

**DRC: EDUCATION AND DECENT WORK,
 ESSENTIAL FACTORS IN THE
 RECONQUERING OF PEACE**



The Ituri region lies in the north east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 1999, this region fell prey to interethnic violence that would have cost 50 000 human lives already. To this have to be added the 500 000 displaced inhabitants, who are now living in very precarious circumstances. This is probably due to the fact that this part of the DRC is fertile and rich in raw materials, which stirs up quite a lust for wealth. The situation of women and children is very critical in some regions (rape, mutilation, assassination...). According to the «*Confédération Syndicale du Congo*» (CSC), the creation of an International Criminal Court, besides education and decent work, is an essential element in the reconquering of lasting peace in the region. The position of the CSC to the privatisation of state-owned companies in the DRC is unambiguous. In no case this will contribute to the creation of new jobs, and in the long run it could deprive part of the population of access to essential services.

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION
 MOVEMENT CALLS COLOMBIAN VICE
 PRESIDENT TO ACCOUNT**

During a meeting with the Colombian Vice President, Francisco Santos, organised in Brussels on 28 November last, a delegation of the international trade union movement (ICFTU, ETUC and WCL, which was represented by Secretary General Willy Thys) reminded that the trade union situation in that country was an absolute tragedy. The assassinations of trade unionists are

innumerable and the constant violation of the trade union rights has become almost commonplace! In 2002, over 180 trade unionists met their death in Colombia, and the toll for 2003 is already 69. Add to this the pressures, threats, displacements and abductions, and everybody will understand that the situation has become unbearable. «*It is time the Colombian government and the international community reacted and exerted pressure to achieve that the workers can associate freely in Colombia, without any fear of reprisals*», declared Willy Thys, adding that «*the international trade union movement, too, must make all-out*

efforts so that nobody, in Colombia or anywhere else, falls prey to assassination on account of his or her status as a workers' representative». The CGTD, the Colombian affiliate of the WCL, has committed itself to this task for years, in the most difficult circumstances. Let us hope that the calls of the trade union movement will be heard!

**MILLIONS OF WORKERS AFFECTED
 BY VIOLENCE AT WORK**

After two weeks of intense debates the Governing Body of the ILO, assembled at the end of November 2003, made the expected decisions, particularly on the workers' rights in Belarus (see below). On 17 November there was a new meeting of the working party of the Governing Body on the social dimension of globalisation. Mrs Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland and Co-Chairwoman of the High Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation – supported by the ILO – stated that «*the present course of the globalisation must change*» and «*the present situation is neither morally nor politically feasible. Too few people are benefiting from it, and too many people have no say in its conception and no influence over its realisation. We have a globalised economy now, but no globalised society. Governance and regulations obviously do not measure up to the economic developments*», she added. The WCL can only support this statement and reaffirm that a good equilibrium requires that the ILO is placed on equal terms with the international financial institutions IMF,

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World Bank and World Trade Organisation. Lastly, facing the increasing violence at work, the Governing Body adopted a new «Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in Services Sector». According to the ILO, this initiatives satisfies the needs of millions of workers affected by this kind of violence in the services sector, both in the developing and in the industrial countries.

For any further information on this Code, please surf to: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/themes/violence.htm>

ATTACKS ON LABOUR RIGHTS IN BELARUS: ILO ESTABLISHES COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Following a complaint under Article 26 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) against the government of Belarus for non-observance of the Conventions Nos. 87 and 98, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office (ILO) established a Commission of Inquiry to examine the repeated attacks on the labour rights in Belarus. This decision of the Governing Body follows upon a letter signed by fourteen workers' delegate and addressed to the International Labour Conference last June. By this letter they demanded the application of the procedure provided in Article 26 on account of «many cases of serious violations of these fundamental ILO Conventions in recent years by the public authorities and many employers of Belarus, counter to trade union movement in that country». It is therefore only logical and in line with the recommendation of its Committee on Freedom of Association that the Governing Body decided to establish a Commission of Inquiry. We remind here that the procedure provided in Article 26 of the ILO Constitution is not applied generally unless the violations persist and the decisions of the supervisory bodies are disregarded. In its latest report now, the Committee on Freedom of Association drew the attention of the Governing Body to the case of Belarus, which had been presented for the first time in June 2000! It was the seventh time already that the Committee noted that the freedom and independence of the trade union movement kept being exposed to serious attacks. Moreover, the Committee pointed out that the administrative detention of trade union leaders became an increasingly frequent phenomenon. The WCL wants this Commission of Inquiry to be able to work in the best possible circumstances.

TRADE UNIONISM MUST RECONQUER ITS SPACE AS A COUNTERVAILING POWER

On 25 and 26 November, our Basque affiliate ELA and the WCL participated in Bilbao in the homage the Manu Robles-Arengiz and the Sabino Arana Foundation paid to trade unionist Jesús Insausti Uzturre, who passed away ten years ago. Jesús Insausti was press officer of the WCL and activist of

the trade union ELA. On this occasion WCL Secretary General Willy Thys gave a lecture on the «Role of trade unionism in a globalised world». ELA Secretary General José Elorrieta, for his part, spoke about the «model of society and democracy». Both trade union leaders pointed out that trade unionism had to reconquer its space as a countervailing power and that it was time humankind became the centre of concerns. «Trade unionism must be a countervailing power facing the multinationals, and that is why the WCL has strengthened its Trade Action, but also facing the international financial institutions». «The WCL», Willy Thys explained, «has entered upon a dialogue with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Within this space we can affirm our positions». As far as the terrorism issue was concerned, the Secretary General reaffirmed that the WCL was totally against each form of violence, but that since 11 September 2001, and under the influence of the American neo-conservatives, there had been a trend to put this label on things that originate in plain social injustices.

The WCL actively supports the SBSI, its Indonesian affiliate, in its sensitisation campaign against child labour.



Schedule of activities

- 15 December: ILO: interregional tripartite meeting HIV/AIDS, Geneva – Switzerland;
- 16-21 December: WCL-ICATU women's seminar, Damascus – Syria;
- 10-11 January: OATUU, 8th Congress, Khartoum – Sudan;
- 12-16 January: Trade Action: second seminar informal economy Latin America – Dominican Republic;
- 14-15 January: World Trade Union Forum, Mumbai – India;
- 16-21 January: World Social Forum, Mumbai – India;
- 23-28 January: World Economic Forum, Davos – Suisse.

Please consult our annual schedule on: www.cmt-wcl.org



Trade Action

WCL MISSION TO HONDURAS

Under the leadership of a delegation of the «*Central General de Trabajadores*» (CGT), affiliated to the WCL, Jaap Wielen and Eric Aarts of WCL Trade Action visited Honduras on 20 and 21 November last. Near San Pedro de Sula they attended the closing session of a miners'



congress and visited the zinc, lead and iron mine. After ten months of closure and disputes, a collective agreement could be concluded and a social fund was created. Moreover, 400 out of the 870 miners organised themselves in a trade union. After the visit of the mine, the delegation went to the free trade zone of San Pedro de Sula. It met the human resources manager of the «*King Star Garment*» textile company. The company has a collective agreement, and 1 400 out of its 2 400 workers are members of the trade union «*Stirakingh*». Yet, to many employers in the free trade zone, trade unions remain synonymous with «problems and misery». The WCL will try to rebuild the trade union image and to strengthen the cohesion in the sector. After the visit, the WCL delegation discussed the situation of the trade union, which is far from rosy. The Honduran trade unionist have been blacklisted by the employers and, as a result, do not find a job anymore. The WCL therefore suggested calling on the ILO and the WCL «Norm» Department in order to file official complaints. In conclusion, Jaap Wielen and Eric Aarts attended a meeting of CLAT Trade Action in Tegucigalpa, during which the VERBA projects in the continents were assessed.

Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of the WCL, also addressed the Executive Committee of the CLAT (also assembled in Tegucigalpa). This meeting of over 3000 workers' representatives was also attended by the top representatives of the three powers: the President of the Republic, the Chairperson of Parliament and the head of the Supreme Court. Besides assessing the action of the CLAT, the Executive Committee prepared the next Congress (November 2004).

MASS STRIKE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Democracy is currently under fire in the Dominican Republic. Three large banks and an insurance company have gone bankrupt, and there are big problems between the two main political parties. Moreover, heavy floods have made hundreds of families roofless. The strong rise in the dollar rate and the interest rates has led to a spectacular increase in the prices of basic services. The Dominican population and workers are in despair. The «*Asociación de Empleados del Estado*» (ATE) – affiliated to CLATSEP, the Latin American regional organisation of Infedop – has informed us that on 11 November a nationwide one-day strike had been called in support of a series of social and political demands. The unions and the populations took massively to the streets, and the commercial activities, industry, transport, education, the courts ... came the whole day to a standstill. Unfortunately, the strike cost seven human lives, fifty people got seriously injured, and 1200 demonstrators were arrested.

EUROPEAN CELL AND WORLD SEMINAR OF THE WFBW IN OSTEND

On Monday 17 November, after the National Congress of ACV-CSC Building and Industry, the so-called «European Cell» of the World Federation of Building and Woodworkers' Unions (WFBW) met in Ostend. For the first time, the Central and Eastern European trade unions were strongly represented. The agenda included the plan of activities 2004 for Central and Eastern Europe, the preparation of the World Congress, the WFBW's participation in activities of the ILO, the role of the WCL, the state of affairs in WCL Trade Action and a possible cooperation relation between the WFBW and the IFBWW (the wood & building federation of the ICFTU). The «European Cell» was followed by the world seminar of the WFBW, which was attended by fifty trade union delegates from thirty countries. They discussed the plan of action for 2004-2008. Further topics were the informal economy, multinationals and works councils, and social dialogue as an instrument for the protection of the workers' interests. These will be more thoroughly dealt with during the WFBW World Congress in May 2004.

WFBW COOPERATES ON NEW ILO PROGRAMME

The ILO has changed its policy with regard to worldwide tripartite activities. As from now, organisations from the various sectors will be invited to present an activities programme, which will then be tried out in a number of countries. Dependent on the results, these pilot projects will be introduced afterwards in other countries as well. Thus, the ILO recently invited a workers' delegation – composed of representatives of the international organisations WFBW and IFBWW – together with the employers and the governments to take part in the very first tripartite meeting in preparation for such an action programme. Also tripartite delegations from Brazil,



Egypt, Ghana, India and Tanzania were present. For the national programmes four priorities were defined: formalisation of informal matters, safety and health at work, training for jobs in the building trade and job creation. Within six months' time, the ILO will organise similar tripartite meetings in the pilot countries, so to define, on the basis of the action programme and per country, the priorities for the next two years.

For further details please contact the WFBW secretariat: isabelle.voss@cmt-wcl.org

CONFERENCE AND CONGRESS OF BSKKS IN BANGLADESH

On 30 September, the Bengalese organisation «Bangladesh Sanjukta Krishok-O-Khetmajur Samity» (BSKKS) – which is part of the BSSF, our affiliate in Bangladesh – organised its 5th National Conference and Congress. The participants agreed about a closer cooperation between peasants and workers to gain a



stronger position in the free market economy and better to stand up against the policy of the World Bank, the IMF and the multinationals. The new-elected President, Abu Mohammad Zulfiqar Azad, stated that he would fight for the interests of the peasants and workers in Bangladesh.

EUROFEDOP CONFERENCE ON THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EU

On the occasion of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, Eurofedop organised on 21 and 22 November an «Enlargement Conference». The international federation of the WCL – with members from Central and Eastern Europe (eg Romania, Hungary and Croatia) – indeed attaches great importance to a good cooperation between its affiliates. The meeting was also an ideal opportunity to get acquainted with new trade unions from countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Albania, Serbia and Slovakia. The agenda included the following items: government, «e-government», social dialogue, trade union action for a social Europe and the liberalisation of the post and telecom services.

NAPFE CONCERNED ABOUT AMERICAN WORKERS

The National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees (NAPFE), our affiliate in the United States, celebrated early in October its 90th year of existence. The organisation was constituted in 1913 by postal employees from 13 states and it was the first industrial

union in the US. During the celebration President James M. McGee expressed his concern about the situation of American workers. From the beginning of the Bush administration, there has been a loss of approximately three million jobs. Millions of people have lost access to health care insurance, and poverty has been strongly on the rise. Nevertheless, the US is spending billions of dollars on the war on Iraq. In a CBS News Poll, 62% of the population has declared its opposition to further expenses in Iraq. The US is indeed in urgent need of money to tackle the weak points in its own infrastructure. «A country that does not invest in its people has lost its way», said James McGee.

PROTEST AGAINST EUROPEAN FISHERIES POLICY

During the latest World Board meeting of FIOST – the international trade federation of the WCL for the transport sector – Michel Claes of ACV-CSC Transcom (Belgium) delivered a paper on the European fisheries policy. The «European Fishing Action Group» (EFAG), an informal partnership of fishermen from the EU member states and a few trade unions that are not affiliated to FIOST, had announced for 10 December a mass demonstration in Antwerp, in protest against this policy. EFAG agrees with the control of the fish population, but considers the Commission's way of acting and planning very unrealistic. Since 2000 several measures have been taken with regard to the fishing periods and the maximum catches. These measures have yielded favourable results, but the European Council of Ministers still intends to adopt even stricter regulations at its meeting on 17-19 December. According to EFAG they can lead to the bankruptcy of many European fishermen. On 10 December, ships from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, Scotland and Denmark flocked together in the port of Antwerp, where the fishermen met trade union delegations from most fisheries powers. On top of this action, there will be local, regional and national demonstrations in the ports of the European member states.

For further details please contact Michel Claes: mclaes.transcom@acv-csc.be

CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING SESSIONS FINISHED IN LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA

On 20-24 November, the last training session in the context of the WCL Trade Action Capacity Building project was organised in Latin America. During this training in «organisational skills», topics such as financial and project management, dues systems, strategic planning and leadership training were treated. The 36 Latin American trainees from the twelve selected countries had already attended the «didactic skills» training in the first half of the year. As from 2004 they themselves will organise as experts – on the basis of suggestions from the (con)federations, the regional organisations and the international trade federations – activities and training sessions in their respective countries, in order to strengthen and develop Trade Action on the spot. Also in Africa, in Douala (Cameroon), on 24-28 November, the last Capacity Building training took place. All 24 African trainers are now trained and will start their follow-up activities independently.