



Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU)

3rd National Congress

DECLARATION

**6-7 April 2016
Mogadishu, Somalia**

THEME: RESPECT our Rights - PROTECT our Safety

We, delegates at the 3rd National Congress of the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU), representing eleven affiliated unions, have adopted the following declaration:

We meet at this National Congress in a united, strong and confident spirit as a free, independent and democratic trade union movement, determined to play a crucial role in tackling the multifaceted challenges facing Somali workers.

We are greatly encouraged and inspired by the achievements of our federation during the past three years and more, which gave a much needed boost to the struggles necessary to reinforce our movement, stand up for workers' rights and deepen our fight for social justice. We entered this congress having achieved many impressive victories.

Our unity and strength at the National Congress were reflected in:

- a) The strong culture of our members to be fully involved in the life of our federation and its statutory cycles of meetings, demonstrated by our deep attachment to internal democracy that made this national congress so unique.
- b) The political cohesion and shared vision of delegates best expressed in the numerous open and dynamic debates on major issues affecting workers.
- c) Our determination to mobilise Somali workers in the face of multiple challenges, resulting in the continued growth of FESTU.

We adopted the theme "RESPECT our Rights - PROTECT our Safety", as the main theme of our congress in order to consolidate respect and safety as two fundamental human rights, which our members continuously endeavour to champion and uphold.

We are gathering at a time when the attacks against our movement have reached a new peak, including violations of the right to freedom of association, massive interference in trade unions affairs and continued attempts to frustrate our basic right of freedom of assembly.

We are all well aware of the massive efforts on the part of some government officials to disrupt our trade unions and their legitimate activities in order to push back many gains made by our federation, and throw our movement into a confusion.

We pledge unanimously to commit ourselves to campaign against any attempt to undermine or take away the trade union rights of our federation – the only internationally-recognised voice of Somali workers.

We will fully resist any abuse by public office holders, including impersonation, derogatory campaign, or character assassination, targeting our elected leaders, which we consider it to be an attempt to deter and dissuade us from freely organising ourselves and choosing our representative. We will, without fear, continue to defend our human rights, including labour rights.

Our society continues to suffer from extremely high levels of poverty arising from unemployment, underemployment, paltry wages, child labour, forced labour, and extremely high levels of inequality. The federal government, in close coordination with regional administrations, must set targets to reduce unemployment and poverty, and it must substantially increase its spending on services and infrastructure for our people. We can and should be able to conquer underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment.

We are enormously concerned about the ferocious attacks on the wellbeing and lives of Somali people. There's an appalling toll of innocent civilians killed and injured in Mogadishu and elsewhere in the country. The blood of workers continues to be shed with no end in sight in numerous terrorist incidents and other criminal attacks. We call on the federal government, as well as the regional administrations, to take decisive action to protect our people.

Violence, conflict, terrorism and corruption are destroying lives in Somalia. The people of Somalia, in every region and district, urgently need peace and economic reconstruction as the starting point for rebuilding the country, encompassing a political system based on good governance and the rule of law, including international law and respect for human rights.

We are concerned that the lack of decent work opportunities, particularly for young people, is one of the root causes of the conflict and insecurity, and the time has come to devote the necessary resources to creating decent work for young people.

Thanks to their continued commitment to social justice, solidarity, non-discrimination and tolerance, and their presence in workplaces and communities, our trade unions have a distinctive role to play, working for peace and preventing the development of conflict and dealing with its result.

FESTU and its affiliated trade unions will remain resolute in their support for workers' rights and their quest for full respect of human rights, standing up for the right of freedom of association, and persistently demanding an end to the culture of impunity regarding abusers and ringleaders.

We welcome the momentous decisions on Somalia by the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee on Freedom of Association in November 2015 and again in March 2016, as they are important conclusions and recommendations in safeguarding the right to freedom of association, safety of trade union leadership and independence and freedom of workers to run their unions without being controlled and manipulated by government officials and employers.

We remain disappointed that the federal government of Somalia has not implemented these conclusions and recommendations, and, instead, continues to defy international principles and values of freedom of association and persecute independent trade unions.

In order to strengthen the work of our federation and affiliated unions, we took steps to intensify our campaign to organise the unorganised – including workers in the informal sector and other hard-to-reach areas, as well as supporting progressive organisations for the unemployed.

We recognise that the basis for a successful recruitment drive by our unions would be to maintain and improve the service we give our members. We have agreed to launch a mass educational and information programme to set up teams with the political, intellectual, organisational and technical skills to advance the struggles of working people.

We reaffirm that social justice, democracy and full respect for human rights and international law are central to bringing about the necessary transformations and conditions under which the people of Somalia can work out a decent future. Restrictions on the right to freedom of association and the right of free trade unions to exist are inhibiting the contribution of trade unionism to the promotion of peace, democracy and workers' rights in Somalia.

In the interest of security, economic growth and development, we call on the Somali security forces and the African Union Peacekeeping mission to take further preventive measures to ensure the security and protection of Somali people at a time when the election of next federal parliament members and subsequent election of the President of the Republic will be conducted later on this year. Many lessons must be learned from previous elections, which have always proved to be deadly for Somali people.

Ahmed Osman Said
PRESIDENT

Omar Faruk Osman
GENERAL SECRETARY