



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Brussels, 17 December 2012

BS/TJ/aa

Baroness Catherine Ashton
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European External Action Service
1046 Brussels

Letter sent by e-mail: catherine.ashton@ec.europa.eu

Copy to Mr László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Dear Ms Ashton,

Representatives of the European Trade Union Confederation and a number of our affiliates, together with representatives from the international trade union Movement, were present in Tunis last week to bring their support to the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail who had called a general strike for 13 December following a violent attack on the UGTT headquarters and a number of its leaders by members of the so-called League for the Protection of the Revolution, the militia of Ennahda, the largest party in the governing coalition, who were calling for the “dissolution and purification of the UGTT”. This was not by any means the first time that these militias had attacked trade unions and other democratic groups, though it was particularly provocative, being perpetrated on the 60th anniversary of the assassination of the UGTT’s historical leader Farhat Hached.

After initially attempting to play down the incident, the Tunisian government agreed to reopen negotiations, on 11 December, with the UGTT leadership. The talks led to an agreement in which the government pledged to set up a joint commission of enquiry to identify those responsible for the violence being perpetrated against trade unions for over a year and to bring the culprits to justice within the space of no more than 40 days, in exchange for the calling off of the general strike. The attached declaration of the UGTT National Administrative Commission shows the high degree of maturity and concern for Tunisia’s future in a difficult security situation, as well as its attachment to dialogue, shown by the Tunisian trade union Movement. You will also find attached the joint ETUC – ITUC declaration referring to the events.

I am writing to ask you to use all means, diplomatic, trade and economic, to bring pressure on the Tunisian authorities to meet the terms of the agreement reached with the UGTT and to comply fully with their obligation to guarantee security to all parties in civil society and to stop backward and reactionary forces seeking to destabilise the country and to block Tunisia’s

road to democracy. We also call on the EU institutions to improve and intensify their relations with the Tunisian social partners, recognising that social dialogue is a crucial prerequisite for Tunisia's democratic development and the preservation of basic human rights including gender equality.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Ségol', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bernadette Ségol
ETUC General Secretary