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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

ICFTU OnLine...

Globablising solidarity - Congress approves the creation of a new international trade union confederation

Miyazaki, Japan, 10 December 2004 (ICFTU Online): As Congress delegates gathered for the final day, they were asked to approve the remaining seven resolutions to guide the future activities of the ICFTU, in addition to the eight adopted earlier.

This time they were taken in groups, divided by theme. To illustrate the real issues behind the first group of resolutions on globalisation and organising, delegates were shown a video on what life is like for workers in export processing zones, including low pay and discrimination, as well as violence and dismissal for those who try to organise. It ended on a positive note as a young Honduran woman explained the improvements in her life since the signing of a collective agreement.

Sharan Burrow (ACTU Australia), the Chairperson of the Resolutions Committee, then introduced the text on "Globalisation, Decent Work and Sustainable Development" to Congress. The resolution, which pledges the ICFTU to mobilise to fundamentally change globalisation so that it works for working people, the unemployed and the poor, was unanimously adopted. As Sharan Burrow said "Decent globalisation, that's our aim." A complementary resolution to this, on the "Social Responsibilities of Business in a Global Economy", was swiftly adopted in its wake. Completing the trio was the resolution on "Organising", which, as Sharan Burrow pointed out, had been central to the debates in Congress and was the number one challenge facing affiliates in all countries. Above all she urged affiliates to reach out to the unorganised, notably those in the informal economy and migrant workers. "Unless we put every piece of our effort into organising we will not have the new trade union you have talked about." The resolution was adopted.

The Chairperson then stepped aside as six young delegates took to the stage, men and women representing all parts of the world, each taking it in turn to set out the problems facing young workers, such as low pay, unemployment, discrimination, and to remind Congress of what young people could bring to the trade union movement. Behind them on a screen a series of slides were projected to reinforce their message. "Imagine" said Yemisi Ilesanmi, Chairperson of the ICFTU Youth Committee, "what it would be like if one third of this room was made up of young people." Calling for "Action! Action! Action!" all six stepped forward with arms raised. Then it was back to business, and Congress adopted the resolution on Fighting Discrimination and Achieving Equality, setting out the ICFTU's action programme to protect the victims of discrimination and bring them into trade unions. Introducing the second resolution in this group on "Unions For Women, Women for Unions", Sharan Burrow spoke of the still undervalued contribution of women. "We are here now. We are here to stay. We know you will get used to it". Still on the theme of equality, Congress had before it the resolution on "Young Workers for the Future". Sharan Burrow called for its adoption, stating that "We older trade unionists must recognise that we must hand on our legacy to the young, which means their inclusion in the trade union movement."

Last but not least came the resolution that delegates had been examining throughout the week during their discussions on the theme document, "Globalising Solidarity - Building a Trade Union Movement for the Future". This resolution committed the ICFTU to the creation of a new international trade union confederation. Several minor changes were made to the text to reflect delegates' views and strengthen the commitments made, notably regarding the engagement of national unions in the process of unification. "We want to build a new international that reflects the vision of the world we want to have, a world of decency, justice, opportunity and equality" said Sharan Burrow. Fackson Shamenda raised his gavel and the final Congress resolution was adopted.

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

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