



A Union of Professionals

September 12, 2011

Statement of Solidarity with the Working Men and Women of Iran

The American Federation of Teachers strongly protests the planned address of Iranian dictator, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the United Nations General Assembly. This year, rather than address the opening session, he has chosen to speak at the September 22 high-level meeting to commemorate the Durban Declaration on racism. Any speech before a General Assembly session by a man with so much blood on his hands is an outrage, but allowing him to speak at a meeting directly concerned with human rights is an insult to the founding principles of the UN.

In rejecting Ahmadinejad and the brutal regime that he heads, the AFT and our 1.5 million members are standing with the oppressed people of Iran, whose rights as workers and as human beings have been systematically destroyed by that regime. It was not long ago that Mr. Farzad Kamangar of the Teachers Union in Iran was executed for demanding his rights and those of his fellow teachers. Still today, hundreds of our Iranian colleagues sit captive in prison and are subject to horrendous acts of torture.

In addition to union organizers and political activists the regime continues to persecute women's rights activists, ethnic minority and student activists, as well as religious minorities. Officially sanctioned punishments, include amputation and flogging while common methods of torture in prison include, beatings, rape, sexual humiliation, long confinement in contorted positions, threats of execution, burning with cigarettes, pulling out toenails, sleep deprivation, severe and repeated beatings with cables or other instruments on the back and on the soles of the feet, beatings on the ears, inducing partial or complete deafness; blows in the area around the eyes, leading to partial or complete blindness; and the use of poison to induce illness.

We have protested and we will continue to protest the crimes of the Iranian regime along with our fellow teacher unions in Education International and the world-wide trade union community. We can only hope that the political leaders gathered at the United Nations General Assembly can come to understand the brutality of Ahmadinejad and his fellow thugs as clearly as do millions of trade unionists around the world.

At this historical turning point referred to as the Arab Spring our colleagues in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have taken to the streets and risked their lives to demand worker rights and human dignity. We can't forget that these popular revolutions owe much to the example set by the people of Iran, some of whom like the young woman Neda Agha-Soltan, lost their lives in the 2009 election protests. The AFT has extended its moral and material support to teachers and other workers currently struggling for workers rights and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa and we will continue to extend our solidarity to our brother and sisters in Iran in their ongoing struggle for justice and freedom.

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