

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Decent work for young people!

Brussels, 24 May 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): Young men and women make up the most vulnerable segment of the labour market. Trapped in low paid, precarious and even dangerous work, they face growing inequality, insecurity and exclusion. What should the trade union response be to the challenge of youth employment? A week ahead of the opening in Geneva of the International Labour Conference on youth employment, the ICFTU today publishes a new briefing entitled "Young and Vulnerable: meeting the challenge of youth employment" (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221662&Language=EN>).

The 12-page briefing looks at the challenges facing the trade union movement in its efforts to open the door to decent employment for millions of young men and women around the world, and reports on the practical steps many trade unions are taking to achieve this goal.

This new briefing gives the floor to young trade unionists from countries as varied as Japan, Nigeria, Yemen or Mongolia, all of whom share the same determination to make a place for themselves in the labour movement and in society as a whole. Access to education, job creation, career advice, wage policies, legal protection and workers' rights ... trade unions have made youth employment a policy priority and an agenda for action in its own right. In Brazil, the three trade union confederations have been working with President Lula's government on Primeiro Emprego, the national action plan on youth employment which aims to create 260,000 jobs for youths aged 16 to 24. In Hong Kong the national confederation is pressing for legislative changes to provide protection for part time and temporary workers. In Australia, ACTU is running the "Call Central" campaign aimed at ensuring that the growing call centre sector, mainly employing young people, adheres to the principles of quality employment.

Youth unemployment is rising around the world and according to the ILO now affects 88 million young people - almost 15 percent of the world's young population. The majority are women. The situation is reaching particularly alarming proportions in the Middle East and North Africa, where 26 percent of young people are unemployed.

In addition to the lack of jobs, the type of jobs available to young people also raises serious issues. Most young workers are underemployed, underpaid or trapped in temporary, precarious or even dangerous jobs. Many of them have to work very long hours in poor conditions for very little pay. Employed on short-term contracts or with no contract at all, they have very few rights and social benefits and little if any protection. In Europe, over 50% of young Italians, Swedes or French people are forced into part-time work. Young people constitute the bulk of poor workers around the world. According to ILO estimates, 130 million young workers earn less than the equivalent of one US dollar a day. The vast majority are employed in the informal economy, where they work very long hours doing low-paid and degrading jobs. In Africa, 93% of all new jobs are located in this unprotected sector of the economy. In Latin America, the pay in the informal economy is, at best, half the amount paid for the same work in the formal economy.

Young women are carrying the burden of widespread insecurity on the labour market, facing blatant discrimination in access to jobs and education. HIV/AIDS is having a terrible impact on school enrolment and attendance rates, as increasing numbers of children are forced into work, accepting the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs to help their families survive. "Sooner or later, this problem is going to cripple our economy. Without young people, what will become of South Africa?" says

Bongi Ndlovu of the South African trade union FEDUSA, keenly involved in trade union education programmes for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

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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