

24 February 2023

Mr Micheál Martin, T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
80 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Re: Expulsion of ETUC General Secretary from Tunisia

Dear Minister Martin,

I am writing to you regarding the shocking decision of Tunisian President Kais Saied to expel Esther Lynch, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and former colleague of ours here in ICTU, from the country last weekend. Thankfully Esther is now safely back in Brussels and we very much welcome your own statement on the matter.

On Friday, Lynch met with the General Secretary of the UGTT, Noureddine Taboubi, before taking part in a protest organised by the union in Sfax on Saturday.

After the protest, Tunisia's President Kais Saied posted an article on his official website accusing the ETUC General Secretary of breaking the law by threatening the security of the country.

The authorities then confronted Esther Lynch in person, saying that she had 24 hours to leave the country. She was ordered to report to the authorities about her activities – and anyone she spoke to – in the intervening period.

Esther was forced out of the country for addressing a rally organised by our sister UGTT trade union centre to protest against Saied's failed policies, a wave of anti-union action by the authorities, and the continued detention of UGTT official Anis Kaabi who was arrested on 31 January following a strike. Anti-union actions have included:

- The sacking of trade union officials
- Malicious lawsuits against trade unionists
- Using law enforcement to monitor and restrict trade union activity
- Promoting yellow trade unions

Saied has, since his 2019 election, eroded and removed key institutions of democracy and assumed complete power for himself. His policies have done enormous damage to Tunisia's economy, society and the daily life of working people.

The expulsion is a blatant interference in the legitimate activities of trade unionists who are exercising their freedom of association rights under international law and does further damage to the international reputation of Kais Saied's regime at a time when the country needs international support due to the failure of his policies.

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Tunisia now forms part of a group of countries where there is “no guarantee of rights”, according to the ITUC’s Global Rights Index. It was the only country in the world to move into this group last year.

Internationalism and solidarity are at the core of the labour movement – not a crime “threatening sovereignty of a country” – and must be protected.

We urge you to raise this issue at the highest level with the Tunisian regime and to seek concerted action at EU and International level calling on him to release Anis Kaabi, respect fundamental rights, including trade union freedoms, and replace his autocratic approach with one that respects the Tunisian people and their democratic rights. The problems of Tunisia today can only be resolved through democracy, dialogue, cooperation and negotiation with the unions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Owen Reidy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Owen Reidy
General Secretary