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Algerian trade unionists in critical condition as hunger strike enters fifth week ***Algerian government ignores deteriorating health of federal justice workers***

Geneva, Switzerland – In protest against repeated human and trade union rights violations, nine union members, of whom five are women, in Algiers, Algeria began an unlimited hunger strike on 6 May. Despite urgent requests for meetings, and daily reports on the hunger strikers' rapidly deteriorating health, the government continues to refuse to address the judicial workers' issues.

Leaders of the Algerian National Independent Union of Public Administration Workers are attending the International Labour Conference in Geneva to call international attention to this desperate situation. No longer mobile, the hunger strikers have dangerously low blood pressure and sugar counts, are suffering from muscular pain and can barely speak. A number of the women are mothers with young children.

Union president Rachid Malaoui explains, "These workers are demanding that the Ministry of Justice honour the commitments it made on 22 February 2011 to increase wages and respect workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining."

"These workers are asking for a dialogue with the Minister of Justice to discuss working conditions within the justice department. Yet the Algerian government is refusing dialogue or even acknowledgement of the protest. For the past year, all doors at the ministry have been closed," says union general secretary Nassira Ghozlane.

The hunger strikers began their protest following a government crackdown on a national protest by judicial workers on 24 April. According to a statement issued by the administration workers' union, security forces violently broke up the peaceful protest, wounding and arresting more than 150 women. Reports of severe police brutality against women held in detention include cases of multiple bone fractures, loss of consciousness, and one woman's subsequent miscarriage.

Workers in the judicial sector, who are primarily women, have led several protests in recent months against repeated infringements on their right to organize. Consequently, many workers have been denied pay, suspended, transferred or dismissed. Additionally, there have been numerous accounts of verbal and physical harassment of judicial workers.

The administration workers' union (le Syndicat National Autonome des Personnels de l'Administration Publique – SNAPAP) is an affiliate of the global union federation Public Services International. PSI general secretary Peter Waldorff says: "We call on the Algerian government to take immediate steps to ensure respect for fundamental labor rights, including trade union rights and civil liberties."

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