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ITUC-Africa Statement in Solidarity with TUCA and the Trade Union Movement in Panama

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) expresses its full solidarity with the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) following the arbitrary detention and expulsion of Comrade Marcelo Di Stefano, TUCA's Secretary for Trade Union Strengthening and Organisation, by the authorities of Panama.

ITUC-Africa unequivocally condemns this action, which constitutes a serious violation of democratic norms, the rule of law, and internationally recognised trade union rights. The targeting of a senior trade union leader—present in Panama to participate in activities linked to a tripartite mission of the International Labour Organization (ILO)—is not an administrative irregularity. It is a political act of intimidation.

Trade unions are custodians of democracy and the rule of law. Across history and continents, organised workers have defended civil liberties, social justice, accountability, and inclusive governance. An attack on trade union leaders is therefore an attack on democracy itself.

Such actions reflect methods increasingly employed by authoritarian forces to suffocate the rule of the people, by the people, and for the people. Harassment, arbitrary detention, and expulsion are tools used to silence dissent, weaken collective organisation, and dismantle social dialogue—especially where trade unions remain among the strongest defenders of democratic participation.

ITUC-Africa recalls that freedom of association and the right to organise are fundamental human rights, firmly enshrined in national legal frameworks and in international labour standards, including ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98, and the principles of tripartite social dialogue. Panama, having ratified core international labour conventions, is bound by these obligations.

ITUC-Africa therefore demands immediate and public explanations from the Government of Panama, calls for an end to all forms of harassment and restriction against trade union activity, and reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with TUCA and the democratic trade union movement in Panama.

The African trade union movement stands united with workers of the Americas: there can be no democracy without free, independent, and strong trade unions.

Issued in Lomé, Togo, on 3 February 2026

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