

## RESOLUTION 16

# End the Silence on Labor Rights in Iraq

Submitted by Alameda Labor Council (Calif.), San Mateo County Central Labor Council (Calif.),  
Washington-Orange-Lamoille Labor Council (Vt.) and Wisconsin State AFL-CIO  
Referred to the International Labor Committee

**WHEREAS**, after more than six years of military occupation, more than 4,300 U.S. and as many as a million or more Iraqi lives have been lost and our government has spent nearly \$650 billion of taxpayer funds on the military occupation of Iraq, and yet real democracy in Iraq still remains more of an aspiration than reality; and

WHEREAS, one of the fundamental building blocks of a democratic society is the right of workers to join unions of their choice free of government interference, domination, harassment or repression; and

WHEREAS, after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. nullified most of the repressive Saddam-era legal code, but kept on the books and continued to enforce a 1987 law that Saddam Hussein imposed making it illegal for public-sector and public enterprise employees to join unions or negotiate the terms of their employment; and

WHEREAS, the subsequent Iraqi Interim Governing Authority continued to enforce this undemocratic denial of worker rights, and the newly elected Iraqi government imposed additional restrictions on worker and union rights, including seizure and freezing of union bank accounts and assets; and

WHEREAS, U.S. and Iraqi forces raided and ransacked union offices and assaulted and detained union leaders, and management of public enterprises, including the oil industry, was directed not to recognize or bargain with unions; and

WHEREAS, a vibrant pluralistic independent labor movement continues to grow in Iraq despite harassment, beatings, kidnappings, detention, torture and even murder of trade union activists; and

WHEREAS, Article 22, Section 3 of the new Iraqi Constitution promises respect for worker rights, foremost freedom of association and calls upon the Iraqi government to enact a law that guarantees the right to form unions; and

WHEREAS, Iraq is also a 1962 signatory to ILO Convention 98 on the right to organize and collectively bargain (which, ironically, the United States has yet to ratify), thereby also imposing a treaty obligation under international law to respect worker rights; and

WHEREAS, the ILO assisted the Iraqi government to draft a basic labor law that conforms to the requirements of the Iraqi constitution and international norms for respect of labor rights and yet the Iraqi government has refused to present that law to the Parliament for adoption; and

WHEREAS, these transgressions of fundamental labor and human rights have taken place for more than six years without a word of criticism from the U.S. government to Iraqi authorities and it is long past time for the U.S. government to speak up for the rights of Iraqi workers and unions; and

WHEREAS, respect for and enforcement of labor rights anywhere encourages respect for and enforcement of labor rights everywhere, including in the United States;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO adopt this resolution and urge the U.S. government to strongly call upon the Iraqi government to live up to the terms of its own constitution and international treaty obligations by:

- Respecting the right of free association and other worker rights defined by ILO Conventions for all Iraqi workers;
- Ceasing all repression of Iraqi unions, union leaders and activists;
- Releasing union funds and assets that have been frozen or impounded and permitting unions to operate normally;
- Directing management of public enterprises and government jurisdictions to recognize and bargain with unions freely chosen by their employees; and

- Promptly adopting a basic labor law that enshrines these rights and obligations in the legal code of Iraq; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO shall send a copy of this resolution to the U.S. government through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, with an additional copy to the Iraqi government through its embassy in Washington, D.C.; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO urge its state and area labor federations and central labor councils to concur with this resolution and communicate that concurrence to the U.S. government by notice to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Iraqi government through its embassy in Washington, D.C.; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO shall participate in the campaign for labor rights in Iraq by circulating the petition in support of those rights initiated by U.S. Labor Against the War.