

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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New ICFTU report submitted to the WTO:

Serious violations of core labour standards in Nigeria

BRUSSELS, 10 May 2005, ICFTU Online: A new report by the ICFTU on core labour standards in Nigeria, which coincides with Nigeria's trade policy review at the WTO this week, shows serious shortcomings in the application and enforcement of all eight core labour standards, particularly with regard to the lack of trade union rights of workers including the right to strike, discrimination and child labour. In October 2004, the President of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) was arrested during a general strike despite the fact that the action was an entirely legitimate exercise of the collective rights of the trade union movement. Though released, he is still facing criminal charges in an Abuja High Court while police have raided his house and office on several occasions.

A new Trade Union Amendment Act, which was adopted recently, fails to address adequately problems identified in the report with regard to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the right to strike and anti-union policies. The new Act is aimed at curbing the right to strike and at weakening the Nigerian Labour Congress. The Act was presented without adequate consultations through the tripartite labour review set up with assistance of the ILO, contrary to what was promised. Furthermore, trade union rights are restricted in Export Processing Zones and strikes prohibited in such zones for a period of ten years, which is directly contrary to ILO conventions.

The ICFTU and the NLC consider that in view of the seriousness of these problems, there is need for a much stronger commitment to social dialogue by the Federal Government of Nigeria in order to achieve a culture of constructive engagement of labour over policies and governance issues. It is also imperative to abrogate the Public Order Act, which compels organisations to seek a permit from the Police before any assembly. The law gives the Commissioners of Police latitude to refuse to issue such a permit or to break up assemblies convened without one. As such permits are invariably denied, the right to assembly provided for by the Constitution and the right to freedom of association cannot be meaningful as long as this law still exists.

Discrimination in employment and wages is persistent in Nigeria. Surveys show a wage gap between men and women and a highly segregated labour market. Few women are employed in the formal economy due to social discrimination in education and training and to a gender-based division of labour in the formal economy. Moreover, the Minimum Wage Act excludes many workers, in particular those groups where women are disproportionately represented such as part-time workers and seasonal agricultural workers.

Child labour is widespread in Nigeria, and it was estimated in 2003 by the ILO and the government that 15 million children are working, of which up to 40% is at risk of being trafficked for forced labour, forced prostitution and armed conflict. 6 million children do not attend school and 2 million work more than 15 hours per day. Many children are also trafficked into Nigeria for the purpose of forced labour. Several child slave camps exist in the Western States of Nigeria, where children are used as slaves in mining and on rubber plantations.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221621&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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