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February 1, 2019

**BY E-MAIL**

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Leader of the Islamic Republic  
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

President of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
Hassan Rouhani

**Re: Concern for Labour Activists and the Union Leaders in Iran**

Dear Sirs:

On behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and CUPE Ontario, we want to express our deep concern and strong condemnation for recent events targeting labour activists and the union leaders in Iran. As Canada's largest union, with 680,000 workers across Canada, including 270,000 in Ontario, we have a strong tradition of building worker to worker solidarity in several countries, including Iran. CUPE recently supported the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) emergency resolution which called for the immediate and unconditional release of Esmail Bakhshi and Ali Nejati and other imprisoned workers and students in Iran.

Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholian were arrested on November 18, 2018 during the sugarcane workers' strike. We were relieved to learn of their release on bail in December 2018. However, we were deeply troubled by their harrowing accounts of torture at the hands of security police and the ministry of intelligence officials in the cities of Shush and Ahvaz. We are now concerned for their safety upon learning they were rearrested on January 20, 2019.

We have reason to believe these activists have been detained again because they chose to speak publicly about the torture they experienced while in state detention. Efforts to discredit their accounts occurred when false testimony was broadcast on the state-run TV station "Seda Va Sima" a day prior to their rearrests. It is widely believed these "confessions" were obtained through threats, beatings and torture. Amnesty International confirms this in a recent press release and reports that these detainees were forced to "confess" to colluding with Marxist and Communist groups outside Iran to orchestrate the overthrow of the political system through organizing strikes and demonstrations by workers.

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**MARK HANCOCK**

National President/Président national

**CHARLES FLEURY**

National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorier national

**DENIS BOLDOC, FRED HAHN, JUDY HENLEY, DANIEL LÉGÈRE, MARLE ROBERTS**

General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

We are also seriously concerned about the safety and freedom of members of the Tehran Bus Workers' Syndicate and especially our colleagues Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saeidi, who, were targeted in this so-called documentary as part of a 'failed plot' behind the strike action.

CUPE supports workers' struggles in Iran for the right to organize and against privatization, corruption and unpaid wages while at the same time calls for an end to economic sanctions by the US government against Iran. Depicting workers and union leaders as threats to national security and criminalizing public communication and international solidarity among workers in different parts of the world are all violations of the internationally recognized workers' and human rights.

CUPE calls on the Iranian government to take concrete and urgent steps to:

1. Free Esmail Bakhshi, Ali Nejati, Sepideh Gholian and other imprisoned workers, teachers and students in Iran immediately and unconditionally;
2. End persecution and prosecution of workers and union activists in Iran including members of Tehran Bus Workers' Syndicate, Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Workers' Syndicate, Iranian Teachers' Trade association, Ahvaz steel workers, among others;
3. Stop the harassment and mistreatment of imprisoned labour and social activists, and the forced confessions on political prisoners. All forced confessions must be considered null and void;
4. Establish a public inquiry, including independent lawyers, labour and human rights' defenders, to independently and transparently investigate the allegation of torture and mistreatment of imprisoned labour activists and other political prisoners, and punish perpetrators of human rights violations accordingly; and
5. Respect and observe the right to organize and strike for workers in both public and private sectors based on international labour standards stipulated in conventions 87 and 98 of the International Labour Organization.

Sincerely,



MARK HANCOCK  
National President



FRED HAHN  
CUPE Ontario President

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cc: The Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran – High Council of Human Rights  
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
The Honourable Hélène Laverdière, MP, NDP Critic for Foreign Affairs  
Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company  
Public Service International (PSI)  
Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)  
Farid Partovi and Zulema Young, Co-Chairs, CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee