



Brussels, Geneva, 11 August 2017

**To Vice-President Mogherini
High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

Sent via e-mail

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cc:

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ATTACKS ON INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS, SEARCHES IN THE OFFICES OF TRADE UNIONS REP AND BITU, DETENTIONS, INTERROGATIONS AND ARREST OF A UNION LEADER IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Dear High Commissioner Mogherini,

We write to you on behalf of IndustriALL Global Union, International Confederation of Trade Unions (ITUC), IndustriAll European Trade Union and European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to express our deep concern and indignation over the recent attacks against trade union movement in Belarus.

On 2 August 2017 representatives of the Belarusian Committee of State Control penetrated in the offices of the Belarusian Independent trade union of Miners, Chemical workers, Oil-refiners, Energy, Transport, Construction and other workers (BITU) and Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union (REP), both organizations are members of the IndustriALL Global Union, and are also members of the International Trade Union Confederation through the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions. During the searches the authorities confiscated hard drives from all computers, thus paralyzing the work of the unions.

Simultaneously, the searches were carried out in private apartments of the trade union leaders and activists Gennady Fedynich, Ihar Komlik and Natalia Pichuzhkina. The trade union leaders and some headquarters staff members were detained for interrogation. While most of them were released later the same day, Ihar Komlik, chairman of the REP Minsk city organization and REP chief accountant, remains in prison.

The authorities started criminal investigation against Fedynich and Komlik for alleged large-scale tax evasion for donor aid received as part of trade union cooperation. Both leaders risk up to seven-year imprisonment with confiscation of their private property.

We have serious reasons to believe that these actions of authorities are aimed at undermining the work of the independent trade union movement in Belarus in retaliation for the active civil position of trade union leaders and the activities of independent trade unions to protect the social and economic interests of the working people of the Republic of Belarus.

As you are aware civil society organizations in Belarus cannot use without restrictions gratuitous foreign donor aid due to administrative obstacles. The concerns about access to gratuitous donor aid have been raised a number of times with the Belarusian government by the Committee on Application of Standards of the International Labour Organization, but apart from cosmetic changes the problem has never been properly addressed and remains, as we witness now, a way to manipulate independent civil organizations in Belarus.

We believe that these actions represent interference in the internal affairs of the trade unions, which is a grave violation of ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association.


Earlier international unions sent a letter to the President of Belarus and demanded to immediately release Ihar Komlik, stop criminal prosecution of Gennady Fedynich and Ihar Komlik, the leaders of the Belarusian REP trade union, and remove all groundless accusations from them.

In addition, the unions demanded the cessation of the interference of power structures in the internal affairs of the REP and BITU unions and the adoption of urgent measures to ensure normal conditions for the activities of trade union organizations in accordance with the obligations of the Republic of Belarus under ILO Convention No. 87.

With this letter we urge you to raise these issues in your communications with the authorities of Belarus and also support our demands.

We will continue to follow the developments in Belarus and will keep you informed.

Yours sincerely,



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