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**Check against delivery**



It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I bring greetings from Amnesty International Secretary General Salil Shetty, and Amnesty UK Director Kate Allen, and I share their warm wishes for a successful Congress.

In the time that has been generously offered to me, I want to convey two key messages. The first is to highlight the shrinking space for human rights, which are increasingly under assault in many places and many contexts, and the second is to identify, with you, the actions we can take together to arrest and reverse the assaults on our rights.

I will tackle these themes through the lens of workers' rights. I will give three examples, of our work with trade unionists at risk, of our campaigning in support of women's and girls' rights, and of our capacity building through human rights education.

In my presentation I will talk about human rights defenders in the front lines of these struggles, but before I do so I want to give some context, to set the scene.

I am assuming most of you are familiar with Amnesty International. We are a global movement of seven million people, with national sections in 70 countries, so we are much smaller than you, but every one of our supporters is dedicated to defending and advancing all our human rights, including civil, political, social and economic rights. We are committed to advancing indigenous and LGBT people's rights. Our current global priority campaigns aim to challenge torture and to advance women's sexual and reproductive rights.

Workers' rights have been our cause for sixty five years. Our organisation was formed through an appeal that cited a maritime union leader jailed solely for peaceful union activities by the Greek junta. Forty years ago our first ever Urgent Action was invented in support of a jailed Brazilian labour leader. So Amnesty and trade unions have made common cause for a long time.

Yesterday you had passionate debates about neoliberal economics and austerity, about the threats of trade treaties to basic rights. You may be surprised to know that your concerns - though perhaps not the solutions - are shared in some unexpected quarters. This year the World Economic Forum identified income inequality as the most pressing challenge facing the world. Their second greatest concern was persistent jobless growth. Meanwhile the managing director of the IMF has also cautioned that the intensifying concentration of wealth could undermine fundamental rights.

Amnesty International is not competent to address issues of economic or fiscal policy or trade regimes but there is one thing that we do know, and that is that economic inequality has grown as collective bargaining has declined.

Just this week a staff paper issued by the IMF concluded that - and I am quoting - "the decline in unionisation is strongly associated with the rise of the income share of the top 10 percent of earners (to the detriment of middle- and low-income workers) in advanced economies. This holds even after controlling for other established determinants of inequality, such as technological progress, globalisation, political and social factors, financial deregulation, and declining top marginal tax rates."

So for Amnesty International, one key way - the key way - to tackle this pressing challenge of inequality is to strengthen the ability of workers to exercise their fundamental rights. And those rights are under acute attack, from governments, media and businesses that question the very principles of collectivism and social protection.

So for the record, let there be no doubt: the right to organise, the right to join and form trade unions, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to strike - these are universal human rights.

The right to organise at work is a crucial enabling right, it is the basis on which workers and communities can defend their living standards, protect their health and livelihoods, and defend the public services that the most vulnerable are usually most reliant upon.

Your president, in her opening address rightly highlighted the special risk faced by educators, resulting from your commitment to empower children and students.

We can see that reflected in the persistent attacks on the teachers' union in South Korea, in the judicial harassment and intimidation, including murders, of teachers in Colombia. Yesterday a delegate from Fiji reminded the Congress of the intense repression of workers' rights in Fiji. Closer to here, we must deplore the removal of collective bargaining rights from public sector workers in Wisconsin. In Iran the teachers associations have been under sustained assault, with key leaders jailed, mass arrests this week, and the jailing of delegates to this Congress.

In each and every one of these situations, Amnesty has worked with the unions concerned, and in partnership with the global unions, to seek to defend individual and protect collective rights.

I would like to pick up on one case to show you what that collaboration can look like, and the impact that it can have.

This is Mahdi Abu Dheeb [slide]. He is the President of the Bahrain Teachers Association, an affiliate of Education International. In February 2011 he called a strike of his members as part of the spring uprising in Bahrain. He was calling for peaceful reforms and quality education for all. Jalila Al Salman, his colleague and deputy, was due to be with us today on this panel, but hasn't been able to make it, so it falls to me to summarise their story.

Mahdi was at his uncle's house on 6 April 2011 when police seized him for interrogation. They took him to a secret location: his family didn't know where he was for over three weeks.

Mahdi was then subjected to 64 days in solitary confinement. When he was interrogated, Mahdi says the police beat him. Mahdi's daughter, Maryam, told us that her father had two broken ribs and was suffering from severe neck and back pain when she saw him after his time in detention.

Mahdi and Jalila were tried before a military court in September 2011. They were found guilty, and Mahdi sentenced to 10 years in prison – which was reduced to five years after an appeal. Jalila

was dealt a three year sentence, later reduced to six months. She was released in November 2012.

Mahdi is not in jail for criminal activity. He is imprisoned because he exercised his right to speak freely, and his right to strike. Mahdi is a prisoner of conscience. From that fateful day in 2011, Amnesty has worked closely with EI to identify the points of pressure that could secure their release, or at least ensure their safety.

The international spotlight cast on his and Jalila's cases may have forced the civil courts to reduce the sentences imposed by the military tribunals, and we are pleased that Jalila is free, but Mahdi's health is at risk and he is suffering from the effects of the torture he experienced.

In our planning with EI we recognised that the UK was a country of considerable influence on Bahrain. There are strong economic ties, and the royal family of Bahrain is friends with the British royal family. Many of the elite are educated in British private schools or our military academy at Sandhurst. So we made common cause with the British teaching unions to ramp up the pressure.

We organised a solidarity photo action at teachers' union conferences as a way of sending support to his family and to have 1-2-1 conversations with teachers [slide]. We gathered over five hundred solidarity photos - this one is from the NUT conference.

Of course in this campaigning we have worked directly with Jalila Al Salman and Mahdi's family [slide]. We have taken his case to our schools and youth group [slide], in the course of which they learnt about the positive role of unions in society. Our younger supporters wrote solidarity messages while the secondary schools drafted protests to the Bahrain ambassador. We had hundreds of these. Most significantly, the NASUWT and NUT both agreed to distribute Amnesty appeal postcards in their membership magazines. All together 628,000 appeal cards were distributed - making this the biggest postcard appeal in the history of Amnesty UK - and perhaps the biggest ever globally in the Amnesty movement.

As a result of these initiatives, the Ambassador of Bahrain in the UK unprecedentedly accepted a request from the AIUK Director to meet to discuss his plights. Kate Allen, our director, in turn insisted that she would be accompanied by the teachers unions and the British TUC [slide]. At the meeting the plight of children imprisoned in adult jails and the wider education and repression issues were also raised. Mahdi remains in jail, and our efforts continue, so I applaud the decision of the Norwegian unions - led by the EI affiliates - to award Mahdi and Jalila, and the BTA the prestigious Arthur Svensson award for union rights earlier this year, helping to keep the spotlight on their case.

As a side remark, I want to emphasise an important point in your rights policy paper. Human rights are universal and inalienable, interdependent and indivisible. Looking at the situation in Bahrain, we aren't going to progress the right of the Bahrain teachers unless we also address torture, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, or the violence of security forces. Workers' rights can only ever be realised if wider rights are respected. That's what makes your proposed policy such a critical statement, weaving together the right to education with the right to decent work.

And decent work, of course, means safe and secure work - one of the three pillars of the quality education for all campaign. I am disappointed that the security and safety breakout clashes with this presentation, but I will in any case tell you the story of our work with Afghan teachers.

A priority campaign for Amnesty UK has been to insist that the UK and western governments do not make concessions to women's rights in Afghanistan in the process of military withdrawal from that country. Afghanistan has a weak trade union movement so we had to find another way to make common cause with you.

Parwin Wafa is the head teacher of a girls' school in Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan. She set up the area's first female education facility in 1982 and has defied the Taliban and other conservative groups ever since in her calling to promote learning among girls.

When the Taliban closed her school, she resorted to secretly teaching pupils inside her home. Their threats escalated, until six years ago, they abducted her 18-year-old son Hamayood. For ten months the kidnappers kept her son alive. During that time she used to receive calls insisting she close the school. Parwin, knew, though, that they would not return her son whatever she did. In due course, her son was killed and his body was left on deserted land. Later the seasonal floods brought his body to an area where there were some nomadic people living and it was found.

Working with Parwin, we developed a "Hazards of Work" campaign which highlighted the risks women faced in certain professions, and in particular as teachers educating girls. We took the campaign to schools groups up and down the country, with our young supporters - and adult activists too - demanding that the UK government ensure women's and girls' rights. Here are some pictures of that work. [slide] [slide] [slide]

We were pleased that - with the support of UK teachers' unions - Parwin was able to come to the UK to tell her story to government. Here she is at a World Teachers Day event last October organised by AIUK and the NUT under the EI banner of quality education for all [slide]. Here she is meeting pupils at a London school [slide]. I am pleased to report that the UK government has reaffirmed its responsibilities to defend women and girls in the political transition. As a follow-up we are working with Parwin to identify suitable human rights materials in Dari and Pashtun for use in her and other schools.

This was a successful campaign made all the more powerful by engaging our activist, and our young supporters in schools will also have come away with a better understanding of the importance of learning, and of the need for girls and women's rights.

And that vital role of building pupils' and students' capacity for active citizenship - which, as your president observed puts teachers and educators at risk from dictators and despots, and risks being undermined by commoditised teaching - is more important than ever. It's a truism to say that to realise our rights we have got to first recognise our rights.

In Amnesty International we have an exceptional human rights education programme, centered on tools to promote *human rights friendly schools*, a whole schools approach that goes beyond the curriculum to look at the environment and culture. We have produced primary school resources such as the picture book "we are all born free" which is now available in 31 languages. We have schools and youth groups in many amnesty sections around the world. Here is a picture of UK youth award activists taking action over the plight of refugees in the Mediterranean [slide]. We also work with college students and in AIUK we have three hundred student groups and are planning joint activism with the University and College Union branches on those campuses. In Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso our HRE work has focused on tackling female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage, and our work has been so successful, that we are teaming up with UK unions to make common cause to fund this vital work.

I know that many teachers unions are developing your own HRE resources. I was pleased to get a preview here in Ottawa, for instance, of the *Speak Truth to Power* project of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. I also know that unions themselves provide huge quantities of training for your stewards, representatives and activists. There are substantial opportunities to come together to share expertise and capacity, and I hope this year we can have a high level exchange between EI and Amnesty to map out some of the possibilities to promote human rights in union learning settings and well as in the classroom and college.

Just before I wrap up, I want to emphasise that solidarity is a two way street. Two weeks ago the UK government announced its Trade Union Bill. Amongst other measures, the Bill proposes that in "important" services - including education - 40 per cent of the workforce must vote in favour for a strike ballot to be legal. This is in the context of a government which refuses to allow balloting online or in workplaces. This is a threshold that fewer than 1 in 10 government MPs have achieved in their own election. It would make all abstentions count as no votes, and effectively make sector wide strikes virtually impossible. also plan to criminalise pickets. It's surely no accident that this is happening against the background of eight years of imposed pay restraint. They Amnesty will, of course, react, and we are consulting with our union partners on how best to add impact. It could be that we will come to you to seek global activism and international solidarity.

I want to end, though, on a positive note, by mentioning two human rights defenders who I have had the privilege of knowing and working with.

In Iran, when jailed trade union leader Mansour Ossanlu was denied an operation needed to save his eyesight, we joined together with the International transport Workers' Federation in the then biggest online campaign in our history: one appeal was sent every minute, night and day, until on the fifth day he was - in an unprecedented move - transferred to hospital to have the operation that saved his sight.

In Zimbabwe, we stood alongside Gertrude Hambira, the first woman leader of the agricultural and plantation workers union, who had been forced into exile as a result of her denunciation of farm occupations. A joint campaign with the global Foodworkers' union saw us distributing Amnesty appeal cards in countries of influence; through sugar cane workers in Brazil, restaurant employees in Russia, in Mozambique and Latin America. And the outcome, very quickly, was the renewal of her passport and restoration of her freedom to travel.

As you move your rights policy forward, I would encourage us to work together strategically, to bring our mutual capacities together to increase our human rights outreach and impact, at the local. National and global levels. Fred van Leeuwen yesterday spoke about the importance of organising and mobilising. I haven't used that language, but I hope you will recognise that this is what I have been describing.

I hope some of the stories you have heard, and opportunities I have raised will motivate us to make common cause to bring about the human and workers' change we need. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Thank you.