



A selection of news releases and interviews published in February/March 2004 | No 2

## Organising the least protected workers

To mark the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March, **Global Unions**, which groups the ICFTU, Global Union Federations and the OECD-TUAC, launched a new initiative as part of its special three-year campaign to unionise women. In the coming year, the campaign "Unions for Women, Women for Unions" will focus on women working in the informal economy and export processing zones.

Informal work, an ever-growing trend affecting developing and developed nations alike, is often characterised by zero protection and desperate vulnerability. Suffering from discrimination and all too often excluded from the official labour market, women are over-represented in the informal economy. It is for this reason that the ICFTU decided to make organising women working in the informal economy a priority on 8 March. The aim is to enable women in the informal economy to assert their rights and to become the driving force behind unionisation. At the very heart of the campaign is the defence of the principle of solidarity and the future of the trade union movement as a whole.

Under the spotlight in the latest *Trade Union World Briefing*, published by the ICFTU, are home-based textile workers in Algeria, Brazil and the United States, street vendors in India and Moldavia, home-based child carers in Croatia and the fishmongers in Chad. Entitled "The informal economy: women on the front-line", the 16 page report, featuring photos and personal accounts, traces various trade union experiences of organising women in the informal economy.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) points out that the globalisation of trade has been accompanied by the rampant spread of the informal economy, which affects 50 to 75% of workers in developing countries, excluding those employed in agriculture, and 30% of workers in the European Union. According to the ICFTU, 25% of the world's working population are active in the informal economy and generate 35% of global GDP. The debt crisis faced by developing countries, privatisation, the deregulation of labour markets (especially within the framework of structural adjustment programmes), the drop in the

**Trade Union World Briefing**

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS | ICFTU | MARCH 2004 | NP2

**The informal economy: women on the front line**

Informal employment is on the rise throughout the world, including in developed countries, and is synonymous with lack of protection and serious vulnerability. Women are discriminated against and edged out of the formal labour market, but are over-represented in the informal economy. On 8 March, International Women's Day, the ICFTU will be focusing on the informal economy and the informal economy so that they can gain better rights and become a driving force for trade union recruitment.

Women home workers in the textile industry in Algeria, Brazil or the USA, street vendors in India or Moldavia, freelance hairdressers in Ghana, peasant farmers in Peru, domestic child-minders in Croatia and fish-sellers in Chad all have their tale to tell as trade unionists. The fundamental principle of trade unionism, that of solidarity, is at stake, but so is the very survival of the trade union movement worldwide.

**T**he International Labour Organisation (ILO) points out that the informal economy has been accompanied by the rampant spread of the informal economy in developing countries. More than 75% of workers in developing countries are in the informal economy, and 30% of workers in the European Union. The informal economy in developing countries is made up of 13 Member States. According to the ILO, 25% of the world's working population are active in the informal economy and generate 35% of global GDP.

According to the ILO's Global Employment Report, the informal economy and the informal economy develop in countries which have low growth rates and the majority of people are poor. The informal economy is growing at a faster rate than the formal economy.

The debt crisis faced by developing countries, privatisation, the deregulation of labour markets especially within the framework of structural adjustment programmes, the drop in the price of oil and the resulting economic crisis, the number of full-time employees, relocations and the development of sub-contracting have all fuelled the spread of more precarious and less well protected forms of work.

Women are over-represented in the informal economy. Two-thirds of the female active population in developing countries work in the informal economy, and the proportion is as high as 84% in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 90% of female agricultural workers in India and Indonesia, 80% of female agricultural workers in Peru, and more than 40% of female workers in South Korea work in

the informal economy.

Women working in the informal economy are at the centre of two global trade union initiatives this year. These include the Global Unions' 2004 campaign entitled "Women for Unions, Unions for Women" and this year's May Day which will focus on respect for women workers ("Respect for Workers' Rights, Respect for Women Workers and Respect for Those Working in Poverty"). Another campaign centring on women workers is the joint initiative of Global Unions, Oxfam International and the Clean Clothes Campaign, who together have just published a report on the situation of often unprotected women in the sportswear industry to launch their five-month "Play Fair" campaign. This aims to defend these workers' rights in the run-up to the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens [www.fairolympics.org](http://www.fairolympics.org). ●

ICFTU OnLine... 037/050305

number of full-time employees, relocations and the development of sub-contracting have all fuelled the spread of more precarious and less well protected forms of work.

Informal workers are not protected, recognised or represented. Without protection, informal workers are highly vulnerable and they have no bargaining power vis-à-vis their employer, especially since the employer-employee relationship has become extremely unclear. Women are over-represented in the informal economy. Two-thirds of the female active population in developing countries work in the informal economy, and the proportion is as high as 84% in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 90% of female agricultural workers in India and Indonesia, 80% of female agricultural workers in Peru, and more than 40% of female workers in South Korea work in

### In this issue

1. Organising women workers
2. Spotlight interviews with women trade unionists
3. Iraq, Ukraine, Burma
4. Women, Haiti
5. Cyprus, Dominican Republic
6. IMF & labour rights
7. Cambodia, Iran, Colombia
8. Olympics campaign

# "Unions for Women, Women for Unions"

**On 8 March, in connection with its Unions for Women, Women for Unions campaign, the Global Unions group launched a season of actions focusing on women in the informal economy and women in export processing zones. The objective is to give non-protected women workers a chance to assert their rights for the sake of solidarity and the future of the trade union movement. For 8 March the ICFTU interviewed leading women trade unionists from around the world. Here is a synopsis of interviews with women from Mauritania, Morocco and Algeria. Spotlight interviews**

**I**n January 2004, ICFTU and its Global Unions partners launched a two-year campaign to organise Maghreb women in Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, where people have been the worst hit by structural adjustment plans.

## **MAURITANIA: ORGANISING WOMEN DESPITE THE WEIGHT OF TRADITION**

**Mahjouba Mint Salek is Executive Secretary in charge of women's affairs of the CGTM (General Confederation of Workers in Mauritania). She actively participated in the creation of a national women's committee within the CGTM in April 2002. This committee is now set to wage a two-year campaign to recruit women.**

● Why are you trying to organise women workers?

*Our country is 100% Muslim. The society we live in is very conservative and believes that a woman's place is in the home. In keeping with tradition, it is believed that "all struggles are the exclusive realm of men". Women only started to show some interest in unions in the 1980s. Their interest became more marked in the 1990s.*

*I became the first female member of the CGTM executive committee in 1999. In 2002, two more women entered the executive committee, which has nine members in total. The CGTM has 25,000 members; 15% are women. As a pioneer, I came under a lot of pressure; it was seen as shameful for a woman to work alongside men. But women are more courageous now and are starting to show interest in unions, having seen that some of their sisters were fighting alongside men.*

*Most women in Mauritania work in the public and paragovernmental sectors, the industrial fishery sector, and agriculture, where the number of women employed has doubled over the last ten years.*

*As soon as you defend someone working in the public sector here, you are labelled as an opponent of the government, and face problems. So some people are afraid, and we have problems recruiting. But we have had some pleasing results in the region of Trarza, where our first regional women's committee was set up. Take the women*

*agricultural workers who are unemployed, for example. We have assisted them in trying to find land to rent, to find financing, premises, and set up cooperatives.*

*Our aim is to advise them, provide them with a means of defending themselves, particularly those who are divorced and have children to take care of. We are willing to go before the courts, to reintegrate them in other sectors where they can work and enjoy protection.*

## **ORGANISING WOMEN IN MOROCCO**

**Amal El Amri is head of the Women's Committee of the UMT (Moroccan Workers' Union). Amal El Amri reports that UMT on the need to unionise women, to curb falling membership, and to protect women against the ravages of economic globalisation.**

● Why has the UMT decided to launch this campaign?

*Increasing women's involvement in unions is directly in keeping with the policies and recommendations of the ICFTU. Only 12% of the UMT's 306,000 members are women. Furthermore, we have been witnessing a general fall in membership, women included, over recent years.*

*Falling membership among women can be partially attributed to cultural issues, although this is by no means a determining factor. Indeed, many women who enter the world of work to make a better living often leave once they marry or have children. But this remains a marginal problem.*

*The determining factors are more closely linked to globalisation and the job insecurity resulting from it. We are witnessing many mass layoffs and the closure of factories that are unable to withstand the competition. This situation is leading to the development of atypical forms of employment, which we are not finding easy to organise, such as part-time work, temping, subcontracting, etc.*

*We are also faced with the major problems surrounding trade union rights in Morocco. Even in the most organised sectors, trade unions rights are not really recognised. As soon as a union is organised within a company, the trade union leaders run the risk of being fired. This explains why women are apprehensive about joining a union.*

## **ALGERIA: WOMEN'S RIGHTS FLOUTED IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY**

**Soumia Salhi is on the National Executive Committee of the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers). Soumia Salhi reports that UGTA the need to unionise women in the UGTA in order to boost their visibility in the country's trade union centre, and to protect women working in the informal economy.**

● Why has the UGTA decided to launch a campaign aimed at unionising women in Algeria?

*The problem we face in our country is the insignificant level of female representatives within the trade union organisations, despite the fact that more and more women are now working. Admittedly, a few decades ago the proportion of working women among salaried workers was a mere 2 to 3%. However, a great deal has changed since then, and the phenomenon of working women is becoming increasingly widespread. Indeed, today women account for 17% of all salaried workers.*

*Consequently it's not really acceptable for our trade union centre to have just one female representative - me - among nearly 200 male colleagues on the National Executive Committee. We want to make the rarity of women on wilaya (department-level) or federations' executives a thing of the past, including in the education and health sectors, where 40% of salaried workers are women.*

*We don't think there's a problem regarding the level of women's union affiliation. The trade union centre's publicly stated views promoting Algerian women's cause are well known. Women even helped to guarantee the UGTA's representativeness during the battles fought against Islamic fundamentalism back in the 1990s.*

*However, unless women gain a more visible profile within the UGTA, and unless their concerns are addressed, our trade union centre will fail to adhere to its own proclaimed principles and could become less attractive and less credible in the eyes of working women. ●*

# International trade union mission returns from Iraq

**A**n international trade union mission spent 10 days in Iraq in February attempting to gain a clearer understanding of trade union developments inside Iraq, and raising key concerns about the reconstruction process with officials of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraq's Governing Council.

The mission, which included representatives from the ICFTU, UGTT Tunisia/International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, Education International, International Transport Workers' Federation, TUC-Great Britain and AFL-CIO/ACILS USA, met with workers and trade union officials in Baghdad, Erbil (Iraqi Kurdistan) and Basra in the south. Meetings were also held with the Minister for Labour and Social Affairs Sheik Samy Azarh Al-majoun, CPA officials, UK special envoy Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and employers from the Iraqi Federation of Industries.

The mission met with workers who are organising unions in workplaces where they were forbidden under Saddam Hussein's laws, and revitalising union structures previously dominated by the Ba'ath party.

However, trade unionism in Iraq faces many challenges. The economy has been devastated by sanctions and the war, with a lack of infrastructure and raw materials resulting in most of the workforce being unemployed. The burden on Iraqi women is especially heavy. Trade union activity has led to better wages in some sectors, however conditions for the vast



majority of Iraqi people remain harsh.

The labour laws inherited from the previous regime, which included the prohibition of unions in the public sector, present many obstacles for trade unions. The mission stressed the need for the new administration to involve workers through their trade unions in the development of new labour laws. A primary role for the UN's International Labour Organisation in drafting the legislation, and in other relevant aspects of reconstruction, is particularly important. The mission welcomed news that the current draft Transitional Administrative Law includes freedom of association, free speech and the right to strike. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 031/240204

## Burma: death sentences for contacting the ILO

The ICFTU has strongly condemned the Burmese authorities for the prosecution and death sentence given to 9 Burmese workers. Charges of high treason were brought against these individuals on the grounds of making contact with International Labour Organisation (ILO). One defendant had been found in possession of the report of the ILO Commission of Inquiry on Forced Labour in Burma, and "other sheets of paper", including the business card of an ILO official currently serving in Rangoon.

In a letter to the Burmese authorities, the ICFTU underlined that the prosecution of individuals for making contact with the ILO is a violation of fundamental human rights. The ICFTU highlighted the blatant hypocrisy of the Burmese authorities' pledges to work with the ILO to stamp out forced labour whilst prosecuting those individuals on grounds of treason for making contact with the UN agency. The ICFTU committed its support to the ILO Governing Body which is currently examining these disturbing cases.

ICFTU OnLine... 054/180304

# Intimidation of trade unionists in the Ukraine

**T**he ICFTU has expressed serious concern over the safety of trade unionists and their families in the Ukraine. This follows the kidnapping and serious assault on the son of the President of the ICFTU-affiliated Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU). Andriy Volynets, son of Mikhail Volynets, was kidnapped on March 7 by two masked men who dragged him into a car. He is now in hospital recovering from his ordeal. His injuries are said to be life threatening.

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovitch, the ICFTU expressed its concerns, highlighting its belief that the attack on Mikhail Volynets' son was politically motivated. The assault came soon after the Confed-

eration of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU) had held a press conference on "the life and death of democracy" during which Volynets had referred to serious violations of trade union rights in the former Soviet state.

In its letter to Yanukovitch, the world's largest trade union body also pointed to the disturbing escalation of trade union rights' violations in the Ukraine which has included attacks on and intimidation of trade union leaders. Calling on the Ukrainian authorities to ensure the security of trade union leaders and members, the ICFTU urged the government to carry out an investigation into the kidnapping and subsequent assault on Andriy Volynets. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 050/100304

## ICFTU focuses on women's participation in peace building at the UN

**A**t the 48th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW48), the ICFTU and Global Unions focused on the role of women workers in advancing sustainable gender friendly workplaces and maintaining peaceful societies. Running from 1 to 12 March, the 48th Session focused in particular on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and women's equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict peace building.

Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU, said: "Women trade unionists play a key role towards conflict prevention and peace building, and have made a wide range of important initiatives such as sending a delegation of women trade union leaders to Palestine and Israel in January 2004 and adopting a resolution on Iraq at the ICFTU's 8th World Womens' Conference last year".

In New York, the trade union delegation called for the universal ratification and full implementation of ILO Convention 156. The Convention covers to workers with family responsibilities and

is an effective instrument for promoting gender equality in the workplace.

**"Women trade unionists play a key role towards conflict prevention and peace building"**

The issue of peace was addressed at a major Global Unions panel discussion entitled "Securing a Peaceful Future – Trade Union Women in Peace Building Initiatives" held on 4th March at the United Nations headquarters. The panel discussion brought together a large number of NGOs and government representatives and examined the involvement of trade union women in post-conflict reconstruction and peace building. Hawa Jilo of the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union, and Marie Mbayabu of the Solidarity Nurses' Union of the Democratic Republic of Congo presented their own experiences. ●

..... ICFTU OnLine... 033/010304

## Haiti: ICFTU welcomes release of union prisoners

**T**he release from prison in Port-au-Prince on 29th February of ten trade union activists held for over one month was warmly applauded by the ICFTU. The freeing of the prisoners came in the wake of the abrupt departure of Haiti's former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The detainees had been arrested during an illegal raid by Haiti's Police Nationale on the headquarters of the umbrella trade union group "Coordination Syndicale Haïtienne" (CSH) on 24 January 2004. They had been charged with "criminal conspiracy" and "plotting against the internal security of the State" - a charge carrying a sentence of imprisonment with forced labour for life.

An international trade union delegation, led by the ICFTU and its Regional Inter-American Organisation (ICFTU-ORIT), had forcefully rejected these charges. The delegation, comprising trade union leaders from the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa, as

well as representatives of Global Union Federations in the teaching (EI) and services (UNI) sectors, had made representations to the Minister of Justice. It had also met with the diplomatic corps in the Haitian capital, many national trade union organisations, the "Group of 184" democratic opposition platform and various other groups.

In a letter sent to the Acting President of Haiti, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder demanded "clear and firm security guarantees for Haiti's trade union and human rights' activists and their relatives, as well as respect for labour and human rights in the future". Ryder added the ICFTU would now also call on the international community, including regional bodies CARICOM and the Organisation of American States, to "provide meaningful reconstruction and development assistance, with adequate safeguards against corruption and other abuses which have marred these efforts in the past." ●

..... ICFTU OnLine... 032/010304

## Middle East: killing of Sheik Yassin will deepen the cycle of violence

The ICFTU has condemned the Israeli government policy of targeted assassination, with the killing of Palestinian Sheik Ahmed Yassin and 7 others in Gaza on 22 March. This action, which also wounded 17 other people, has been condemned as unlawful by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and leaders from around the world. The assassination policy has failed to end terrorism, and has not ensured security for either Israelis or Palestinians. The prospects of a peaceful resolution of the conflict have now been put yet further out of reach.

A genuine commitment to resolving the conflict is urgently needed, through dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, with the full support of the international community. This must be done on the basis of the relevant UN Resolutions and the "Road Map" for peace. In the absence of this, the cycle of terrorist attack and murderous reprisal will continue with appalling consequences.

## ICFTU condemns bomb attacks in Madrid

The ICFTU has strongly condemned the bomb attacks in Madrid, conveyed in messages of solidarity to its two Spanish affiliates UGT and CC.OO. "This terrorist atrocity is clearly an attack on Spanish democracy and on innocent working people. Every effort must be made to find those responsible and bring them to justice", said the Brussels-based trade union confederation. "We stand shoulder to shoulder with our Spanish trade union colleagues, and extend our deepest sympathy to those affected and their families".

## Cypriot union leaders join for peace

**A**t a meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder voiced strong calls for the reunification of the island, split in 1974 into Greek and Turkish zones. "Our goal is to see a prosperous, unified Cyprus with Turkish and Greek Cypriots living and working together in harmony within an enlarged European Union. We look forward to the day when the people of Cyprus are no longer divided and where trade union rights are treated fully and equally across the island," said Ryder.

The event, a joint seminar of the ICFTU affiliates SEK and TURK-SEN on the social dimension of globalisation, brought together trade unionists from the Southern and Northern parts of the island. The meeting took place against a backdrop of talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriot political leaders. "Our affiliates have worked long and hard on the march towards reunification and today, it looks like this could finally become a reality," commented Ryder.

Ryder's presence in Nicosia is the latest in a series of ICFTU initiatives to help bridge the divide between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot workers. ICFTU activities with Cypriot trade unions started in 1958, and since the 1974 division of the island, the global trade union confederation has worked for reunification. Issues such as the freedom of movement across Cyprus, equal pay, a single model of employment, and industrial relations also feature high in



*At a recent meeting in Brussels, the ICFTU interviewed Cypriot trade union leaders, Demetris Kittenis of SEK and Nihad Elmas of TURK-SEN,*

the discussions between the trade union organisations.

TURK-SEN, whose members are from the Turkish-occupied part of the island and SEK, which represents workers in the non-occupied Cyprus, both expressed their full endorsement for the United Nations effort and initiatives as a way to consolidate peace in Cyprus and in the Eastern Mediterranean area as a whole.

At a recent meeting in Brussels, the ICFTU interviewed Cypriot trade union leaders, Demetris Kittenis of SEK and

Nihad Elmas of TURK-SEN. ●

ICFTU OnLine...027/190204

### Current crisis in Côte d'Ivoire

A letter from ORAF/ICFTU to the Chair of the African Union, His Excellency Alpha Omar Konaré, draws attention to the serious crisis in the Ivory Coast. Andrew Kailembo, General Secretary of ORAF, writes: "It is for us a matter of serious concern, when a country with so much promise for Africa, should be drawn into a civil war." The letter appeals to the African Union to take steps to ensure that the conflict is resolved through dialogue and negotiations.

The recent eruption of murderous violence in Abidjan was also condemned by the ICFTU which appealed to the President of the Ivory Coast to commit himself to dialogue and reconciliation. Ivory Coast has been racked by a serious political and military crisis since the start of an armed uprising in September 2002. In a letter to President Gbagbo, the ICFTU General Secretary, Guy Ryder, highlighted the decisive role that he could personally play in ensuring that the Marcoussis peace settlement, negotiated in January 2003, is fully respected. The ICFTU believes that full compliance by all signatories to the agreement would guarantee a return to the peace process.

ICFTU OnLine... 059/250304

## Dominican Republic: international trade union body protests at killings

**T**he International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) strongly condemned the killing of 8 people in the Dominican Republic during the 48-hour general strike in the country. Dozens more suffered injuries during the course of the strike which took place on 28th and 29th January.

The general strike was initially called to protest against the poor economic situation in the country which is affecting several sectors. The cost of living is spiraling, accompanied by low salary levels, high unemployment and a dramatic increase in the cost of public utilities such as water and electricity. Demonstrators also mobilized to voice their opposition to the devaluation of

the Dominican peso against the US dollar.

Following the deaths and the arrest of some 100 members of the Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares, Sindicales y Choferiles, the ICFTU, in a letter to the President, called for the Dominican Republic government to take all necessary measures to avoid further violence and to bring to justice the perpetrators of the violence. The ICFTU urged the government to tackle staggering poverty and social exclusion and to reverse policies which contravene fundamental human and trade union rights. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 016/300104

# Trade unions slam IMF attack on labour rights

The ICFTU has launched a strong attack on a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which criticises the European social model. The ICFTU has prepared, jointly with other organisations, a detailed rebuttal of the paper and is demanding a response from the international financial institution.

The IMF paper "Unemployment and labour market institutions: why reforms pay off" (included as a chapter in the April 2003 World Economic Outlook publication) concludes that European countries could greatly reduce unemployment simply by adopting US-style labour market and competition rules and implies that European countries should follow the US example of offering much weaker legal and social protection to their workers. The IMF report is criticised for its ideological bias, as re-

flected by its selective reading of evidence, and scant attention to the reality of European labour markets.

John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, made the following statement: "It is hugely disappointing but not surprising that the IMF has swallowed wholesale the conservative view that the European Social Model is out of date. The American way is certainly not the only way and certainly not the best way of running economies. Europe with its welfare states, collective bargaining and public services and in some countries high employment levels has much to teach the USA about equality and civilised cities. It does not have to apologise."

In a letter addressed to IMF's Managing Director, Horst Köhler, trade unionists raise key concerns with the report

including its flawed methodology, which leads the IMF to the highly implausible conclusion that unemployment would drop sharply were Europe to mimic the US model of labour market institutions. The trade union movement presented two papers from the Centre for Economic Policy and Research and the European Trade Union Institute which provided detailed demonstrations of the serious faults in the IMF's economic analyses.

ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder stated that "The IMF report fails to recognise the vital importance of strong labour market institutions and their key role in some of the world's most successful economies. The IMF must reconsider its position of calling for massive labour market deregulation." ●

ICFTU OnLine... 019/030204

# World Commission demand for fairer globalisation gets full support

Commenting on the publication in London of the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder said, "A major mission of the international trade union movement is closing the ever-increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Today we warmly welcome the World Commission's report which seeks to do precisely this. We look forward to playing our part in seeing these very important recommendations becoming a reality, and we will not allow them to become simply political rhetoric".

The report, which the ICFTU is hailing as a major breakthrough, calls for a forum to be set up by international organisations to achieve a fairer form of globalisation and to address the social impact of developments and policies in the global economy. This Globalisation Policy Forum should bring about cohesion between the international institutions on social issues.

The report, two years in the making, was prepared by a special World Commission made up of 26 high-level members including trade union leaders John Sweeney, President of the ICFTU's US affiliate the AFL-CIO, Zwelinzima Vavi, General Secretary of COSATU in South Africa, and Bill Brett, then the Chair of



the Workers' Group at the International Labour Organisation. As the UN's only tripartite body, governed by representatives of governments, trade unions and employers' organisations, the ILO has a key role to play in bringing social and employment concerns to the forefront of the process of globalisation.

Ryder remarked that "Formal structures for consultation with the international labour movement and the business community should be established

in international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The report is pushing for precisely this. We expect international meetings this year, such as the G8 Summit in the US in June, to give the report full backing and examine how to implement its recommendations".

In line with the ICFTU's recent work, the World Commission report calls for better conditions for workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs). These zones, which according to the World Commission employ in excess of 50 million workers worldwide, in countries as varied as the Dominican Republic and the Philippines, are often a hotbed of anti-union activity. Fundamental trade union rights are denied to workers, most of whom are women, as the zones are often beyond the reach of national labour laws which may themselves be weak.

The World Commission report underlines the essential role of collective bargaining in promoting productivity, ensuring equality and giving workers a voice at the workplace. The report targets the responsibilities of the international institutions and stresses the role they must play in ensuring that fair labour standards are not undermined. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 029/240204

# Cambodian authorities urged to protect trade unionists

The ICFTU has expressed rising concern over the safety of trade union leaders in Cambodia. During a meeting with the Cambodian Minister for Social and Labour Affairs, Mr. Ith Sam Heng, held in Phnom Penh on 26 February, the General Secretary of the ICFTU's Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO), Noriyuki Suzuki, underlined the ICFTU's concern over the need to ensure the protection of trade union activists, an issue of ever more pressing importance following the assassination earlier this year of trade union leader. Following the murder of Vichea, leader of the FTUWKC (Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia) on 22 January, several trade unionists in Cambodia have received threats, including Rong Chhun, President of the Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA) and FTUWKC General Secretary Sum Som Neang, who has left for Australia, for fear of his safety. It was also reported on 25 February that Chea Vichea's partner, who is eight months' pregnant, was to

leave for Thailand, under the protection of the UN's specialised agency for refugees (UNHCR) and planned to seek asylum in a third country.

In a meeting with the Cambodian Trade Union Coordination Council, ICFTU-APRO General Secretary Suzuki said, "A top priority for the ICFTU, supported by its regional organization, is to encourage unity amongst trade unions in Cambodia. A fragmented trade union movement is of no benefit to Cambodian workers."

Earlier this year, the ICFTU addressed a strong protest letter to the country's Acting Prime Minister Hun Sen, urging Cambodia's authorities to provide public guarantees of safety for the country's trade union activists and human rights defenders. It also demanded that the government open an impartial inquiry into Vichea's assassination. The ICFTU has lodged a formal complaint regarding Chea Vichea's murder with the ILO. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 030/270204

# International union body makes breakthrough with Colombian authorities

In December 2003, a delegation representing the ICFTU and Global Unions met with the Colombian mission to the United Nations in Geneva. During the meeting, Colombian diplomats asked the trade union delegation to provide a sample list of cases where trade unionists have been murdered and the perpetrators have gone unpunished. Following this request, representatives of the ICFTU and Global Unions met with Ms. Clemencia Forero, the new Ambassador of Colombia in Geneva, on 27 February and presented a list of 18 cases of murders of trade unionists which exemplify crimes committed with impunity in the country.

The union representatives asked for prompt and tangible action for a speedy resolution of these particular cases as well as of all pending cases (which include murders, threats, and intimidation). In response, Ambassador Forero admitted that the level of impunity in Colombia was "alarming" and stated that she had received the list of mur-

dered trade unionists "with respect and concern".

Speaking in Brussels on the recent meeting, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder said "the entire international trade union movement will continue to pressure the Colombian government to respect internationally guaranteed trade union rights, first and foremost, a trade unionists' right to carry out their activities without fear of intimidation or murder."

The ICFTU has reported nearly all of the 3000 murders of Colombian trade unionists to the ILO over the years and maintains that under international law, the government of Colombia is bound to respond to the charges.

The ICFTU strongly urged President Alvaro Uribe to halt the massive and systematic intimidation of trade unionists as the Colombian President prepared to address the European Parliament in Strasbourg. ●

ICFTU OnLine... 034/020304

## Iran: ICFTU condemns killings of 4 workers

The international trade union movement, in a letter to the Iranian President Seyed Mohammed Khatami, has condemned the unlawful killings of workers in the Iranian village of Khatoonabad and the city of Shahr-e Babak on Saturday 24 January 2004. Four people died and over 40 workers were injured when violence broke out at an 8-day sit-in at a plant in the Kerman Province of the country.

Workers were protesting against the use of temporary contracts, layoffs and deferred payment of salaries and benefits at the Nazkhaton's Copper Smelting plant. Violence erupted unexpectedly when special police forces were dispatched to the plant to break up the strike and sit-in using force.

Demonstrators came under fire from the police during the confrontation and at least four workers were killed in front of the plant and dozens were wounded, some of whom lie critically injured in nearby hospitals. Over 80 people were arrested during the confrontation.

The ICFTU called on the Iranian authorities to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of these killings. It also called for the Iranian government to open an independent and impartial investigation into the incident. The government of Iran was reminded of its duties as a member of the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The ICFTU also submitted a complaint to the UN's ILO which is due to be forwarded to the Committee on the Freedom of Association.

ICFTU OnLine... 025/170204

# New campaign calls for sportswear companies to clean up their act

**G**lobal Unions and the ICFTU have launched a major new worldwide campaign with Oxfam and the Clean Clothes Campaign entitled Play Fair at the Olympics. The campaign calls on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and sportswear companies such as Fila, Puma, Umbro, Asics and Mizuno to clean up their acts. Giant sportswear brands are violating the rights of millions of workers around the world in order to fill shops with the latest and cheapest sports shoes, clothes and accessories in time for the Athens Olympic Games.

In a new report, the Play Fair campaign exposes the ruthless tactics used by the global sportswear industry to produce the latest fashions, made cheaper and faster and to ever more punishing deadlines. In order to deliver, suppliers are forcing their employees to work longer and harder, denying them their fundamental workers' rights.

Play Fair draws on the testimony of workers and factory managers in Bulgaria, Cambodia, Thailand, China, Indonesia and Turkey. These findings show that:

- Companies' promises to behave responsibly are often superficial and lacking in credibility, and are ignored by company buying teams who use cut-throat tactics to reach their targets;

- Factory managers are failing to meet the high-pressure demands from companies and comply with rules on respecting labor standards at the same time;

- The industry is therefore undermining the very labor standards it claims to uphold; some factories falsify records routinely in order to pass inspection and there is plentiful evidence of workers enduring abusive and exploitative working conditions or being sacked for joining a union.

"If hypocrisy and exploitation were an Olympic sport, the sportswear industry would win a medal," said Junya Yimprasert from the Thai Labour Campaign and member of the Clean Clothes Campaign network. "The industry is sacrificing human rights in the search for profits. Should the race to outfit athletes mean a race for the bottom for these workers?"

The IOC has an obligation to challenge the abusive business practices of its sponsors and licencees. The industry needs to make prices fairer, deadlines more appropriate and treat labor standards as important a set of criteria as cost, time and quality. The industry must emphasize to every supplier that the rights to join and form trade unions and the right to collective bargaining are fundamental to implementing international labor standards.

The Play Fair campaign brings together workers and consumers all over the world to urge the sportswear industry to change the way it works. It is supported by Global Unions, Oxfam International and the Clean Clothes Campaign. ●

.....  
ICFTU OnLine... 080/171203

## Other news from February/March 2004.

(Available on request by mail or telephone from:  
ICFTU, Ivo De Crée, tel +322 224 02 10)

- **Priorities for the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights** (Statements 3/2/2004)
- **ICFTU targets several countries for grave violations of trade union rights** (Online Bulletins, 3/2/2004)
- **Violations of core labour rights in Gambia** (Online Bulletins, 4/2/2004)
- **ICFTU focuses on women's participation in peace building at the UN** (Online Bulletins, 1/3/2004)
- **Violations of basic workers' rights in Sri Lanka** (Online Bulletins, 3/3/2004)
- **Statement by the Group of Trade Union Friends of Venezuela (GTUFV)** (Statements, 8/3/2004)
- **Belarus: ICFTU denounces assault on independent trade union activist** (Online Bulletins, 16/3/2004)
- **Spotlight interviews with Umroalmat Purohit of HMS, Demetris Kittenis of SEK, Nihad Elmas of TURK-SEN, Joseph Salnave, a former EPZ worker, Vivianne Pierre of RENAFANM and many more...**
- **Turkish authorities wrong tire workers' rights** (Online Bulletins, 29/03/04)
- **Violence in Kosovo must stop** (Online Bulletins, 24/03/04)

## US trade action puts pressure on China

The ICFTU-affiliated AFL-CIO has filed a petition under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 demanding that President Bush and the U.S. Trade

Representative take action against the Chinese government for engaging in unfair trade practices through violations of workers' rights.

The AFL-CIO initiative complements other trade union efforts to end the repression of hundreds of millions of Chinese workers, and to curtail the impact of that repression on workers throughout the global economy. According to the ICFTU, millions of jobs from countries including Cambodia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Mexico are being lost to China.

This is the first time the workers' rights provisions of the US Trade Act of 1974 have ever been used as a basis for a filing under section 301. According to the AFL-CIO, President Bush and the US Trade Representative can only refuse to take action if they find that the Chinese government does not persistently deny workers' rights, or that the denial of those rights imposes no burden on US workers.

The ICFTU has called on the Chinese authorities to release 6 detained textile workers, held in custody since 8 February 2004. The arrests occurred as workers held a strike at the Tieshu Textile Factory in the Chinese city of Suizhou to demand over 200 million yuan (over US\$ 24 million) in unpaid wages, redundancy pay, and share options owed to them by the now bankrupt textile factory.

.....  
ICFTU OnLine... 053/160304

*Publisher responsible at law: Guy Ryder,  
General secretary*

### ICFTU

5 Bld du Roi Albert II, Bte 1,  
1210-Brussels, Belgium  
Tel:...+32 2 2240211, Fax:...+32 2 2015815  
E-Mail: [press@icftu.org](mailto:press@icftu.org)  
Web Site: <http://www.icftu.org>

*Editor in chief: Natacha David*