

Spring 2025

## CODIR stands in solidarity with Iran's teachers and

### THEOCRATIC REGIME FORCES TEACHER UNION LEADER ESMAIL ABDI INTO EXILE

- ♦ CODIR unequivocally condemns the Islamic Republic regime's persecution and forcing into exile of one of Iran's most prominent trade union activists.
- ♦ From the very beginning, CODIR campaigned for all trumped-up charges against Esmail Abdi to be dropped.
- ♦ Two of CODIR's affiliates, the NEU and the NASUWT, campaigned for years for Mr. Abdi's release from prison and for his reinstatement to his teaching job.

Amid escalating intimidation from the regime's security forces and the looming threat of new charges and another lengthy gaol sentence, the former Secretary-General of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA) was compelled to leave Iran in Spring 2025. This forced exile occurred shortly after Mr. Abdi's release on bail, following the Supreme Court's acceptance of his request for a retrial request, having already served eight years and eight months of imprisonment in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison.

Upon his arrival in Germany, Mr. Abdi spoke to *IranWire*, reflecting on the bittersweet nature of his departure and current situation: "I cannot say whether I am happy or sad. While I was forced to leave my homeland, I am nonetheless happy to be reunited with my family." He revealed that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had recently filed a fresh complaint against him and, while awaiting the Supreme Court's review of the current case against him, the situation took a turn for the worse: "Unfortunately, the case was returned to the Security Prosecutor's Office for a change in the indictment. Therefore, because a new case had been filed - and instead of being acquitted, my case was returned to the prosecutor's office - I felt that a new arrest was imminent. I decided to leave Iran to continue my activities in safety and be alongside my family."

Mr. Abdi poignantly highlighted the profound personal cost of his activism, noting that he and his family had been separated for over a decade: "My [daughter] Mandana is now ten years old, but I haven't even been able to spend ten days with her."



### Regarding the likely future course of developments

Regarding labour activism in Iran, Mr. Abdi predicted that, "Teachers, workers, nurses, and all segments of society who are currently below the poverty line and exploited by the rulers will join the ranks of protesters, akin to a confederation in which all working-class people are present. This is because the fate of all of us is intertwined."

In early January 2025, one of his lawyers, Ramin Safarnia, noted attempts to coerce Mr. Abdi into appearing before court on new charges, despite the pending Supreme Court review of his original case. Prior to this, another of his advocates, Faramarz Khodashenas, revealed that his client had been dismissed from his teaching post and banned from leaving the country following a complaint lodged by the IRGC. His long history of persecution dates back to his first arrest in 2007. He has since faced repeated harassment, intimidation, and detention at the hands of the regime solely on account of his legitimate trade union activities and received a ten-year suspended prison sentence for his activism in 2011. In 2016, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for "assembly and collusion to commit a crime against national security" and another one-year term for "propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran" on charges that included establishing teachers' union branches and participating in civil society events.

The Islamic Republic's Ministry of Education also reportedly opposed his return to work or the making of arrangements for his retirement.

The long tortuous ordeal endured by Esmail Abdi and his subsequent forced exile underscore the continued very real pressures faced by labour activists attempting to organise in Iran.

# The Iranian women's struggle for freedom, equality, peace, and social justice continues!

## CODIR JOINS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVENT IN PARLIAMENT



On the evening of Wednesday 5 March, the Boothroyd Room at Westminster's Portcullis House was the scene of a great rally to mark the imminent International Women's Day 2025. More than 100 people attended the successful event.

CODIR, as a longtime affiliate of the Liberation organisation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom, established back in 1954) played a central part in the effort to put together a fantastic all-women panel to address the rally, which was very well-received by all who attended. The event was chaired by Baroness Christine Blower and was attended by MPs as well as women's rights activists hailing from several MENA countries in which women's rights are either severely repressed or where the women's movement has a prominent role in their respective national struggles.

Following the keynote addresses, there was a lively and informative Q&A as well as a discussion and exploration as to how the parliamentary representatives in attendance could help in taking forward some of the issues raised.

The panel included Dr. Iman Mustafa Hamad Hassanin (Sudanese Women's Union, UK & Ireland); Dr. Salma Saddawi (Iraqi Women's League); Ms. Maghboula Ahmed (Sahrawi community in the UK); Ms. Selina Musa (Palestinian People's Party); and Dr. Azar Sepehr (Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women).

Among the parliamentary representatives present at the event were Brian Leishman MP, Steve Witherden

MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, John McDonnell MP, Brendan O'Hara MP, and Mary Glendon MP - all of whom reaffirmed their commitment to women's rights and the struggle in each of the five countries represented on the panel.

The evening was a resounding success with valuable insight and inspiration drawn from the panel members' articulations of the courageous struggles - in which women play a prominent if not leading role - for equality, freedom, social justice, self-determination, and peace in their respective homelands.

Much food for thought indeed!

CODIR hereby reproduces the speech of **Dr. Azar Sepehr** delivered at the International Women's Day event on Tuesday 5 March 2025 at Portcullis House, on behalf of the **Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women**



The 8 March, International Women's Day, is a day to renew our commitment to the struggle for gender equality, and a world free from poverty, violence, discrimination, injustice and environmental destruction.

The first commemoration of this day took place more than a century ago, in 1911. By 1975 the UN had officially recognised this day as International Women's Day, with a call on all governments to secure women's rights and fight gender-based inequalities. In 2025, the battle still continues. As wars rage in different parts of the world, often to subvert the will of the people, to exploit their natural resources, or gain geopolitical advantage, women and their children suffer

## The Iranian women's struggle cont./

disproportionately from this violence. The recent rush to increase military budgets, following the threats from the extremist Trump administration, at the expense of services that benefit the people, is a serious threat especially to the working class and women. In Iran, in addition to the economic challenges that we face due to the regime's neoliberal policies, as well as the punitive Western sanctions, the theocratic regime has imposed its reactionary political Islam on all aspects of life and thus redefining the role of women as that of second-class citizens. They have done irreparable harm to the country by imposing a dictatorship based on religious dogma and superstition, and subverted the Revolution of 1979, soon after they consolidated their power. It is more than a century since the first celebration of the 8 March was held in the northern city of Rasht in March 1923. Despite the harsh conditions they face, Iranian women have proved to be vanguards in the struggle for fundamental changes in our country. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, women's battles have included demanding:

- ◆ A ban on polygamy,
- ◆ The right to divorce, to the custody of children,
- ◆ The right of travel without permission of husband or male guardian,
- ◆ Equal inheritance rights.
- ◆ Prohibition of child marriage
- ◆ An end to compulsory hijab, and freedom to choose one's clothing.

The women's movement has been one of the strongest and most effective in the popular struggle in Iran. The One Million Signatures petition, that demanded the removal of misogynist articles from the Constitution was the first of many successful campaigns. The regular protests and actions by women, whether as part of the broader protest movement for change or for women's rights, culminated in 2022-23 with the nationwide 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests.

This movement was qualitatively different, by the fact that women took a leading position, and it soon linked the demand for women's rights to the call for an end to dictatorship and for democratic rights. Young women spearheaded the movement that for more than six months traversed all 31 provinces and actively challenged the theocracy. More than 600 activists were gunned down in the streets, or were executed. Protests have continued in various forms over the past two years despite the regime's crackdowns. Currently, the clerical regime's social base is put at a maximum of 20%. A poll of 'Iranians' Values and Attitudes' in 2024, found a deep desire among the population to separate religion from the state. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement was significant in the way it



connected with several strata in society and demonstrated its readiness to link to the labour, youth and peace movements. Despite detentions, torture, and lengthy prison sentences, Iranian women continue to pursue diverse initiatives in the struggle. They continue to defy the order to wear the hijab, in the face of continued violence by the regime's henchmen.

The most courageous resistance has come from women political prisoners and their protests and hunger strikes against the death sentences passed on political prisoners. They have started the "No to Executions Tuesdays" campaign and declared their solidarity with all protests opposing capital punishment across the country's prisons. In July 2024, women political prisoners staged a sit-in in the Women's Ward of the notorious Evin prison, in protest against the death sentences passed on Pakhshan Azizi, Varisheh Moradi, and Sharifeh Mohammadi. The sentences and executions are seen as an act of revenge against the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. The Mothers for Justice are another voice of protest against all types of state violence, with many living in the shadow of open "security cases" against them or imprisoned.

Today, as the extreme right-wing government of Israel that has been responsible for the massacre of more than 45,000 Palestinians in Gaza alone, shamelessly threatens Iran with destruction and taking it back decades, the Iranian women's struggle against the authoritarian, misogynistic regime, co-exists with a resounding cry of 'No to War', 'No to Foreign Intervention'. Alongside women human rights activists, political prisoners, the Mothers of Khavaran, retirees, teachers, nurses, workers and labourers, housewives, students, and others, we continue the fight for the elimination of gender oppression, for freedom, equality, peace, and social justice.

**Long live international solidarity. Forward to a world free from war!**



## International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) mark World Day of Social Justice with report highlighting the experiences of persecuted trade unionists from the transport sector around the world



**Wrongful detention and exile of transport trade unionists in Iran: Ebrahim Madadi and Davood Razavi**

**Stephen Cotton, General Secretary of the ITF**, stated: "An attack on trade unionists is an attack on us all. The global labour movement stands together today, and every day of every year, with those who suffer at the hands of anti-democratic governments because of their trade union activities. The collective power of trade unions is the most potent counterforce against those things in society which cause division. This is what we mean in the movement when we say, 'An injury to one, is an injury to all'."

In Iran, the Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company [Syndica-e Sherkat-e Vahed] has long been a prime target for government repression. Retired workers Ebrahim Madadi and Davood Razavi, both pivotal figures in the Syndicate, remain unjustly imprisoned because of their trade union activism.

Ebrahim Madadi, formerly Vice President of the Syndicate, was arrested again on 11 August 2024. His legal troubles date back years, marked by repeated detentions for defending workers' rights. Previously, he faced a three-and-a-half-year sentence on similarly unfounded charges. He was also charged for organising a May Day 2015 event, which initially resulted in five years and three months' imprisonment - later reduced to one year by the Supreme Court. Despite serious health issues, authorities have decided to carry out his sentence.

Davood Razavi, a member of the Syndicate's

board of directors, was arrested on 27 September 2022 for his trade union activities and for meeting with French union representatives. He endured four months of solitary confinement under intense interrogation. After trial, Razavi was handed a five-year prison sentence plus a two-year ban on trade union activities, which was upheld on appeal. He is currently serving his term in Evin Prison and recently required hospital treatment for medical issues.

These cases are emblematic of broader systemic repression. Simply meeting with fellow trade unionists or trying to celebrate International Workers' Day [1 May] has been recast as a criminal offence by Iranian authorities. The Syndicate's leadership has repeatedly denounced the state's persecution.

### **The right to union activities: non-negotiable**

At our 46th Congress meeting in Marrakech last October, ITF committed to our belief that labour rights and trade union rights are human rights. Attacks on labour rights around the world, including fundamental principles and rights at work, erode democracy and fuel division between workers.

Today, on this World Day of Social Justice, we stand with all persecuted trade unionists. We reaffirm our commitment to speak out, to act, and to unyieldingly defend the fundamental rights of transport workers worldwide.

### **We call on:**

Governments worldwide to demand an end to political prosecutions and the repealing of draconian, punitive legislation used to persecute trade unionists.

International organisations to intensify scrutiny and take strong, unambiguous actions - diplomatic, legal, or otherwise - to safeguard labour activists like Carol Ng, Sticks Nkambule, Ebrahim Madadi, and Davood Razavi.

"Workers' rights are the bedrock of social justice - without them, democracy cannot thrive," stated Padraig Crumlin, President of the ITF. "The solidarity of the global labour movement is our greatest defence against oppressive regimes, and today, we reaffirm our commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with every single trade unionist facing persecution. We will not rest until each one is free."