



ITUC CSI IGB

Arab Trade Union Confederation

Founding Congress

Together for a Better Future

Foundations and Aims of the Democratic and Independent Arab Trade

Union Movement

Report drafted by the Amman Office following the deliberations of the experts' meeting

Tunis, 11-16 April 2014

- I. Persistent economic underdevelopment**
- II. Deterioration of social conditions**
- III. Slow political reform**
- IV. Lack of awareness of trade union rights**
- V. Our current approach and demands**
- VI. Our pressing internal concerns**

I. Persistent economic underdevelopment

1. According to the UNDP human development index for 2014, the majority of Arab countries rank among countries with either medium or low human development. The economies of most Arab countries are rentier economies; they rely on dwindling raw materials, mainly oil. The Gulf States, Iraq, Libya and Algeria rely mainly on oil production. However, the economies of Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Sudan rely heavily on it. This had led to and continues to leave the organisational and economic structures of these countries in a fragile state with reduced efficiency and a lack of sustainability.
2. Based on the figures for 2013, the size of the economy of all Arab countries is limited in comparison to many other countries. It is no more than USD 700 billion, only 2% of the world economy. This is a modest amount compared to the economy of any medium-sized European country, such as Spain or Italy. Oil derivatives constitute 76.5% of their exports and exports from processing industries 15.9%, whereas exports of agricultural goods constitute only 4.9% of the total Arab exports.
3. There is a lack of fair and healthy lawful economic competition in most Arab countries; there is also a lack of transparency which results in a lower capacity for economic activity in both the public and private sectors. Most privatisation programmes carried out in the past two decades in a number of Arab countries have led to private monopolies replacing earlier state monopolies.
4. Structural defects in most economies in the Arab region have led to a noticeable regression in the status of the agricultural sector in the infrastructure of Arab economies, as a result of the old-fashioned production methods and techniques used and the ambiguous development priorities of most Arab countries. At the same time, imports of foodstuffs and agricultural goods to states in the region have increased hugely. This has led to an increase in the total cost of the food gap in Arab countries, which in 2013 was around USD 35 billion. Total Arab food self-sufficiency is less than 46%.

5. Transactions by all Arab countries with the outside world led to a rise in the surplus of USD 170 billion in 2012 despite of oil exports. Due to the large discrepancy between oil-producing and non-oil-producing Arab states, the external public debt rose to around USD 190 billion in 2012, 20.6% of GDP, the highest level of external debt ever reached by Arab states. The amount of the internal public debt rose to USD 332.7 billion in 2012 in nine Arab countries alone. Arab countries pay around USD 15 billion every year to service external debts. This had led to an increase in the barriers to economic and social development.

6. The public budgets of non-oil-producing Arab countries face increasing financial deficits, in spite of an overall position that shows that there was a surplus of USD 165 billion in 2012. At the same time, the functional classification of Arab budgets reflects the chaotic state of development priorities, with 27.1% allocated to military and security expenditure and 35.2% to social services.

7. There is a clearly lack of development in the Arab region, due to the continuing reliance on traditional sources of income without real modernisation of the existing production structures. Consequently, 11 Arab countries face deficits in their trade balances (imports and exports) and their transactions with the outside world. Fifteen Arab countries also face deficits in their services and income balances, reaching a total deficit of more than USD 124 billion at the end of 2012.

8. Arab countries are marked by economic disequilibrium in the field of development both within and between countries. Even though the average wage is either low or very low in most Arab countries, indicators of great wealth are also apparent in these countries. Also, while the individual share of GDP has increased in oil-producing Arab countries to USD 50,000 annually, it has fallen in most other Arab countries to less than USD 4,000 annually, according to UNDP figures.

9. Economies in the Arab region have seen a huge rise in average prices and the rate of inflation while average wages have not risen by the same level. This has led to deterioration in the standard of living for the majority of the region's inhabitants. Inflation rates in most Arab countries rose by 4% in 2012, and in the best cases varied between 2 and 3%.

10. The economic restructuring programmes carried out by many Arab countries over the past two decades in cooperation with the IMF and the World Bank conditionality have not improved the performance of these economies. These programmes applied a set of economic policies that focus on increasing economic growth rates, removing subsidies on goods, price liberalisation, liberalisation of foreign trade, privatisation of the public sector and reducing state intervention in the economy.

11. Over the past few decades, the economic choices that have been implemented through restructuring programmes have had clear results for the sectors and social classes that control the political and economic decision-making processes. Consequently, the social dimension was missed out in these policies which led to a gradual and continual deterioration in the standard of living for most citizens in the Arab world.

12. The poor capacity of Arab economies has led to their inability to provide sufficient job opportunities for the many newcomers to the labour market leading in turn to the unprecedented expansion of the informal sector, which has had and continues to have negative consequences and has affected the economies and labour markets of the region. The overwhelming majority of workers in this sector lack any form of legal and social protection or suitable work conditions. In addition, social security funds have been denied contributions from tens of millions of workers in this sector and state budgets have been denied tax revenues from clandestine labour.

13. The economic situation in the Arab region led to the rate of citizen involvement in production activities being lower compared to the international average according to the ILO 2014 report on employment: less than 49% of the total number of the working-age population compared to an international rate of 63.5%, and 59% in Europe, 70.8% in Asia, 56.1% in Latin America and 70.8% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

14. The situation of Arab economies has also led to unemployment rates in the region being the highest in the world according to the ILO 2014 report of employment; rates in the Middle East and North Africa vary between 11% and 12.2% respectively, whereas the global average is 6.1% and 8.6% in Europe, 4.7% in East Asia, 6.5% in Latin America and 7.6% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

15. Young people in the Arab world have paid an enormous price for the deteriorating economies in the region; the youth unemployment rate in the region exceeds all comparative rates elsewhere in the world, according to the ILO 2014 report on employment. It ranges from 27.9% to 29.5% in the Middle East and North Africa respectively, whereas the global average is 13.2%, 18% in Europe, 10.5% in East Asia, 3.5% in Latin America and 11.8% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

II. Deterioration of social conditions

16. According to a number of reports from UN specialist agencies, the development models used in the Arab region are marked by clear distortions. These development models vary from rentier economies, particularly in the oil-producing GCC states to economies that apply different degrees of chaotic and liberal economic policies, whereby the state gradually withdraws from its regulatory role in running the economy, including the public services sector. Most Arab governments have relinquished their essential role of providing basic social and economic rights to their citizens. These are rights that all governments must respect and strive to maintain as they are stipulated clearly and explicitly in the international conventions on human rights that have been ratified by Arab governments.

17. The withdrawal of the state from its regulatory role in economic and social matters has led to a rise in poverty levels in most Arab countries, to the extent that nearly half the population in five of the Arab countries live below the poverty line and a quarter of the population in five other countries also live below the poverty line. In most Arab countries, poverty is mainly a rural phenomenon as poverty levels are higher in the countryside than in cities. The rate of rural poverty in some countries has increased to include three-quarters of the total number of those living in poverty. The economic policies implemented have also increased the wage disparity due to the lack of effective policies and lack or weak social protection networks.

18. Informal settlements and slums have sprung up noticeably in a number of Arab countries due to the failure of the development models implemented, poor economic capacity, intensifying social inequalities and the retreat of the role of the state in providing different forms of welfare and ensuring economic and social rights to citizens. This has led to increasing streams of rural to urban migration to the big cities. Many studies indicate that 60% of Arab slums are located on the outskirts of cities, 30% are outside urban boundaries and 8% are around capital cities.

19. Most of the residents in the Arab world are young people under the age of 24. This is due to a rise in the population growth rate, placing increasing pressure on public services and economies to provide sufficient job opportunities for new entrants to the labour market, which is one of the main challenges facing Arab countries. On the other hand, the large number of young people in the Arab world can be seen as an opportunity to improve capacities that have not been sufficiently invested, giving the economies in the Arab region a relative advantage due to their labour pool being younger than in any other region.

20. According to a number of UN and specialist reports, in particular by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ISESCO), there has been a clear deterioration in the quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education in many Arab countries. Furthermore, illiteracy rates in the Arab region are still high, at a rate of 19.7% of the total population. This rate is noticeably higher among women than men and has a perceptibly negative impact on their integration into the labour market.

21. According to the latest reports on the healthcare situation of the population in the Arab region, most residents do not have sufficient insurance and healthcare provision to ensure a suitable level of health. There is a noticeable discrepancy in the health care services available in the different Arab countries as well as in the provision of health care in cities and rural areas. Health care levels for states such as Yemen, Sudan and Mauritania are very low, for example. The levels of health care in the main city centers are also far better than in smaller towns and rural areas far away from capital cities.

22. Women's participation in the labour market in Arab countries is still very low compared to many other regions and areas and did not exceed 21.5% of the total workforce (2011). The unemployment rate for women is also twice that for men. This is due to the weak structure of Arab economies and poor working conditions. It causes a large disruption in production capacity and has a lasting negative impact on the standards of living of citizens due to the high rate of dependent people.

23. General trends in Arab labour markets indicate that there has been a growth of child labour, e.g. children under 16 being in the workforce. Due to the lack of official statistics on the importance of this phenomenon, estimated figures put the number of Arab children involved in child labour at around 15 million. This is more than a quarter of children in this age bracket in some Arab countries. In addition, there are millions of homeless street children. This is due to a lack of compliance with domestic and international laws, including international labour conventions that prohibit child labour and protect the rights of the child.

24. Most Arab labour markets operate in noticeably poor working conditions, as most of them do not comply with internationally recognised labour standards stipulated in domestic and international law. Working hours can frequently exceed 8 hours a day and some employments do not provide any weekend breaks for workers. There are also poor occupational health and safety standards, low wages, a deprivation of the right to organise trade unions, to associate, collectively bargain and other fundamental rights at work.

25. As a result of the inequality in social conditions in Arab countries and especially between oil-exporting countries and others, the phenomenon of migrant workers had increased to the extent that labourers in many Arab countries are eager to work in wealthy Arab and foreign countries. Migrant labour still constitutes a social problem as in most cases work is carried out in circumstances under which legal and social protection is denied. Now that job opportunities in oil states have started drying up, the migrant workforce has started to move, particularly from North African countries, to Europe in recent years. Tens of thousands of young Arabs have died during clandestine immigration journeys to Europe.

26. Although there are social security systems in most Arab countries, these systems are weak and insubstantial in providing the variety of minimum social security benefits that must be available, including medical treatment, occupational injury benefits, pensions, maternity allowance, disability benefits, survivor's benefits and unemployment benefits. Most social security systems do not provide all of these benefits and these systems also fail to cover all workers comprehensively. Parts of ILO recommendation no. 202 on social protection floors are still unattainable in light of the existing circumstances in most countries and for most citizens in the Arab world.

27. Many people from different social classes, groups and sectors have expressed their weariness and rejection regarding the poor social and economic conditions by holding thousands of protests, including the increasing number of strikes demanding better working and living conditions. Protests in many countries have intensified into popular uprisings and some into revolutions that have violently shaken the existing political system.

III. Slowness of political reform

28. Although all Arab states have been independent for decades and have announced development and modernisation plans, Arab political life continues to suffer from stagnation and lacks modernisation and development and remains a hostage to nepotistic, tribal, sectarian and ethnic relations. Despite the presence of parliaments and some political parties, autocracy and tribal leaderships continue to control the course and direction of Arab political life which has led to the spread of discrimination, political inequality and lack of participation in state institutions and public administration making elections merely an opportunity to reorganise the centres of power given the lack of political representation and political programmes.

29. There are still many restrictions on freedom of thought, religion and opinion/expression in many countries and on all civil and political rights and freedoms, whether public or individual. Furthermore, there is a violation and restriction of the freedom of press, media, publication, and access to information and knowledge.

30. Many countries impose restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, protest, demonstration and to strike. The labour movement in several sectors also still faces arrests of trade union leaders on the charge of association and protest or protesting and demonstrating to defend workers' rights. Torture also continues in many Arab prisons, as most of them lack monitoring or judicial inspection. Arab laws are still full of gaps that allow executioners to act with impunity.

31. Some Arab states still do not have elected parliaments. In others, fraudulent election results are the most prominent phenomenon, resulting in the democratic process losing its credibility and pushing people to avoid participating in elections and taking an interest in politics in general. There are also many obstacles and barriers that limit the powers of local and municipal councils, their monitoring role and their participation in creating general policies, turning them into superficial organisations that do not represent popular regulatory power but instead are merely organs of the executive powers.

32. For this reason, Arab societies lack a culture and tradition of political dialogue and still lack the mechanisms to manage disputes peacefully, accept the concept of minorities and majorities and the principle of power sharing. As a result, disputes arise too often between the elements of the single regime and quickly turn into a long armed conflict undermining the state and society and wreaking immense damage on the lives and future of people.

33. Corruption in all its forms has its impact on public policies in Arab states. It plays a major role in government contracts, the depletion of natural resources and the allocation of state-owned land, the sale, operation and maintenance of public projects, agreements with foreign states and appointments to public posts are on the basis of allegiance and not capability. Some foreign states and international corporations and organisations also play a major role in corrupting senior state officials and using corruption as a working tool. Some businessmen have caught on to this and use it to make monopolistic gains and to bring in goods and products that destroy the health of citizens and squander the limited financial resources of the state and also pass through laws that protect their interests and give immunity to their corruption.

34. Most Arab states suffer from a lack of transparency, or its non-existence in some cases. This places restrictions on political participation and changing public policies. On the pretext of protecting national security and dealing with enemies inside and outside the country, restrictions have been placed on lots of governmental documents and information. Arab activists might find a lot of information about their countries in international reports but they are prevented from knowing about them within their countries. This is in spite of international agreements signed by their countries committing governments to transparency and free circulation of information.

35. The region is at the forefront of the globalised permanent international conflict supported by despotic Arab regimes. This has led to the emergence and rise of terrorist movements that have been supported and funded by major states since the Afghan War after which thousands of armed fighters returned to many Arab countries and spread oppressive sectarian ideas and terrorism. The arena of armed conflict has also broadened and many Arab countries are facing the risks of fragmentation and division.

36. Although dozens of international agreements have been issued by the UN and its organisations to guarantee civil and political rights, many of these have not yet been signed by all Arab states and some have been signed but not applied. Local laws have not been amended to conform to international standards. Consequently, the violation of public freedom continues due to the lack of commitment to international conventions. As a result, the legal framework in much of the Arab region needs to be updated and developed to be consistent with contemporary changes and the needs of protecting the general freedoms of the citizens.

37. Another problem related to Arab political development concerns the rule of law and judicial independence; the independence of the judiciary still suffers interference by the executive and government departments with overlaps between their works. The criminal and civil courts remain slow and biased in favour of the ruling classes. Millions of Arab citizens are looking in vain for the conditions for fair trials to be met. The Arab people are still struggling to have access to judicial remedies for victims of injustices in many Arab regions.

38. There are still strict restrictions on the movement of individuals between Arab states particularly with the increase of terrorist activity in many Arab countries which helps to support the security directives of Arab regimes and to impose more restrictions on Arab migration.

39. Arab states remain unable to strike a balance between their past and the present and this has led to the obliteration of the identity with all its components. Uniqueness, just as everyone else, has been lost before a real identity crisis that affects the entire political life.

40. The situation of Arab women is one of the biggest political challenges. Until recently, some countries denied women the right of being nominated and the right to vote and some still apply restrictions on their appointment to public posts. Some regions refuse their appointment to judicial posts and some refuse their candidacy for parliament. Existing laws also contribute to worsening the situation of Arab women and place huge restrictions on their political participation and the future of Arab political development.

IV. Lack of awareness of trade union rights

41. Although most Arab countries have recognised the principle of the freedom of association both in their constitution and their laws, some still disregard this principle completely in practice. Even though this principle has been recognised, in general the legal framework lacks effective and necessary protective mechanisms for the right of individuals to join trade unions and to ensure the independence of trade unions from the public authorities, political parties and employers.

42. Many laws in Arab countries form obstacles that are contrary to the principle of the independence of trade unions from the public authorities, with respect to how trade unions are set up, run and dissolved. Many laws subject the establishment of trade unions to strict administrative procedures that contradict the principle of the freedom to form trade unions without prior permission. Some Arab countries also allow the administrative authorities to intervene and dissolve a trade union or suspend its activity.

43. Most laws in Arab countries that accept trade union pluralism in principle have not stipulated specific provisions on the terms and procedures to define the most representative organisations. They have also not specified the standards on whose basis these organisations are appointed objectively to guarantee respect for the principle of freedom of association and the independence of trade unions from the public authorities, employers and individuals.

44. Many laws in most Arab countries do not contain guarantees and sufficient mechanisms for trade union activity within workplaces. Indeed, the laws in these countries do not usually clearly stipulate that the employer is bound to recognise the trade union structure and work with it as it is qualified to represent workers at company level. This legal void undoubtedly does not help to democratise professional relationships within workplaces.

45. In some countries, the law does not include the right to join trade unions for broad sections of the workforce; especially public servants and foreign workers remain completely deprived of this right or are allowed in some circumstances to join trade unions but are deprived of the right to participate in setting up trade unions or running them. Some laws in Arab countries also include various provisions that prevent or impede the formation of new trade unions.

46. Labour laws in several Arab countries do not include effective protective mechanisms to prevent discrimination on the basis of a person's membership of a trade union or their participation in its activities as well as preventing abusive practices by employers. If workers are dismissed because of their trade union membership or activity, "protection" is usually restricted to acknowledgement of the right of the worker who was unfairly dismissed to receive limited financial compensation which is not in line with the fundamental nature of the principle of the freedom of association.

47. Although some countries have acknowledged the right to strike and have given it a clear constitutional status along with the freedom of association, most other constitutions in the Arab region have been silent on this issue. Indeed, the legislation in some Arab countries does not recognise the right to strike and does not provide a clear framework for its exercise.

48. In several Arab countries, the legislator has explicitly or implicitly excluded public servants from exercising the right to strike under severe terms. In particular, we draw attention to the term concerning the duty to announce a strike before embarking on it, which means an absolute ban on spontaneous strikes, and the term related to the approval of a significant proportion of workers at the company or corporation to strike or the prior approval of the trade union structures for the strike.

49. In addition to the terms mentioned, the legislator in several Arab countries has subjected the right to strike to conditions precedent related to the settlement of collective labour disputes through conciliation, mediation and arbitration. The legislator in most Arab countries has made it mandatory to undergo amicable settlement procedures through direct negotiations or mediation with the intention of reconciling the parties. However, some laws in Arab countries go further and also require that the failure to reach an amicable solution necessarily results in arbitration to end the dispute, making strike action impractical.

50. Contrary to this, several Arab countries have applied compulsory arbitration to all collective labour disputes and in some countries, the law stipulates the need to recourse to arbitration, thereby preventing the use of strikes, using in this regard completely ambiguous expressions and fail to determine a list of facilities where strikes are not allowed or in which arbitration is compulsory. In addition to the obstacles mentioned, several laws in Arab countries contain provisions that criminalise strikes and related actions. In several cases, strict penalties can include prison sentences for anyone in breach of these provisions.

51. In most Arab countries, the right to collective bargaining is not a constitutional right. In general, there is no explicit recognition of this right in ordinary legislation and no legal scheme concerning how collective bargaining should take place, defining its procedures, framework, regularity and the obligations of the parties during the negotiation process. The legislator has been more interested in regulating labour relations through laws and their executive orders.

52. While some Arab laws have included a partial framework for collective bargaining procedures, most other laws in the Arab region have not given importance to this issue or have found it suffice to delegate the executive authorities to intervene in order to organise the rules and procedures of collective bargaining. Consequently, almost all laws in Arab countries have applied their own concept for collective bargaining that does not stipulate that employers are obliged to enter negotiations with trade unions. It also does not stipulate the need for regular negotiation. This is what makes collective bargaining subject to fluctuations in the balance of power between the parties and usually causes permanent tension in professional relations.

53. On the other hand, the legislator established the right of each party to terminate the collective employment contract unilaterally, if this contract was made for an unlimited period or was not renewed if it was made for a limited period. This had led to a sort of legal gap where the contract is terminated without entering new negotiations that allow workers to maintain and strengthen their acquired rights.

54. In many Arab countries, the state intervenes clearly in collective bargaining which is not in line with the principle of the freedom to bargain and the independence of the parties involved in the negotiations. This is particularly clear in the recognition for the benefit of the executive authorities of very wide-ranging powers relating to the approval of collective employment contracts or their registration so that they are binding. As a result, the validity of the collective agreement remains subject to the approval of the public authorities who may object to its content or refuse to register it.

55. Finally, the role of collective bargaining as an independent source of labour law generally remains very limited in most Arab countries, given the levels of negotiation and the content of agreements made between worker representatives and employers. There are hardly any negotiations at company level, nor at sectoral or national level. Collective bargaining in the public sector is also rare in most Arab countries. The content of collective bargaining mainly remains limited to some physical aspects related to wages and benefits without addressing other issues such as those concerning employment, vocational training, improving productivity and boosting welfare protection for workers.

Our Approach and Current Demands

56. Our approach is the approach of the democratic and independent trade union movement around the world. We demand respect of Labor Laws and their development to guarantee decent work for everyone. We demand union rights and freedoms and supporting them to attain a just and equitable social dialogue among the parties to production. Our approach is also to provide social protection to all workers, unemployed, retired and migrant workers. Our approach is also to resist discrimination at work and to defend everyone's basic rights.

57. However, in the special circumstances of all the Arab countries today, including political crises, escalating social problems, unprecedented increase in rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, and low social welfare, along with the failure of the economic policies and their inability to address these circumstances, the Arab trade union movement must assume its social responsibility and demand that the Arab governments expedite the introduction of in-depth reforms for their policies in all fields. On this basis, we demand the following:

58. The governments should assume their full responsibilities in resisting poverty and social marginalization to empower all citizens in their right to decent living, decent housing, health services, education, vocational training and the right to work. This can be by drafting policies in which all social parties participate along with various components of civil society, and allocating the necessary budgets to implement them while providing the necessary support to the protection networks and social security.

59. Labor laws must be renewed in a manner that enables the resistance of all forms of religious, racial, creed or gender based discrimination, which allow migrant workers the opportunity to enjoy all their basic rights, specifically with regard to wages, social protection, the right to organize and freedom of association, while enhancing mechanisms to follow-up on labor disputes through developing inspection directorates and forming gender equal committees within places of work.

60. Organize the labor market and limit various forms of irregular work as it undermines the rights of workers and denies them their most basic economic and social rights. This can be through passing deterrent laws that prohibit all forms of forced labor and various forms of precarious work, and prohibit child employment, while identifying mechanisms that guarantee enforcement on the ground.

61. Ensure that improving women's right is a permanent goal in economic and social policies and in laws and legislation so that women can attain their right to equality through special procedures that aim to increase the number of women in the education system and the vocational training systems, while paving the way for their joining the labor market without barriers or discrimination and enabling them to rise to leadership positions in social, economic and political life without obstacles.

62. Draft new policies that can provide work opportunities to the youth and limit the phenomena of social marginalization and immigration through support programs for the unemployed to enable them to get a source of income and vocational training opportunities that provide them with decent living conditions.

63. Review all policies in the area of social protection and the situation of insurance funds for illness as well as insurance for work injuries, retirement, old age, disability, unemployment and long term unemployment, while expanding this protection to wider groups in society that are in need of this. Moreover, be very careful to use these security funds for the purposes for which they were created. Therefore, these funds must be run on fully transparent principles and must include all social groups in their management and monitoring.

64. Review education and vocational training policies to focus on quality, give priority to academic specialization, and adopt ongoing training while balancing between the education system and the changes in the labor market, giving priority to scientific and technical research, promising sectors and sectors producing decent work opportunities. Choices in the areas of investment, industry and agriculture must be in parallel with the protection of natural and environmental resources to take into account requirements of sustainable development and the rights of future generations.

65. Draft strict policies to combat the spreading corruption in the public administrations through permanent monitoring commissions that are established for this purpose, create clear rules for full transparency in public transactions and strict resistance of confidential transnational commerce and the black market through amending the laws in this regard with the aim of achieving higher degrees of strictness and firmness and providing job opportunities. Moreover, control inflation and the increase in consumer prices of basic goods while halting the removal of subsidies for these necessary items in the absence of wage and minimum wage increases.

66. Conduct essential and fair reviews for tax policies and conduct in this field just reforms that reduce the burdens on workers and put an end to some groups evading taxes, within a new and just vision to distribute the fortune and achieve economic and social balance among the social groups.

67. Remove the borders and commercial barriers among the Arab countries to develop their levels of exchange, in preparation for a unified Arab market that guarantees the exchange of goods and the movement of capital and individuals, thus enabling Arab products from becoming competitive in the international markets and reducing the cost of goods imported from outside the region, which constitutes a heavy burden on the public budgets of the countries.

68. Draft, as soon as possible, a plan to address terrorism and the international networks behind them that work for industry lobbies, arms trade and oil industries, and other regional and international parties that take advantage of religious and sectarian partisanship in the Arab region to mobilize marginalized youth behind slogans that have nothing to do with the Islamic religion.

69. As this is a phenomenon that threatens all countries of the region without exception, the Arab countries must immediately draft a regional plan with coordination mechanisms. The plan must be comprehensive and must address this problem from its roots, which usually is a result of political oppression and its repercussions and the educational system and its content, as well as failed social policies.

V. Our Urgent Internal Duties

70. The success of the Arab trade union movement in fulfilling these demands – partially or gradually – will be subject to its ability to expand its representation and the scope of its social impact, along with the ability to maintain its independence, adopt democracy and transparency within its structures, and develop its relations with various components of the civil society. Therefore, the development of the internal capacities of the Arab union organizations represents a prerequisite to their contribution to saving their countries from the current dangerous political, economic and social situation. This necessitates in the current situation giving special attention to a host of issues directly related to the personal capacities of the trade union organizations and the scope of their development.

71. Trade union representation: This is the first measure in evaluating the size of the trade unions and their ability to communicate with the workers and organizing them, especially since the available data indicates that the number of workers associated with trade unions in the Arab countries does not exceed 15% in the best of cases. Therefore, the Arab trade unions must enhance their representation and their presence at the national level, through:

- Drafting practical strategies to expand their membership base and increase the size of trade union membership while adopting quantitative goals within specific and measurable timelines.
- Expand the base of membership in the trade unions, and refrain from restricting the expansion to traditional trade worker sectors. Also, expand the social base of trade union work through bringing in other trade union sectors, such as workers in the informal sector, agricultural workers in the rural areas, seasonal workers or workers with limited contracts, trainees qualified for the labor market, craftspeople, retirees, migrant workers...
- Empower the women and youth to join trade unions and to assume trade union responsibilities at various levels through organizational measures stipulated in the bylaws such as adopting quotas, facilitating conditions of election candidacy, and establishing specialized committees and empowering them in terms of freedom of activity and initiative.
- Establish the specialized frameworks and structures in forming associations and clubs (cultural, sports, social, study and research, entertainment...). Establish service and production cooperatives and vocational training and rehabilitation centers, while codifying these structures in the bylaws of trade union organizations, and empower them with the means and capacities, and with administrative and financial independence.
- The organizational structure of trade union federations must be developed to be able to build flexible structures capable of accommodating all newcomers to the trade unions to defend their interests, train them and educate them, as well as build their capacities in organization, negotiation, facilitation, participation in trade union decisions and drafting policies and programs.

72. Internal Democracy: The establishment of representative and democratic trade unions is connected to the principles of trade union freedom as stipulated in the relevant ILO Conventions. Conventions 87, 98 and 135 included most of the rights embodying trade union freedoms and stipulated no intervention from any external party upon the establishment of trade unions and joining them without any discrimination or licensing, as well as when drafting their constitutions, bylaws, activity programs and elections. These conventions also protected trade union organizations from being dissolved or frozen through an administrative decision. They also recognized the right to collective bargaining and the protection of the trade union official and worker representatives from arbitrary measures that they may be subject to due to their trade union commitments. Based on the above, the trade unions are invited to:

- Reflect in their bylaws, regulations and internal practices the principles that the trade unions long since practiced by adopting rules that should entrench democracy within the trade union organization and at the level of relationships among various structures, through internal systems that guarantee the actual participation of members and grass root and central structures in decision making, setting trade union policies and monitoring their implementation.
- Respect the positions of the minority groups and the right to disagreement, and recognize the right to equality in duties and responsibilities among all members regardless of gender, race, religion, thought or nationality.
- Ensure honest and democratic elections without foreign intervention, which take place on time, controlled by their bylaws and regulations.
- Create transparent and democratic mechanisms to address trade union differences or appeals regarding the decisions or results of elections.
- Adopt transparency in managing financial affairs based on internal and legal monitoring mechanisms, such as subjecting the budget of the trade union federations to external audits and publishing the financial reports through the media.

73. Independence: This means independence from the authorities and their departments, from employers and their organizations, from political parties and all forces of pressure outside union organization. This independence is embodied in the freedom of trade union decisions which must be the result of dialogue and discussions within the trade union structures. The trade union freedom does not necessary mean trade union pluralism, as the choice of unity or pluralism remains subject to the workers only without any guardianship or imposition. However, the independence of the trade union organization, as in the case of its independence, represents a basic condition for trade union unity, a guarantee of the mobilization ability of the trade union organization, and a guarantee in the face of attempts to break the lines of the trade union movement. If political affiliation is the right of all citizens, including all workers, then stipulating in trade union bylaws and regulations a ban on combining party responsibilities within trade union responsibilities represents freedom of trade union organization independence and protects it from the risks of employing it to serve non-trade union agenda.
74. Effectiveness and Influence: A representative, independent and democratic organization is certainly an organization that has acquired the terms and conditions of effectiveness, the ability to influence political options and a pattern of development on one hand and the achievement of worker demands and aspirations and their protection from all forms of injustice and discrimination on the other. The forces against worker rights and trade union work attempt to limit the power of their trade unions and their activities, and to marginalize their role. The pressures on the trade unions have increased in this regard as well as the transformations in the labor market over the past three decades. This was the result of the growing phenomenon of globalization and its economic and social impact, deteriorating work conditions, increasing forms of vulnerable and informal work in a political context characterized by adopting, in most Arab countries, the policy of pressuring independent and democratic trade union work and besieging it to limit its influence, effectiveness and ability to address the alliance of dictatorships with corrupt money circles. The results of the Arab uprisings expanded the margin of freedoms in the Arab region and will provide an opportunity for the trade union movement in the Arab countries to activate their role and strengthen their influence at the national level and assume their leadership responsibilities in this interim phase that the Arab region is going through. The trade union organizations must now adopt mechanisms and rules to acquire additional effectiveness and influence:

- Identify the priorities of the trade union organization at each phase and set specific goals that include trade union demands and those arising from the organization's vision on various development issues raised at the national level, as well as set a practical plan to achieve these demands through a strategy that all trade union structures participate in drafting and implementing.
- Enhance the struggle nature of various trade union structures and build the capacities of trade union officials in the areas of social dialogue, collective bargaining, organizing campaigns as a means to advocate, and the ability to organize strikes and ensure their success.
- Work to institutionalize and entrench social dialogue at all levels, from the enterprise to the national level, and struggle for balanced trade union representation in each public institution relevant to social affairs: social insurance, insurance, training and vocational training, economic and social councils, statistical institutes and centers of the state, and structures and institutions for migration and migrants, etc.
- Create programs in the area of trade union research and studies to develop the knowledge and academic aspect of the trade union staff so that the Arab trade unions acquire the ability to propose choices and alternatives academically and holistically, making them forces of struggle as well as proposals and alternatives.
- Create media plans to communicate with trade unionists and the community using modern means of communication ideally and creating practical plans to train trade unionists on dealing with this modern technology and employing it to serve the goals of union organization and strengthen its effectiveness and impact.
- Avoid marginal conflicts between democratic and independent trade unions inside the single country, and work to find common denominators among them, coordinate positions and participate in struggles in defense of trade union freedoms, protect worker rights and achieve common goals.

- Enhance the relationship with the civil society and develop joint work with its institutions and associations that share the trade union movement principles and agree with it on essential issues of society. In this regard, a structure can be created within the trade union association to work with civil society institutions and institutions, motivate joint work with them, and regulate the relationship with the political parties regarding their position towards demands of the workers and their desire for social justice, while respecting trade union independence and refraining from interfering in their affairs.

- Defend democracy and equality, address any violations of public and individual freedoms by any entity, draft policies and build alliances to achieve social justice.

75. International solidarity. Globalization led to opening national markets to flows of capital and goods and an unprecedented integration of state economies into a global market controlled by multi-national corporations. Our Arab countries were not far from this reality, and the result was importing the crises in the international markets to our countries, exasperating the structural problems of our backward economies. Globalization led to the movement of crises from one economy to another with the same pattern and flow of goods and capitals. This turned any local or regional rises to a crisis that affects all parts of the global market, in varying degrees, and with a different impact from one country to another. The globalization of crises entrenched on the other hand the need to globalize addressing their repercussions and unifying the trade union struggle against savage liberal policies that have increased the severity of poverty, exclusion and unemployment in all countries regardless of their degree of growth, expanded the differences between individuals, classes, countries and continents, and entrenched the liability and dependence of southern countries. The trade union movement in practice now needs more than ever actual international solidarity to defend public and individual freedoms and trade union rights, and achieve social justice. Activating international solidarity requires new mechanisms and dynamics, namely:

- Activate the role of the Arab Trade Union Federation and expand its base to include all components of the Arab independent and democratic trade union movement, so that it is the real representative of all workers working in the Arab countries, the defender of their rights, and translator of their preoccupations and aspirations, before all official and popular commissions and institutions, at the Arab and international levels.

- Enhance solidarity of democratic and worker forces in the Arab World and around the world to spread the human rights freedoms and culture and build democratic communities where the values of equality, peace and social justice prevail.
- Develop and diversify relationships with member organizations in the International Trade Union Confederation and the international professional federations, and create plans, campaigns and joint struggle, training and study programs.
- Defend ILO standards and ensure decent work, and include these within the struggle agenda of trade union federations and enhance the relationship with the ILO to achieve this.
- Network international trade union work, and build bridges with other social networks to create solidarity mechanisms and plans of quick intervention to organize campaigns, demonstrations and solidarity movements with the necessary success and effectiveness.
- Support the African Federation and the Asian Federation of the International Trade Union Confederation, and contribute effectively in implementing their work programs, as well as actively participate in the implementation of the International Trade Union Confederation programs and participate in the implementation of its policies at the Arab region level.

VII. Our Regional Program

76. After its founding conference, the Arab Trade Union Confederation will be handed over the responsibility for completing all programs of the International Trade Union Confederation for the Arab region. It will also create new programs for the Arab region based on its specific needs. In this context, the executive secretariat will propose programs to the first session of the general assembly to study them and make decisions in their regard. There are also readymade programs based on the following pillars:

77. Media: Most Arab countries, for six decades, have only known the single trade union system, which works legally under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and other government departments. Its role is usually restricted to mediating between the workers and employers to resolve conflicts that arise according to instructions issued by the government.

In some cases, it intervenes to put an end to worker demonstrations by all means available, if necessary. The government trade union system was focused on three pillars, first, direct financial support to the trade union which works under its supervision and coerced participation through direct deduction from worker wages, and finally, monitoring worker elections by the Ministry of Labor or the security departments, whose results are usually predetermined.

Therefore, generations of workers in most Arab countries have lived under this system and have known no other system, to the extent that the concept of trade unions has lost its original meaning in the minds of a large part of public opinion. This has also led to many groups refraining from participating in trade unions.

The program "**Promoting Principles of Democratic and Independent Trade Union Work**" represents one of the main pillars for future activities by the Arab Trade Union Confederation which aims to correct misconceptions related to the goals of the trade unions, rules for managing them and their role in society, as well as encouraging workers to establish democratic trade unions in their places of work and establish new trade unions in their places of work. This program will rely on modern communication tools and social networks online, as well as other forms of media, to introduce the principles, values and goals of original trade union work.

78. In the area of supporting internal capacities: the Arab governments have decades ago drafted their economic and social policies without consulting the population and without the participation of political parties, civil society organizations or trade union organizations. As for the laws drafted to implement the policies, they were usually passed by formative parliaments that followed questionable elections in terms of their integrity, and therefore were unable to participate with economic and social options or to monitor their implementation and results. In early 2011, following the Arab revolutions that toppled some oppressive regimes in the Arab region and shook the ground under others, most Arab regimes introduced some amendments to their style of government and reduced their restrictions on the freedom of expression and association.

Over the past three years, the Arab region saw the most integrity in its history, allowing the entry of opposition parties into parliament. In this new environment in the Arab political life it became possible for trade unions to express their opinions and submit proposals regarding economic and social policies.

Therefore, trade unions in the Arab region will in the future need to develop their internal capacities in the area of analyzing economic and social policies and their direct and indirect impact on the labor market and the circumstances of the workers and the popular groups with limited income. Therefore, **"Supporting the capacities of trade union organizations in the area of analyzing economic and social policies"** aims to empower the trade union movement in the Arab countries with the necessary experience that allows them to form positions and give proposals on government options, as well as demand more capacities.

79. In the area of internal reform: The Arab governments have placed many restrictions on trade union work that were expanded over the last half century to prevent them from expanding their ranks and developing their structures. The efforts of political life and its calcification also had an impact on life within trade union organizations, which remained in most cases in a state of legitimate defense to protect themselves and protect their existence.

With the eruption of the Arab revolutions in 2011 and the openness in most Arab countries in terms of individual and public freedoms, and with the escalating worker movements to improve their social circumstances, the trade unions were invited to reconsider their internal structure to be appropriate to the transformation in the labor market and more accommodating to the entry of new generations of youth and women to the work place, as well as the deep cultural changes in the Arab communities over the past few years.

Therefore, the "**Structural reform program for the trade union organization in the Arab region**" aims to support the efforts of the organizations that wish to reconsider their internal structures, and appoint experts to assist in achieving the targeted internal reform as soon as possible.

80. In the area of training: Modern tools of communication, and their widespread use in the Arab region, allows distance trade union training. Since the cost of trade union training programs has become very high, especially regional programs, it has become necessary to reconsider the possibility of using the internet through a website designed for purposes of dissemination at the widest scale the largest amount of information on worker rights, social dialogue, collective bargaining, ILO Conventions, as well as other knowledge needed by trade unionists to undertake their duties as best as possible.

Therefore, the distance "**Regional Trade Union Electronic Training Program**" aims to introduce the basic documents that the trade unionists must know at the widest scale, as fast as possible, with the least cost.

81. These pillars can form the components of the agenda of the Arab Trade Unions Confederation in its first year, after presenting them and discussing them in detail during the first session of ATUC General Council that will be held in February 2015.