

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

Trade unions endorse action plan to defend migrant rights

Brussels, 15 December 2006 (ITUC Online): As International Migrants Day (18 December) approaches, the International Trade Union Confederation today reiterated its determination to prioritise the fight for the respect of migrants' rights.

At a seminar that brought them together for four days in Brussels, some 60 trade unionists and representatives of international organizations defined their priorities and methods for implementing a concrete action plan with a view to better organising migrants, defending and promoting their rights and improving their working conditions. Emphasis was placed on gender since female migrant workers account for a significant proportion of migrant labour and are particularly vulnerable to discrimination.

Focusing on four priorities - protection of rights, unionisation, sustainable development and awareness-raising - this realistic action plan sets out the specific steps to be taken at national, regional and international level, both within the trade union movement and in partnership with NGOs and other civil society players. The first priority - promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers - involves: 1) enhancing legal protection, specifically by more actively promoting the ratification and application of ILO instruments (Conventions 97 and 143) and the UN Convention on Migrants (1990), and 2) fighting discrimination, racism and xenophobia at all levels, especially within trade unions.

The second priority focuses on the unionisation of migrants, specifically by sending trade union organisers from the countries of origin to destination countries and developing practical guides for organising migrants.

"In the context of the overall trade union struggle for a fairer and more humane globalisation, coordinating migration and sustainable development is a key priority for promoting decent work for all workers, including migrant workers", said Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary. This approach includes unions' determination to fight the brain-drain – or indeed the permanent loss of expertise - in countries of origin.

Information and awareness-raising are key tools for pursuing these objectives at all levels of union work, as clearly demonstrated by the experiences presented during the seminar.

In a new ITUC video, an adviser at the Info-Point in the Estonian capital of Tallin explains that "If Estonians wishing to emigrate come to see us before leaving, then they know what kind of wages and working conditions await them in Finland and which unions they should join. Well informed people will have fewer problems once they get there". The Info-Point was set up with the support of the Finnish trade union federation SAK(*).

Concluded at the seminar were the partnership agreements between trade unions in Jordan (GFJTU), Pakistan (PWF) and Sri Lanka (NWC), between unions in Mauritius (CGTM) and Senegal (CNTS), between unions in Costa Rica (CNTRN) and Nicaragua (CST), and between unions in Malaysia (MTUC) and Indonesia (KSPI). These partnership agreements are often accompanied by the creation of information and service centres for migrants.

See also the 7-minute video entitled "Estonian migrants: longer working hours for less money" at http://www.icftu.org/www/video/estonia_en.wvx

Read also the interview with Sartiwen Binti Sanbardi (Hong Kong, HKCTU) entitled "Migrant domestic workers are exploited because they don't know the law" at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article472>

Founded on November 1 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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