



Worker Rights Abuses in Iraq

Unions in Iraq

Five major Iraqi unions strive to support and represent workers in various parts of the country. More are forming every day.

★ General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW)

★ General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE)

★ Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI)

★ Kurdistan General Workers Syndicate Union/Irbil

★ Iraqi Kurdistan Workers Syndicate Union Suleimaniya

History of Iraq's Trade Union Movement

Iraq's union activism goes back to the 1920s, when the labor movement formed the working-class base of the struggle against British authority. But a series of coups that eventually brought Saddam Hussein to power crushed Iraqi workers' freedom to form independent unions. The Iraqi Trade Union Organization Law in 1987 abolished the minimum wage, the right to collectively bargain, the right to form independent unions, and the right to strike. Public sector workers were reclassified as "civil-service" and prohibited from joining or forming unions. Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, serious obstacles to unions remain. The 1987 law has not been replaced by a new labor law, which leaves the legal status for organizing and representing members ambiguous.

Labor Federations cannot meet safely in their union offices for fear of being targeted.



Iraqi labor leaders Hashimiya Hussein and Abdullah Muhsin

Worker Rights Abuses

- **Dangerous workplaces:** Workplaces are not safe from bombings, kidnappings, or shootings
- **Brutal murders:** Union leaders are targeted for assassinations, torture, and kidnappings. One of the most famous was Hadi Saleh in January 2005 among countless others.
- **Illegal seizures:** Under Decree 8750, the Iraqi Government seizes the bank accounts of trade unions.
- **Violation of Freedom of Association:** The Iraqi government has tried to interfere in the internal union elections of two union federations.
- **Trafficking:** Reports show that contractors supporting the U.S. military have employed thousands of foreign workers who had arrived in Iraq as victims of trafficking.

Programs and Progress



In February 2004, the Solidarity Center joined an international labor delegation on a fact-finding mission to Iraq. From this mission, the Solidarity Center established relationships with newly forming Iraqi trade unions, in partnership with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Global Union Federations (GUFs), and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Together, these programs help diverse trade unions build democratic, representative institutions from the ground up. The Solidarity Center supports all trade unions in Iraq regardless of religious or ethnic groups, and, as in other countries, is committed to a long-term union development program.

Left: Iraqi trade union workshop in Amman, Jordan

★ Training Center

Iraqi trade union members come every month for programs at the Solidarity Center's training center in Amman, Jordan. The ITUC and GUFs use the training center, which reaches hundreds of Iraqi workers in the course of a year. The center is also developing a library of trade union materials and documents in Arabic.

★ Workshops and Seminars

Workshops and seminars for union workers take place in various regions in Iraq such as Basra, Mosul, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Suleimniya, Irbil, and Nasriya. Topics include organizing, collective bargaining, economic policy, labor law, basic computer literacy, union management, and media outreach. A new program will launch in 2007 to help women in trade unions achieve leadership roles and push a working women's rights agenda within their unions and communities.

★ International Solidarity

The Solidarity Center connects Iraqi trade unions with their counterparts throughout the region and the world. As a result, Iraqi unions are developing solidarity coalitions with Middle Eastern, European, and North American unions and are integrated into global networks of unions in the building trades, public sector, transportation, education, petrochemical, and garment and textile industries.

★ Conferences

With the help of the ITUC and British Trades Union Congress, the Solidarity Center sent the presidents of Iraq's trade union federations to attend ITUC's 2004 World Congress in Miyazaki, Japan. In 2005, Iraqi labor leaders were honored at the AFL-CIO Convention in Chicago, Illinois.

★ Union Alliance

With the support of the ITUC and the Solidarity Center, the five major Iraqi trade unions have formed an alliance to advocate for new social safety nets, job policies, and economic reforms from the Iraqi government and international financial institutions.

