

HE Mr Hatem Seif El Nasr  
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
26 South Street  
London  
W1K 1DWA

2 March 2012

Dear Ambassador

### **Sentencing of Kamal Abbas**

As President of the University and College Union in the UK, I was alarmed to hear that Kamal Abbas, the General Coordinator of the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) has just been sentenced to six months imprisonment for comments he made at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) last year. This is a gross breach of his freedom of expression, and an attempt to silence one of Egypt's most respected labour rights activists. I call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately drop this sentence.

Mr Abbas was sentenced in absentia by a court in Helwan on 26 February 2012 for the supposed crime of 'insulting a public officer'. Mr Abbas had made critical remarks against Ismail Fahmy of the old state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) during his speech at the ILO in June 2011. To jail someone for speaking up on labour rights - and in the ILO no less - would be completely against the spirit of the Arab Spring and will most probably see Egypt return to the ILO's notorious and so-called 'black-list'.

Kamal Abbas is a widely respected labour leader internationally and a close friend of the British trade union movement. Last year he was a guest of honour at the Fire Brigades Union conference in Southport and he met with my predecessor as UCU President and other UCU colleagues whilst visiting London. The UCU, and its 122,000 members in UK higher and further education, will campaign until this sentence against him is dropped.

I also call on the Egyptian authorities to pass the draft law on trade union freedoms that would guarantee freedom of association and collective bargaining and finally bring Egypt in line with the core conventions of the ILO.

I hope that you can raise these issues as a matter of urgency and I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry Hoad". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Terry Hoad  
President  
UCU