

# American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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March 9, 2015

His Excellency Haider Al Abadi  
Prime Minister of Iraq  
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq to the United States  
3421 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Your Excellency:

On behalf of the twelve and a half million members of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), I am deeply concerned that Iraqi workers—instead of being full partners in the process of strengthening and revitalizing the country—are, instead, unfairly bearing the brunt of the ongoing economic crisis and being adversely impacted by a variety of poor policies. This path inhibits the ability of Iraq's working families to support themselves and contribute to the economy.

For example, in self-financed enterprises under the Ministry of Industry, workers have not been receiving the wages owed them on time. I understand that the government has recently agreed to make loans available to these enterprises in order to pay workers their wages. While I am happy to hear that workers will receive pay for the work they have performed, I am concerned that a sustainable solution to this problem has still not been found. Further, the 2015 national budget contains troubling articles for workers in self-financed enterprises, specifically articles 31, 38 and 49, which, instead of ensuring their rights, increases their precariousness. These risks include possible transfer to the private sector and the concomitant reductions in pay, benefits and rights as well as layoffs and forced retirement.



His Excellency Haider Al Abadi

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The budget law also will make it more difficult for struggling companies to secure loans to pay workers' salaries, thereby compounding the problem of unpaid wages, corporate bankruptcy and rising unemployment. Given the current economic crisis and instability, this is a time to bolster public-sector companies in order to promote economic growth, expand employment opportunities and ensure the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Victimized workers through structural adjustment policies will only serve to deepen economic misery.

We urge the Iraqi government to search for alternatives that respect the rights of workers and their families. In addition, we call on you to respect the right of freedom of association, including the right to peaceful protest without harassment from security forces. Workers have started to organize, and your government should recognize their rights under international standards and negotiate with their selected representatives. Workers are integral to any successful efforts to revitalize and rebuild the Iraqi economy and to preventing or reducing the impact of future economic shocks. We urge you to create and implement policies that protect jobs and strengthen workers' rights.

Sincerely,



Cathy Feingold,  
Director, International Department