


## A Global Call for Human Rights in the Workplace



**“Protecting the right to form unions...is vital to promoting broadly shared economic prosperity, social justice and strong democracies.”**

THE HONORABLE JIMMY CARTER  
Nobel Peace Laureate 2002

HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH  
DALAI LAMA TENZIN GYATSO  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1989

DR. SHIRIN EBADI  
Nobel Peace Laureate 2003

THE HONORABLE JOHN HUME  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1998

INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS  
FOR THE PREVENTION OF  
NUCLEAR WAR  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1985

MÁIREAD CORRIGAN MAGUIRE  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1976

THE HONORABLE  
DR. JOSÉ RAMOS-HORTA  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1996

THE MOST REV. DESMOND TUTU  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1984

THE HONORABLE LECH WALESIA  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1983

BETTY WILLIAMS  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1976

PROFESSOR JODY WILLIAMS  
Nobel Peace Laureate 1997

AS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD PREPARE TO OBSERVE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY ON DEC. 10, WE, THE UNDERSIGNED NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATES, are gravely concerned about the state of workers' rights in many countries. International Human Rights Day commemorates the adoption by the United Nations in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration, which has become the cornerstone of the modern human rights movement, states clearly and unambiguously that all people have an inalienable and fundamental human right to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests. Protecting the right to form unions is not only required by the Universal Declaration but also is vital to promoting broadly shared economic prosperity, social justice and strong democracies.

Yet today in many countries, exercise of this fundamental right is poorly protected and in some it is explicitly banned or brutally suppressed. Far too many workers who struggle to form unions for the purpose of bargaining collectively with their employers over the terms and conditions of their employment face threats, harassment, deportation, job loss, prison, beatings, torture or even assassination.

- In Burma and China, independent trade unions are legally prohibited and violation of that ban is severely punished.
- In Zimbabwe, Belarus and Colombia, trade union activists are frequently surveilled, harassed, beaten, arrested, mistreated while in police custody and subjected to laws that often make collective bargaining extremely difficult, if not impossible. Ninety trade unionists were murdered in Colombia last year alone.
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, trade union leaders have been harassed and intimidated, and laws restrict collective bargaining and the right to strike.
- Even the wealthiest nation in the world—the United States of America—fails to adequately protect workers' rights to form unions and bargain collectively. Millions of U.S. workers lack any legal protection to form unions and thousands are discriminated against every year for trying to exercise these rights.

We cannot remain silent in the face of these and other serious abuses of workers' rights. We call upon every nation on this International Human Rights Day to abide by the Universal Declaration and, at long last, truly protect and defend workers' rights, including the right to form unions and bargain collectively.

**AFL-CIO**  
[www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)

This week in more than 100 U.S. cities and 12 other countries, working people are rallying and speaking out for their human rights at work. Find out more at [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org) about this new campaign to restore workers' freedom to form unions and bargain together for a better life.