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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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New ICFTU report submitted to the WTO:

PROBLEMS FOR LABOUR STANDARDS IN SWITZERLAND

BRUSSELS, 14 December 2004, ICFTU Online: A new report by the ICFTU on core labour standards in Switzerland, which coincides with Switzerland's trade policy review at the WTO, still shows some serious shortcomings in the application and enforcement of core labour standards, particularly with regard to trade union rights and discrimination.

Restrictions still exist on the right to organise and collective bargaining in Switzerland. Workers who are dismissed on grounds of trade union membership have no legal recourse for reinstatement and are generally only granted three months of wages instead of the legal maximum of six. Several cases of anti-union discrimination have been reported in Switzerland, such as attempts by the retail giant Migros to prevent trade unions from organizing, and, in another case, the undermining of existing trade unions by a union close to the company.

Collective bargaining is still refused by many employers, and only 50% of jobs are covered by collective agreements in Switzerland. The right to strike is restricted, particularly due to binding clauses in collective agreements that exclude any recourse to "social protest" during the period of the agreement. The right to strike for public officials is still prohibited outright in seven cantons and obstacles to this right remain in many communes, despite a change in legislation in 2002.

Discrimination in employment is prohibited, but many women are employed in low-skilled part-time jobs. Wage gaps between men and women remain high, and can reach more than 20% in some industries, such as 24.6% in the textile industry and 26% in the paper and carton industry. Many migrant workers face discrimination in employment and wages.

Child labour and forced labour are not significant problems in Switzerland, although some cases of prisoners being required to work for minimal pay, and domestic servants in conditions of bonded labour, have been reported. Sexual exploitation and trafficking however is a serious problem in Switzerland.

The ICFTU report calls upon the Swiss government to address to apply the core labour conventions it has ratified. Various improvements in legislation are needed, such as the reinstatement of workers in the case of unfair dismissal. Enforcement of legislation has to be improved, particularly in the case of the right to collective bargaining, and ILO Convention No.98 should be promoted more widely in view of the anti-union environment mentioned above. More efforts have to be made to address discrimination in employment and wages as differences are still unacceptably high. And finally, the government has to take effective measures to end the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation.

The WTO trade policy review and the ICFTU report also include reviews of Liechtenstein. While Liechtenstein is not an ILO member, core labour standards are generally well respected, except for discrimination in wages and a lack of legal protection against unfair dismissal.

To read the full report:
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221106>

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 150 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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