

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

## ICFTU OnLine:

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### European Union GSP - Unions reiterate demands on workers' rights and oppose arguments by El Salvador

Brussels, 04.05.05 (ICFTU OnLine)

The international trade union movement has addressed a new letter to European Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson reiterating its demand for respect for fundamental labour rights.  
(<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221620&Language=EN>).

Jointly signed by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), the letter enumerates the many reasons why the new GSP regulation should, under no circumstances, include an exemption clause allowing countries such as El Salvador to enjoy GSP-plus benefits without ratifying the Core Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ratification of these Conventions, eight in total, is one of the cornerstones of GSP-plus\*.

Reacting to Commissioner Mandelson's response to a previous letter dated 21 March on the same subject, the international trade union movement reiterated their position that the prior ratification of the eight ILO Core Conventions must remain a precondition for the granting of "GSP-plus" trade benefits under the new GSP regulation. "We categorically refuse to accept the pretext of legal or constitutional constraints used by certain GSP applicants in an attempt to eschew their responsibilities in terms of recognising and applying fundamental labour rights that have, however, been accepted by many other countries, in some cases for many years already," said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU.

The international trade union leaders consider the particular case of El Salvador in their letter. They underline that although the arguments, such as "constitutional constraints", put forward by the Salvadorian government have been refuted both by a recent ILO study and the Human Rights Ombudsman of El Salvador, the authorities of El Salvador continue to turn a deaf ear to the ILO's offer of technical assistance. It goes on to point out that the government's refusal to create a legal framework to ensure respect for basic labour rights translates in practice as serious and repeated violations of these rights, such as the killing last November of trade union leader Gilberto Soto, or the generally "rights-free" situation in Salvadorian export processing zones.

"We insist on the fact that GSP-plus must continue to serve as an incentive for the full respect of all fundamental labour rights," reiterated Guy Ryder. The signatories of the letter to the EU Trade Commissioner urged the Commission to take a clear stance against any kind of exemption clause that would free governments of the obligation to respect fundamental labour rights and inevitably lead to the weakening of the GSP incentive system.

The international trade union movement has also called on national affiliates to present these arguments to their respective governments, urging them to prevent the weakening of the provisions regarding fundamental labour rights within Europe's GSP regulation.

\* GSP-plus grants greater trade benefits, in the form of lower tariffs on exports to EU member states, to countries that have ratified and fully implement a clearly defined number of internationally-recognised fundamental rights, labour rights, women's rights and environmental conventions.

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

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