and the trade union committee during the first half of every month’.

El Borae'i marked that there is an urgent need to a suitable legislative change harmonizes with the change in Egyptian economic structure and labour market.

Then Ms. Rahmaa Refaat, programs coordinator at CTUWS, spoke about the potential legislative amendment and the draft law labour of trade unions which had been prepared by CTUWS.

She said that the current law does not match with the change in the Egyptian labour situation, especially after inserting Egypt among the list of individual cases of countries that do not respect the international conventions and agreements which has been ratified by its governments, for violating conventions No 87 and 98 in particular.

Rahma showed that the new draft law puts all powers into the hands of trade union organizations and its general assemblies, and makes the deduction of subscription fees for trade union membership optional, and gives workers the opportunity to form regional or geographical or sectors confederations according to their own free will.

She explained that the registration of new trade unions for being recognized could be done, as the draft law states, through applying the required papers to any court in the region of the newborn trade union not to the administrative authority at the ministry of manpower. Also she mentioned that joining or withdrawing from the trade union, according to the draft law, could be done through sending a letter to the organizing committee.

The draft law also states that there is no financial supervision from the ministry of manpower or other federation or general trade union on the subscription money that workers paid. Only the general assembly of trade union organization has the right to financially supervise the money of its members.

Later, one of the participants asked about the current situation of RETA union after applying the required paper for being recognized as an official union at the ministry of manpower, and the several attempts of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation ETUF to brake down the union through forming another alternative union in the federation for real estate taxes and customs workers in order to rose doubts about the legality of RETA union as independent union.

Then El Borae'i answered that all what is said about the illegality of RETA is not true, and he asserted to the participants that RETA union is a legal trade union. He added that he doesn't like to use the term of 'independent' to refer to RETA union because unions are independent by origin. Rahma commented also and asserted that the procedures that had been taken to form the union were
totally legal. She also said that the acceptance of PSI to RETA membership indicates a great proof on the international legality which is itself a basic requirement.

Afterwards Mr. Nabeel Abd Al Ghanee, Member to Council of Pension Holders union's founders’, asked for the international and legal support in order to finish the procedures of forming the union.

Mr. Stephen Benedict, the moderator of the session, asserted to the participants the full solidarity of the ITUC with the Egyptian workers, among them the Pension Holders union, in obtaining their legal rights to form their own organizations.

In the end of the session, Dr. El Borae’i announced to the participants he will take the issue of RETA union in case of any legal disputes.

Around 3pm, the second session opened under title 'Collective Bargaining or How can the workers practice their influence to change/amend polices? [Development of Organizations, mechanisms and Dynamics]'. In this session panelists showed the mechanisms of collective bargaining in the European unions. Mr. Bill George, President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, moderated the session.

Ms. Alejandra Ortega, Responsible for Arabic Countries, Africa and Asia at CCOO-Spain, spoke about Social dialogue and Collective Negotiations in Spain. She mentioned that 'social dialogue cannot exist without the mutual recognition between the government and the other social actors, the presence of both the trade unions and the employers organizations and a climate of confidence and credibility which allows direct and indirect participation in decision making'.

Ortega referred that 'The collective agreement on Spanish legal standards is effective and has a general legal force. Negotiations took place according to the rules stipulated by the Labour Law issued in 1980. It means that the agreement is binding for all labour relations and it has a legal force. The agreement is also applied on all the workers and employers covered under its scope regardless of their affiliation or non affiliation to other organizations'.

However, the situation, as she explained, had been changed. 'In 1994 an amendment in the law was introduced which was rejected by the trade unions confronting the socialist government. The amended law dealt with the competence of legislation and collective bargaining. It introduced the legal provisions which define the minimum level of the regulatory rules amendable by collective agreements. In this framework, there was an increase in the number of matters, which the law has completely designated for collective negotiations without regard to the other matters, which are not regulated by the agreement. As a result, there are some sectors and groups of workers without regulations governing their affairs. Problems started as a result of this lack of regulatory coverage, unorganized work, fragmentation of labour sectors, the appearance of different forms of employment and the strong impact of the new forms of business administration on the labour force. All these factors had a strong negative impact on the workers.'

Then Ortega continued 'As a fruit of the social dialogue which started in 2004, the negotiators and the government signed a new agreement in May 2006. The main approved procedures aim at reducing disputes, reducing the number of indefinite agreements and changing temporary jobs to permanent jobs. Added to this are the approved procedures for a draft law on equality between men and women. The main concept of the draft law is that companies which employ more than 250 workers must negotiate on plans and procedures for achieving equality between working men and women.'
Then Mr. Leo Mesman, Policy Advisor Netherlands Trade Union Confederation FNV spoke about 'Social dialogue and Collective Bargaining in Netherlands'. In the beginning of his presentation, he mentioned that 'Real social peace can only be attained if all stakeholders recognize the existence of different interest groups and are ready to search for ways to balance these different and sometimes clashing interests by means of appropriate forms of dialogue and collective negotiation'.

In Holland, as Mesman explained, there are about 25% of all workers members of a trade union, while 90% of the employers are organized. There are three trade union confederations. FNV, which is the largest one with 1.4 million members (= 73% of all unionized workers) in 19 affiliated unions. The second confederation is a Christian one, CNV. The smallest one is the confederation for Middle and Higher personnel, MHP.

Mesman referred to the two main organizations that participate in the social dialogue in Netherlands, which are Labour Foundation that had been established through a private initiative by the central employers’ associations and the trade union confederations, and the tripartite Social and Economic Council (SER) that has 33 members, 11 appointed by the employers, 11 by the trade unions and 11 independent experts appointed by the government. The SER meets every month in a plenary session and advises the government on all major socio-economic topics.

He also mentioned that these two consultation institutions is that they force the key-actors in the socio-economic system to meet each other frequently, not only in formal sessions but also informally, to discuss all kind of topics and to try to reach consensus about them.

Leo said that more than 80% of the employees are covered by a collective labour agreement, while not more than 25% of them are unionised. Then he added 'the low union density rate may, in fact, be a direct result of the protection, which all employees enjoy under the declaration of universal applicability'.

In the end he asserted that 'the building of real trade unions and employers’ organisations is not enough. The government on its part should demonstrate a sense of responsibility and a sincere interest in a respectful and meaningful dialogue with the social partners'.

Then Mr. Philippe Réau spoke about 'The conquest of freedom of association in France and formation of the CFDT'. Réau remarked that the struggle of CTUWS activists for right to organize and collective bargaining reminds with the same struggle in Europe and particularly in France, to conquest these rights in the nineteenth century. Réau referred to the word "Union" (Trade Union for English), that it comes from the Greek "trustee" which means two things "lawyer" and "agent" in charge of defending a community. "Make union" in the nineteenth century, as Réau explained, meant creating an association to defend common interests on the workplace.

Then Réau pointed out that the official recognition for unions was achieved in 1884 by an Act which is still a legal reference for them. This law also gives the right to federate (combining the unions of the same professional sector) and to confederate (combining these associations). However, this law, though it founded legal base in reality, but it was not that sufficient. In practice, the right to organize needed to be defended and strengthened. It took more than 20 years for common unions to be recognized by the law. Only in 1946, the freedom of association was enshrined in the French constitution, and officials had the right to be unionized.

Réau asserted that no French trade unionist today loses sight of the non-recognition of freedom of association and collective bargaining is incompatible with democracy.
There was no better than trade unionism as a collective organization to defend the public or private interests of employees but also for precarious workers and unemployed' said Réau and added 'but the quality of its action and its effectiveness make it special. Indeed bringing employees from each work place and organizing them to counterbalance the power of shareholders and company executives have no equivalent. Creating a social norm (that is to say, rights and procedures) through collective bargaining and legal action, to assume management and control Works (instance of employee representatives ) or manage a tripartite social protection (health and retirement pensions) are instruments that trade unionism as we understand it in France should consolidate and grow rich.’ Réau explained that the Confederate unionism as understood by the CFDT is both a struggle unionism and trade unionism negotiation. This approach combines challenge and sum proposal, mobilization and conflict negotiation, power and cons of management responsibility. In fact, this position seems strange in France, a country ravaged by the culture of conflict. The transport strikes in France are regularly speaking on behalf of the workers through the paralysis they cause.

From outside, the French trade unionism has emerged as an opposition between the proponents of the protest and supporters of social relations systematically oriented discussion and dialogue denying conflict. For its part the CFDT rejects this view. It wants to be at the heart of the process of changing the social and economic standing and did not undergo these changes. In short, CFDT wants to influence individual and collective futures.

Then Mr. Gian Franco Benzi, Representative of CGIL, spoke about the necessity of social dialogue as tool for obtaining stability and cooperation between all democratic forces within the society to enjoy justice and respect. He referred to the role of workers through continuous struggles in obtaining right to organize and collective bargaining. Moreover, Benzi emphasized on the role of international organizations to support workers in forming freely their trade union organizations, and developing programs of social dialogue.

Then Mr. Bill George, moderator of the session, gave the attended participants a chance to share ideas with panelists.

Many of participants talked about the possible actions that can be done by European unions in supporting Egyptian workers in forming their own trade union organizations, and activating social dialogue mechanisms, which the government deactivates in favour of the employers. The participants asked European trade unions and international federations to put pressure on the Egyptian government to amend its legislative system to be compatible with international labour standards. The participants also criticized the role of International Labour Organization ILO for dealing only with governments and official trade unions, asking the ILO for putting real pressure on the government and giving opportunity to the newborn social movement as well as the only independent union to build connection channel with the ILO.

Some participants talked about the difficulties that face workers, without the international solidarity, in committing a change in their battle with the government of National Democratic Party, which manipulates everything in the country and doesn't allow to anyone to play a role in unionism movement.

The Second Day, Friday 26 March 2010:

Around 10:30am, the first session in the second day of the seminar opened under title "Difficulties that Face the Egyptian Labour Movement". Mr. Mohamed Abd Alaziz Shaaban, Member to People's Assembly, moderated the session. In the beginning, Mr. Shaaban gave a brief historical overview on the unionism movement before the revolution of July 1952, when there were democratic unions that truly represented workers at that time. He also referred to the experience of
Then Mr. Kamal Abu Eitta, President of RETA Union, talked about the experience of the union as the first independent union in Egypt, and referred to the great ordeal that the Real Estate taxes workers have gone through when they form their independent union. Abu Eitta referred to the aggressive campaign of ETUF against RETA members, and its attempts to break them down. Abu Eitta called upon the workers who are involved in the Egyptian labour movement to form their own unions out of the umbrella of ETUF, as an only solution to obtain their rights.

He also referred that the pyramidal structure of ETUF and the domination of the government on the federation mean nothing but absence of democracy.

Abu Eitta pointed out that the discrimination against Real Estate Taxes Authority worker in favour of Public Taxes Authority workers was the reason for them to strike and later to form RETA union.

He also referred to the international solidarity of PSI which plays main rule in making the union internationally recognized.

Then Mr. Nabeel Abd Al Ghanee, Member to Council of Pension Holders union's founders’ spoke about the exprience of the union which still under foundation, reviewing the factors that lead pension holders to form their union. These factors include the following:

First: the Presidential Decree No. 242 on 31 December 2005 to attach the National Authority for Social Insurances to the Ministry of Finance, instead of being attached to the Ministry of Social Insurances.

Second: The decision of the Minister of Finance No. 272 for 2006 to attach the social insurance funds to the state budget.

In addition, the government reduced the value of the social increment for all who retired as from 2004 as follows:

1- In 2004 the government decided to disburse a social increment by 10% for all the employees and pension holders, but it decided the maximum amount for pension holders only at EGP 60.
2- In 2005 decided to disburse a social increment by 20% for all the employees at a minimum of EGP 30 and without a maximum. At the same time it decided a social increment by 15% only for pension holders without a minimum but with a maximum level of EGP 70.
3- In 2006 the government disbursed a social increment by 10% for the employees at a minimum of EGP 36 and without a maximum. At the same time it decided a social increment by 10% only for pension holders with a maximum level of EGP 70.
4- In 2007 the government disbursed a social increment by 10% of June salaries without a minimum or a maximum. At the same time it decided a social increment by 10% for pension holders with a maximum level of EGP 60.
5- In 2008 the government disbursed a social increment by 30% without a maximum. At the same time it decided a social increment by 20% for pension holders with a maximum level of EGP 100.

The value of this increment was collected through raising the prices and charges for all the Egyptians. This means that the government did not give an increment. On the contrary, it raised the prices by official decisions and the increase was borne by all the Egyptians including the pension holders.
Nabeel pointed out that the union combined thousands of delegates expressing the will of pension holders, their interests and aspirations for a dignified life. The union undertook its responsibilities and helped the early pension beneficiaries to regain their right in disbursing the variable wages and the differences in the social increments for 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. The union’s membership is increasing day after day to make it the democratic and independent platform for pension holders in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Nabeel mentioned that union founders got an offer from ETUF to be affiliated to the federation; however they refused such offer, due to their lack of trust towards ETUF.

Then Mr. **Sayed Habib**, a labour leader at Misr Spinning and Weaving Company of Mehalla El Kobra, talked about the experience of El-Mahalla workers and their recent strikes and the absence of the role of the official trade union.

As Habib explained, the company was one of the advanced sites for labour movements. In the 1970s there was the well known and big strike of 1975. It joined the spinning and weaving workers in calling for their right to take the week end vacation in the 1980’s. The strike of 1986 was a part of this movement. The strike of 1988 which called for allowances on the occasion of the beginning of the school year was also a big part of this movement.

The labour movement in Mehalla Spinning Factory, similar to other sites, suffered a lot of oppression after each strike: labour leaders were arrested, imprisoned or transferred to other companies. Then the movement suspended in Mehalla Spinning factory for over one decade, but it was resumed in January 2006.

Habib referred that the main reason of the strike in 2006 was the refusal of the management of the company to apply the prime minister decision of paying out bonus of two months instead of 100L.E.

Habib pointed out that coincided with the strike, the workers held what can be considered as an open general assembly meeting for the company workers. They decided to withdraw confidence from their plant Trade Union Committee (which is affiliated to ETUF). The decision was signed by twelve thousand two hundred and eighty five workers (12285) or more than half of the total number of the Committee’s general assembly which consists of twenty three thousand nine hundred and forty three (23943) members according to the lists of the last trade union elections which took place one month earlier (Wednesday 8/11/2006). However, the official trade union refused to accept the decision. This act is considered as an obvious violation to the law.

Habib referred to the intention of the workers of the company to form an independent union to be an alternative organization for the official one, which does not really represent the workers.

Later, some participants said that it is required in the next phase to encourage workers to form their own independent trade unions that truly express their free will, depending on the international conventions that had been ratified by the Egyptian government. Some participants emphasized on the right of pension holders to organize themselves and form a union.

Meanwhile, other participants asserted the legality of the independent RETA union. They asked RETA representatives in the seminar to neglect the attacking campaign of ETUF and to work hard on keeping the unity and independency of the union.

On the other side, other participants discussed the relationship between political forces and labour movement, and they refused the way of some political forces that use labour movement to fulfill their own agenda.

Some others participants criticized the weak role of ILO regional office in Cairo.
Around 2pm, a collective interactive debate, opened under title ‘Magnification of the Egyptian Labour Movement’s opportunities. .............. How?’ Mr. Ghassan Slaiby, Sub-Regional Secretary for Arab Countries at the Public Services International (PSI) moderated the debate which divided into three Working Groups plus the guests group, to discuss and develop suitable strategies to challenge obstructions, enable workers to build their organizations and develop negotiation tools and mechanisms as well as engage with the mechanisms of the International Labour Organization and develop international solidarity.

At 5 pm, the moderators of each group brought out the results of Groups discussions and recommendations, as the following:

**Recommendations of the first group:**
- Spreading strike culture and rising the awareness toward the right to organize
- Activating laws that provide protection to workers in the private sector
- Forming a committee of NGOs for supporting workers who go on strike
- Concerning international solidarity:
  - Emphasizing on the international support to Egyptian labour movement
  - Supporting all initiatives to form trade union organizations independent from the official federation
  - Putting pressure on the Egyptian government in the annual International Labour Conference ILC to compel its laws with international conventions that had been ratified by the government.

**Recommendations of the second group:**
- The need of RETA union and Pension Holders union to develop their organizational structure
- On the human resources level, there is a need for training and educating the organizers in RETA union, Pension Holders union and the committee for defending the rights of administrative education workers
- Providing labour solidarity within the same factory or from other workplaces to dismissed and transferee workers due to leading or being involved in a strike.
- Providing daily media coverage and legal support for workers who go on strike in front of parliament or other workplaces, and linking them with decision-making circles through delivering their demands.

**Future vision:**
- Coordinating between all labour movements on both national and international levels through exchanging experiences
- Establishing an international court concerning the labour rights' violations similar to the WORLD COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
- Activating campaigns on the draft law of labour trade unions and raising the minimum rate of wages.
Raising international cooperation between international federations and NGOs in Egypt instead of ETUF.

**Recommendations of the third group:**

- The importance of building independent trade unions.
- Encouraging the workers in the private sectors to form trade union organizations and geographic, industrial or sectors federations in order to activate workers' right to organize and collective bargaining.

**Recommendations of the guests group**

- Providing Egyptian labour movement with all kinds of international solidarity.
- Delivering information about any kind of violations against labour rights in Egypt to ILO and experts committees on applying international basic labour standards.
- Practically providing the Egyptian labour movement through PSI and ITUC with helpful and supportive programs.
- Providing the Egyptian independent trade unions with training programs on freedom of association and organizing campaigns.
- Exchanging experiences between international federations and Egyptian independent trade unions.
- Encouraging Egyptian independent trade unions to join international trade union and educational networks.
- Putting pressure on the Egyptian government to amend its law to comply with international conventions.
- Concerning ILO, Giving priorities to Egyptian labour situation.
- Activating the role of ITUC in Amman to support independent unionism movement in the Arab world.
- Encouraging all independent trade unions in the Arab world to build connection channels between them.