Trade Unions and their members are guardians of democracy and workers' rights the world over.

This year, unprecedented numbers of workers have been hitting the streets around the world. They have been fighting government attempts to cut back their rights. They make their voices heard when economic mismanagement threatens everyone's livelihood. They demand that the forces of globalisation be mastered and controlled.

When Zimbabwe's election was corrupted, the only protest action in the country was the calling of a national strike by trade unions. When Argentina's economy went up in smoke, workers came out in force to insist on change. When Italian premier Berlusconi, started dismantling the hard-won rights of the Italian worker, millions answered the trade unions' call to protest. In Japan, thousands of union members came out in a massive protest action against social insecurity and their government's anti-union reforms. When the Indian government's ill-judged reforms threatened to devastate the lives of workers and their families, around ten million union members joined a day of protest across the country. When things go seriously wrong, workers' voices are heard louder than any other.

When workers protest, union leaders often risk their own personal safety. When Korea's workers stood their ground against yet another repressive onslaught from government, their leaders found themselves in jail, some facing long prison terms. When Nigerian unions called a general strike this year, their leader was arrested. When independent labour unions in China protested layoffs, their leaders were put behind bars. And in Colombia, involvement in trade union work can be fatal, costing dozens of union leaders their lives each year.

These leaders, and the workers they represent, know the risks they face. They know that being arrested or suffering violent attacks is sometimes the only way they can help draw the attention of the world to what is unjust or repressive in their workplace, industry, or country.

The combined voice of the work force is more powerful than any other. When thousands, or even millions, of people stand side by side in solidarity, neither governments nor employers, nor their sisters and brothers in unions around the world can ignore them.

Workers lucky enough to be outside the trouble zones are still part of the extended family of those facing danger or hardship. They too can and do get involved, by lending their support and solidarity, in times of trouble. This is why, for example, workers around the world have come out in a heartfelt call for peace in the Middle East. The value of this solidarity is immeasurable, in all its forms. International and national trade union leaders will travel thousands of kilometres to observe court trials of unionists, or to intervene with authorities on behalf of their colleagues. Union members will participate in global trade union "days of action". And individual members will pen protest letters in response to international appeals. Solidarity works at all levels.

In the international trade union movement, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its Global Unions partners promote this solidarity. We protest abuses of workers' rights perpetrated by governments and employers. We represent workers in the global political bodies which set the standards we live by. We put forward, in the name of many millions of working men and women, ways to
combat the painful effects of globalisation, felt by workers and their families from the poorest to the richest countries in the world.

Our strength is in our numbers - unions must grow and must organise if they want to be heard. The efforts of the international trade union family mean nothing if they are not supported by strong and constantly renewed membership in individual trade unions. Unions must reach out to men and women, young and old, to convince them first and foremost of the value of union membership in their own workplaces. And they must stress the central importance of trade unions, not only in the workplace, but also in guaranteeing fundamental freedoms for people all over the world.

Today we salute all trade union members, guardians of democracy and fundamental workers' rights the world over, for advocating a better working life for all, better societies, and a better world.

Long live May Day, Long live international trade union solidarity.