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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

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COSATU Mission deported from Zimbabwe: ICFTU to complain to ILO

Brussels 26th October 2004 (ICFTU Online): The ICFTU has said it will protest with the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) against the expulsion from Zimbabwe, earlier today, of a delegation from the ICFTU-affiliated Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), just hours after it had started its official programme in the country. The mission had been scheduled to last a week, and aimed at getting an accurate picture of the situation in the country in order to contribute to resolving some of the acute problems faced by Zimbabwe and its trade union movement. The expulsion came as police invaded the headquarters of the ICFTU affiliate, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), shortly after it had started a meeting with the visiting COSATU delegation.

COSATU had last week received a letter from the Zimbabwe Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare Ministry, in which it was simply told that its mission was "unacceptable". The Ministry wrote that some of the civic society organisations with which the COSATU mission was poised to meet were "critical of the government" and that the mission was "predicated in the political domain".

As the mission was entering the country earlier today, officials at Harare Airport tried to persuade the 14-member team not to meet six organisations in particular. The mission refused to accept this but was nevertheless allowed into the country. They then went to hold their first meeting in the offices of the ZCTU, but police invaded the building while the meeting was in progress. The COSATU delegates were told that the government had decided their mission had to be ended and leave the country immediately. "They told us we must go back because our passports only granted us a one day stay," said COSATU Second Vice-President Violet Seboni.

The expulsion prevented the delegation from holding a scheduled meeting with South Africa's High Commissioner in Harare, thus prompting COSATU spokesperson Patrick Craven to declare that "the move is a snub to the South African government as well as to COSATU". The ICFTU will report the expulsion and the police raid on the ZCTU's headquarters as a part of a major complaint it is about to lodge against the Government of Zimbabwe with the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association.

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 152 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0232 or +32 477 58 04 86.