

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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047/310305

Burma: Strong Criticism of European Commission Conference by European and International Trade Unions

Brussels, 31 March 2005 (ICFTU Online): The ICFTU, together with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), today strongly criticised the European Commission over its planned "Burma Day 2005". In a letter to External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221444&Language=EN>), the union bodies expressed their deep concern over the contents of the report prepared for the meeting, authored by well-known opponents of strong international pressure on the Burmese military junta. The exclusion from the European Commission event of most groups campaigning for democracy in Burma is also singled out for criticism.

The ICFTU/WCL/ETUC while supporting a 2004 European Union decision on the provision of humanitarian aid to the Burmese people, are calling for strong international sanctions against the Burmese military and an end to foreign business dealings with the country, which is notorious for its suppression of democracy, widespread use of forced labour and violations of other rights. "Burma Day 2005" is a missed opportunity to look at how humanitarian aid could be delivered and used to strengthen civil society in the country, and seems instead to be aimed at removing much-needed pressure on the Burmese junta.

The trade union organisations also express their disappointment at the position taken by the European Union at the March meeting of the governing body of the UN's International Labour Organisation. In the ILO discussion, the EU once again postponed taking a decision on whether to support trade union calls to strengthen measures on Burma adopted by the ILO in 2000. This attitude is all the more surprising given the increasing disquiet amongst Burma's ASEAN neighbours over the prospect of the Burmese military junta assuming the rotating ASEAN Presidency in 2006.

Stressing their commitment to supporting genuine humanitarian work in Burma, the union bodies are calling upon the European Commission to revise the programme for "Burma Day 2005", and to "ensure that biased events of this kind are not allowed to happen again".

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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