

21st May 2014

Statement from the IndustriAll Europe Executive Committee

Call for Safe Working Conditions for all Workers in Turkey

The Executive Committee of industriAll European Trade Union, meeting in Brussels on 21st & 22nd May, expresses its profound sadness and outrage at the tragic accident that has led to the deaths of hundreds of our colleagues at the mine in Soma, operated by the Soma Coal Mining Company in Manisa (Turkey) on 13 May 2014. We would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, as well as their colleagues, in this time of hardship. The sheer magnitude of the catastrophe is completely incomprehensible and raises a series of concerns that need to be addressed urgently.

In principle, industriAll Europe welcomes the accession negotiations between Turkey and the European Union. However, in the light of this dreadful event, it calls on the European Commission to address workplace security as a matter of urgency in upcoming rounds of negotiations. It is furthermore just as necessary to continuously improve health and safety standards throughout the European Union. IndustriAll Europe believes that no country can progress at the expense of workers' lives. Good working conditions and social standards are core values of the European Union. High safety standards are indispensable for creating such working conditions, which lay the economic foundation for the success of European companies.

The government of Turkey must act now and ratify ILO Convention 176 on Safety and Health in Mines, and its accompanying Recommendation 183. This should be the first step in establishing a credible and effective legislative and regulatory framework on safe and healthy mines. Furthermore, industriAll Europe calls attention to the "Joint statement on the further improvement of the working conditions and occupational health of employees in the extractive industries in the context of European social dialogue". Safety at the work place must be the number one priority at any mine in Europe and, indeed, the world. Any divergence from this course in favour of profit maximisation is unacceptable and criminal.

Those responsible must be held liable and swiftly sanctioned for their actions. The Turkish government can, however, under no circumstances be satisfied with merely investigating fatal accidents, but must finally put in place measures that can effectively prevent them. In order to do this, it will have to abandon its hostile policies towards trade unions and instead cooperate with workers' representatives, ensure respect for collectively agreed solutions and uphold democratic principles. The fact that concerns regarding the safety of the mine in Soma had already been raised in front of the Turkish Parliament but were dismissed by the government shows the blatant lack of understanding in this field that needs to be overcome.

Numerous industriAll Europe affiliates have already set up relief funds for the Turkish mine victims and their families and industriAll European Trade Union pledges to provide all possible support that our sister organisations in Turkey and their members may need. We stand united and in solidarity at their side. The fact that the accident in Soma and its gravity were avoidable and were caused by scandalous and insufficient safety provisions makes this catastrophe absolutely unbearable. IndustriAll Europe therefore calls for immediate action to enforce and improve the existing safety legislation in Turkey and for a change in mentality that is the root cause for the intolerable death toll amongst workers in Turkey.