

## Strengthening Trade Unions - a Cornerstone for Democracy and for Tackling Inequality

### Joint Nordic Statement from NFS Congress in Oslo 27 September 2022

We, the Nordic trade unions, representing more than 8,5 million workers in the Nordic countries, are deeply worried about the threats to trade unions and suppression of labour standards internationally and in our close neighbourhood, Central and Eastern Europe.

The presence of strong democratic trade unions is crucial in the fight against the inequality we now see skyrocketing around the world. Strong democratic trade unions constitute important pillars for the transition processes we have ahead of us. The “just transition” we envisage depends on labour movements able to negotiate ground-breaking reforms at both national and global levels, and to implement them at the shopfloor. The implementation of due diligence incorporated in the UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights likewise relies on unions present at the shopfloor. Strong social contracts and social dialogue, as referred to among others by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, will require well organized parties on both workers’ and employers’ side.

Yet, trade unions and workers’ rights to organize are currently under pressure in many countries. Hostile employers and governments put pressure on the right to organize, to bargain collectively and to strike. Several trade unions are struggling with repression and arrests or legislative restrictions on international collaboration and creative use of inspections and tax regimes to suppress trade unions. The majority of the world’s workers now live in countries where free trade unions are either prohibited or consistently opposed by states and companies. About 80 per cent of the world’s countries do not respect the right to negotiate collectively (ITUC 2021). The rights to organize as well as collective action and bargaining are under considerable strain internationally.

In Central and Eastern Europe, these strains are felt particularly these days. In Belarus, trade union leaders have been imprisoned and unions declared illegal. In Russia, free independent trade unions are under political pressure. In Kazakhstan, independent trade unionism is put under considerable pressure by the authorities. Trade unions all over Central and Eastern Europe are feeling the pressures and tensions rising as a consequence of polarization, rising inequality and mass immigration of refugees and their humanitarian needs. In Ukraine, recent legal changes will make it considerably more difficult for labour to organize and protect labour standards. ITUC Global Rights Index 2022 shows that [many workers in Central and Eastern Europe have no access to rights](#).

**We, the Nordic unions, declare that much more needs to be done in order to protect free trade unions as part of the for democracy, justice and peace:**

- ⇒ We call on our governments to support the ILOs endeavours aiming to get countries to *ratify core ILO Conventions* as well as their implementation, monitoring and respect enforcement
- ⇒ We call on our governments to integrate support for trade unions, social dialogue and core labour standards in their development aid
- ⇒ We call on our governments to insist on respect for trade unions and social dialogue as a basis for reconstruction plans in Ukraine.