

Successful Western Saharan union congress

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El Aain refugee camp,

More than 380 delegates participated at the sixth congress of the General Union of Saguia El Hamra and Rio de Oro (-Western Sahara) Workers (UGTSARIO) in the Western Saharan refugee camp of El Aaiun in south-west Algeria from October 19-21.

The congress represented workers from Western Saharan four refugee camps plus members of the official administration from camps 27 February and Rabuni.

Delegates also attended from the Western Saharan diaspora in France, Spain, Algeria and Mauritania.

The congress also heard from former-phosphate workers from the Moroccan-occupied territories of Western Sahara. Highly lucrative Saharawi phosphate is mined illegally by the Moroccan administration with involvement of foreign companies, including from Australia.

Due to repression in the occupied territories, the participation of the former-phosphate workers occurred via phone link up.

Morocco occupied Western Sahara in 1975 and to refuses to respect the 1991 UN-brokered peace plan between Morocco and Polisario Front, the official representative of the Saharawi people. According to the agreement the Saharawis were supposed to vote on a referendum on self determination by 1992.

As part of the congress, the fourth International Trade Union Conference in Solidarity with the Western Saharan Workers convened and released a declaration in support of Saharawi self determination and condemned Morocco's ongoing human rights violations.

The declaration also calls for an international day of action in 2009 to highlight the plight of the Saharawi people and the illegal exploitation of their natural resources by foreign companies.

The declaration was signed by unions representing more than fifty countries and 200 million workers. The Australian delegation included a member of the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance and two Australian Workers Union members, one of whom was an official representative for the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Also there was representation from Australia from the Socialist Alliance and Australian Western Sahara Association.

P.S.

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