



EFFAT



EFFAT- IUF Strategic Leadership Committee

Antwerp, 9 March 2023

Strengthening the international solidarity of trade unions to stem the global tide of right-wing populism and militarism

The far right and democratic trade unionism are two movements that could not have less in common.

The far right and militarism embodies the worst of the European and global ideological tradition: exclusive nationalist essentialism, dogmatism and political authoritarianism based on the myth of racial superiority and homogenous nations founded on one race or ethnicity.

Democratic trade unionism, on the contrary, stands for progressive societies, united working people, better lives for everyone based on core values of democracy, peace, unity, pluralism, equality and solidarity through social representation and collective responses to universal needs.

Military regimes and far right political parties specifically target democratic trade unions for their capacity to build collective confidence of working people to act. This collective confidence of working people in fact underpins the power of trade unions across borders to be at the forefront of the struggle against the rising anti-democratic tide. As democratic trade unions we share the same sense of responsibility to oppose a return to authoritarianism and militarism, overcoming division among working people and strengthening their ties to defend democracy and promote peace.

The rise of anti-democratic movements targeting trade unions is an international phenomenon that concerns Europe and the world alike. Only some examples:

- The February 2021 coup in Myanmar restored military rule and shattered hopes for democratic progress, resulting in the systematic suppression of human rights, armed attacks on civilian populations, and a brutal crackdown on trade unions and the imprisonment of trade unionists.
- In Tunisia, Esther Lynch, the ETUC newly elected Secretary General, was ordered to leave the country for participating in a protest against crackdown on trade union and workers' rights.
- In Hong Kong the suppression of democratic rights and freedoms under the National Security Law has seen the imprisonment of trade unionists and the forced dissolution of democratic trade union organizations, including the HKCTU.
- Belarus's trade unions have been under mounting pressure from the regime ever since the outbreak of a nationwide pro-democracy protest movement in the wake of the country's 2020 presidential election.

In several countries the rise of the far right has seen the reversal of gains made by women workers, with the dismantling of women's rights and growing gender inequality, coinciding with greater violence against women



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The rise of militarism and military conflict generates increased intolerance and violence against racial, ethnic and religious minorities; migrant workers; refugees and asylum seekers; and within these groups women face the greatest oppression and violence

- Violence against the LGBTQI+ working people and community at large is increasing at alarming speed threatening their security in Europe, Central Asia, Africa and beyond.
- In Iran the brutality of the governing authorities is scoring a miserable record of human rights abuses, and violence against women and girls, working people, activists and trade unions.

These and many other cases of attacks on democracy and democratic rights demands the attention and action of democratic trade unions around the world. It is in this context that EFFAT and the IUF join forces and coordinate their common response to counter the resurgence of attacks on democratic and trade union rights worldwide.

The resurgence of militarism and extreme nationalism is also driving an arms race in several parts of the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, that could lead to a renewed nuclear arms race.

Against this background, EFFAT and the IUF commit to:

- Seizing every occasion to promote peace: As trade unions we must build solidarity and develop a collective narrative to counter all forms of violence, intolerance and hatred based on race, ethnicity, language, social origin, descent, gender, age, or religion.
- Actively fighting and respond to the current cost-of-living hitting all working people and restore economic justice: poverty and economic fear is where anti-democratic and right-wing populist ideas find fertile soil.
- Bringing the fight to the workplace: Negotiate agreements that tackle growing intolerance, racism and discrimination in the workplace, community and in our unions.
- Join the global trade union network around the MANIFESTO of the International network of anti-fascist trade unions to build a response to the far right and militarism.
- Allying with other pro-democracy movements where appropriate calling for peace and disarmament, and to educate and mobilize our members to better understand peace and disarmament and become active in these movements.
- Develop education and training programs with affiliates on democracy and democratic rights and freedoms, including a better understanding of the history of dictatorship, authoritarianism, fascism and colonialism from a trade union perspective.

Alongside the IUF and EFFAT agreed on the following:

- Keep the issue as a permanent agenda item in each respective Executive Committee meeting.
- Present this Statement during the session on Peace , Democracy and Human Rights at the IUF 28th Congress for discussion and global endorsement.

Trade unions are democracies in their own and are a foundation of our democratic societies. Our history of defending democracy and democratic rights will be the footprint for our future actions – and our actions must be global in scope, reaching across borders to build the confidence of working people to fight for our collective futures.