

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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August 2, 2007

His Excellency Nouri Al Maliki, Prime Minister
The Republic of Iraq
Baghdad, Iraq

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

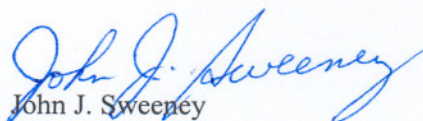
On behalf of the nearly ten million working men and women of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), I write to strongly condemn an order given by the Minister of Oil on July 18 prohibiting its agencies and departments from dealing with the country's oil unions, declaring them and all unions in the public sector "illegal."

Shockingly, this directive relies on labor and trade union laws developed by the previous dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, intended to squash democracy in the workplace, ban independent trade unions and silence workers. This attempt to silence Iraqi unions is an unacceptable attack on human rights in Iraq and a breach of the most fundamental rights to freedom of association, which Iraq is required to uphold by virtue of its membership in the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Your government's actions in this case appear to undermine a previous commitment to develop a new labor law in consultation with the ILO. This process began in 2004 and is currently on hold. Iraqi workers deserve a new labor law that would afford them, for the first time in decades, the rights enshrined in the ILO's Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Iraqi workers have been joining together freely to form trade unions across the country, including in the oil sector, since 2003. The AFL-CIO has worked closely with Iraqi labor representatives and their supporters worldwide to rebuild labor institutions and to promote trade unions and worker rights in Iraq. Trade unions are a fundamental civil society organization necessary for democracies to grow and thrive. We urge the Iraqi government to withdraw this order immediately. Further, we urge the Iraqi government to revive its consultations with the ILO in order to replace the labor laws installed by a dictator, with a truly democratic labor law worthy of a new democratic Iraq.

Sincerely,


John J. Sweeney
President

JJS/jc

