

ICATU-WCL SUMMIT MEETING IN DAMAS

On 4-5 April last, a delegation of the WCL Executive Committee was in Damas (Syria) for a high-level trade union meeting with the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions – ICATU. Both days of debate were chaired by ICATU Secretary General Hacene Djemam and WCL Secretary General Willy Thys. On the first day, the participants discussed the socio-economic and political situation as well as the future of Arab trade unionism. Willy Thys reminded of the current trade union challenges, which turned out to drive also the ICATU. The debates on the second day were centred on the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the war in Iraq, and on the solidarity actions the trade unions could take. The possibilities of cooperation between WCL and ICATU Trade Action were examined, and the role (actions) of the International Labour Organisation and other international institutions was specified. Another topic was the impact of the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre) and the World Economic Forum (Davos) on trade union action. The debates were very lively, with a strong participation from both sides. In conclusion of the meeting, the WCL and the ICATU drew up a joint declaration and a cooperation protocol. We hope whole-heartedly that similar joint initiatives will continue to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the WCL and the ICATU.

The joint declaration of the ICATU-WCL Summit is available in French, English and Spanish at simple request via info@cmt-wcl.org, or on our website (www.cmt-wcl.org/Publications/Interventions-Lines).

EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE WCL MET IN BRUSSELS

The European Section of the WCL met on 28 February in Brussels. Deputy Secretary General Jaap Wienen welcomed the participants and particularly the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia (CATUS), which recently affiliated to the WCL. It discussed the Conference of the International Labour Organisation, which will assemble next June, the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum of Davos. It also took stock of the Trade Action project. Almost 400 activities will be started up shortly, in 28 countries. In conclusion of the European Section meeting, several representatives provided information on the trade union situation in their countries, and the WCL missions to Belarus, Armenia, Poland and Serbia were assessed.

WCL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING IN A NUTSHELL

The WCL Executive Committee met in Brussels from 31 March to 2 April. This Committee – composed of the President, the Vice Presidents, the Treasurer, the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretaries General – prepares the Confederal Board session and outlines the activities of the Brussels-based WCL General Secretariat. It made the following decisions:

- On 30 April next, Béatrice Fauchère will retire. She started her career at the WCL in 1977 and was appointed as permanent representative in Geneva in 1991. She held this office with great conviction and enthusiasm until her retirement. It will now be up to Hervé Sea and Ramón Vivanco to assume the permanent representation of the WCL with the ILO, the UN and its specialised institutions in Geneva. Whereas Hervé will deal with legal issues and will maintain the relations with the ILO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramón will take up the economic matters and stay in contact with the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
- The Women and Work Department continues unabated its action to strengthen the position and unionisation of women. Early in April, Kattia Paredes took part in a European Women's Seminar in Madrid (Spain).
- All the current projects in support of the workers worldwide are followed up with utmost care.
- The Indian Confederation of Labour (ICL) became an ordinary WCL member, and the affiliation of the trade union COSI from Benin (Africa) was approved.
- In 2004, the CLAT – our regional organisation in Latin America – will organise its 12th Congress, probably in Brazil. «*The human being must be the centre of society and of the economy. Also the dignity of the informal economy workers is one of our concerns*», said Eduardo Garcia, Secretary General of the CLAT.
- At next WCL Confederal Board session, which scheduled to take place in Jakarta (Indonesia) on 19-25 October, the Executive Committee will present a preliminary draft of the themes for 2005 Congress, which will normally take place in Latin America.

WFAFW WORLD BOARD DISCUSSES THE ORGANISATION'S FUTURE

The World Board of the World Federation of Agriculture, Food, Hotel and Allied Workers (WFAFW) met on 27-29 March, with financial support from CNV International, to discuss

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the organisation's future. One of the agenda items was the WFAFW's basic policy. The representatives of the continents were given the opportunity to present their activities reports. The Board drew up the action programme 2003-2005 and started the preparations for the next WFAFW Congress, which will be held in Spain at the end of September.

PROTEST MARCH OF THE THREE ROMANIAN CONFEDERATIONS

On 21 March, a protest march was organised in Bucharest. More than 15,000 trade union activists from all the branches of industry, members of the *Confédération Syndicale Démocratique Roumaine* (CSDR) and Cartel Alfa, both WCL affiliates, as well as of the BSN, took part in it. The march had been



called by the European Trade Union Confederation. It urged its members and all the social organisation to take action in favour of a more democratic and more social Europe. The World Confederation of Labour readily answered this call. Cartel Alfa, the CSDR and the BSN demand among other things a less heavy tax system in Romania. According to the confederations, *«the system – and particularly the wage tax – must be revised»*. They also urge the Romanian government to develop an independent and unbiased status of the public office, to pay the civil servants equitable salaries, negotiated with the social partners, and to approve a legal minimum wage between 330 and 350 euro.

CONGRESS OF THE CGT-FRANCE: «UNITY IN DIVERSITY»

The 47th Congress of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT, France) met in Montpellier on 24-28 March. Deputy Secretary General Jaap Wielen represented the WCL during the opening, whereas Eduardo Estevez took part in the preceding symposium on globalisation. In his opening speech, Bernard Thibault (re-elected CGT Secretary General) stressed the importance of a pluriform trade union movement: *«the workers' organisations must combine their forces at the European and the world level,*

without losing their identity». The Board passed a resolution on the 'regeneration of trade unionism'. Other resolutions bore upon the emancipation of the workers, new forms of social security, a 'charter on trade union life' and a new system of membership dues.

ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL INSISTS ON STRONGER STANDARD-SETTING SYSTEM

The Governing Body of the International Labour Office (ILO) organised its 286th session in Geneva on 6-28 March. One of the items on its agenda was the programme for 2004-2005, which rests on four strategic pillars: labour standards, employment, social security and social dialogue. Decent work, poverty reduction and gender equality remain essential in this respect. Juan Somavia, who was re-elected ILO Director General with an absolute majority, repeated that the standards system of the International Labour Organisation had to be optimised by means of stricter controls, a uniform system to file and process complaints, etc. The working party on the 'social dimension of the globalisation' listened attentively to the WCL's contribution. The Governing Body also decided that a special session on the situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories would be organised in the margin of the International Labour Conference (3-19 June). Basile Mahan Gahé, WCL President and

regular member of the ILO Governing Body, represented the WCL at this 286th session, jointly with Rabiadou Sera Diallo and Julio Roberto (both deputy members).

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION TEXTILE AND CLOTHING ORGANISES REGIONAL SEMINARS IN BRAZIL AND TOGO

The International Federation Textile and Clothing (IFTC/WCL) is preparing its 33rd World Congress, which will be held in Doorn (the Netherlands) on 25-27 September. Within this framework it organised at the end of March two regional seminars, in Brazil and in Togo, on 'effects of the globalisation on the shop-floor'. The participants from the regional organisations – supported by the IFTC – sought answers to the problems caused by the advancing globalisation, and they discussed the central themes in the IFTC's policy. The textile industry, the largest source of employment in the world, is also the relocating at high speed to the low-wage countries where, in the free zones, the workers work in dreadful circumstances for indecent wages and with scanty trade union protection. The informal economy is booming, and large clothing companies increasingly contract their work out to homeworkers, from whom the pieces they make are bought back for a morsel of

bread, instead of offering them a decent remuneration. Moreover, they have no social protection or security whatsoever. That is how other markets can be flooded with fabrics and clothes, which causes a rise in unemployment. In other words: liberalisation and flexibilisation of the market to the detriment of the conditions for the workers. In some countries the government favours the 'individualisation' of employment contracts. The number of temporary and flexible contracts is rising fast, and the labour code makes it impossible to conclude collective agreements. The participants in the IFTC seminars therefore concluded that labour regulations and working circumstances had to be the subject of international agreements. Moreover, consumers and trade unions should take action to force companies to observe the international labour and wage conventions. They demanded, further, to improve the labour laws and to enforce them by means of stricter controls, etc.

MERCOSUR BUILDING AND WOODWORKERS' FEDERATIONS MET IN BRAZIL

The federation of ceramics workers met in the city of Itapema (Brazil) on 27-29 May last. The agenda included the current situation of the sector in the various countries as well as the future priorities and activities. In the next three years it will become clear if the MERCOSUR project of southern Latin American countries can hold out against the US proposal to create a free trade zone covering the whole of North and South America. The Latin American federations turn down this North American project lest their economies be no match for the powerful North American economy, which would have serious social repercussions such as unemployment and poverty. They advocate a separate Latin American model for economic, social and political development. In the meantime, development within MERCOSUR has stagnated due to the deep economic crisis in Argentina and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. Meanwhile, the privatisation processes and the attendant flexibilisation and liberalisation of the markets have reached an advanced stage. The trade unions are therefore seeking more direct and practical responses to these developments. In this respect they are watching chiefly the developments in the European Union. They accepted the proposal to organise a European – Latin America seminar of the World Federation of Building and Woodworkers' Unions (WFBW) to analyse and discuss the cooperation between the European Union and MERCOSUR from a trade union perspective. The participants also reached the conclusion that it is necessary to create works councils in Latin America as well. The relevant experience acquired in Europe could serve as a basis for a proper policy and strategy. It was suggested that the WFBW should urge the Belgian multinational Eternit-Etex, which operates in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Venezuela, to set

up works councils in each of its branch companies in Latin America. A similar initiative is possible at the company DECA, which operates in Argentina and Brazil. In conclusion, the participants approved a comprehensive action and activities programme and agreed that the next meeting would be devoted to an adaptation of the Constitution in such a way that also building workers' federations can affiliate to the Federation.

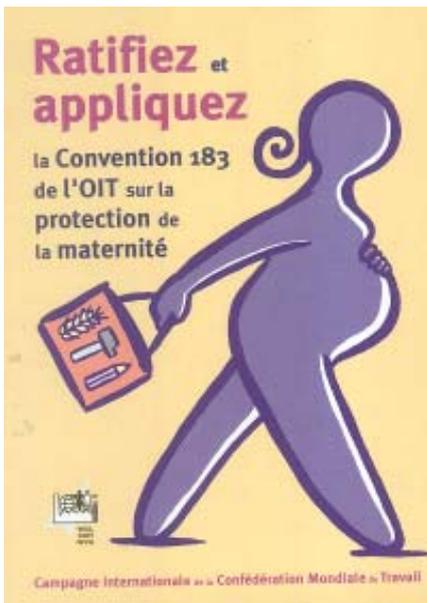
UN COMMISSION REMAINS COMMITTED TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

By 2015, all 191 member countries of the United Nations must have achieved the Millennium development goals. This programme encompasses the eradication of extreme poverty, basic education for all, reduction of infant mortality and promotion of gender equality. "These goals can only be achieved if the international community invests in the situation of women", said Louise Fréchette, UN Deputy Secretary General, on 8 March on the occasion of International Women's Day. The UN Commission on the Status of Women is working hard on this. Wendy J. Kelly Carter of our US affiliate, NAPFE, represented the WCL at the 47th session of the Commission, on 3-5 and 12-14 April. The participants discussed how the modern communication and information techniques can strengthen the position of women and how women can gain better access to the media. A further topic were the basic rights of women, which have prevented, worldwide, each act of violence against women and girls, including sexual abuse and forced prostitution. Also the fate of women in times of war got proper attention. Figures indeed go to show that 70% of the casualties during recent conflicts were not military people, but women and children.

FIRST TRAINING SESSION ON 'CAPACITY BUILDING' IN AFRICA



7 April 2003 - Togo: start of the first training session on 'Capacity Building' in Africa, an initiative of WCL Trade Action and the DOAWTU. Kokou Tozoun, Minister of Public Affairs and Employment of Togo, wishes project coordinator Eric Aarts every success.



According to the WCL, the ratification of ILO Convention 183 is absolute necessary to give women workers and their children the best possible protection!

Schedule of activities

- 24 April - 09 May: Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations (CONGO) / UN: Commission on Lasting Development, New York – United States;
- 25-30 April: SBSSI Congress, Jakarta – Indonesia;
- 5-23 May: WCL / International Institute on Workers' Education (Belgium): Seminar on women workers, Belgium;
- 12-14 May: Seminar on 'Financing and Development', Brussels - Belgium;
- 16-18 May: FCG/ÖGB – 15th Conference on trade union cooperation in Europe, Vienna - Austria;
- 20-21 May: CFTUI Congress, Patna – India;
- 26-29 May: 10th ETUC Congress, Prague – Czech Republic.

The latest updates of our schedule are available on our web site at the address www.cmt-wcl.org