

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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New ICFTU report submitted to the WTO:

'Serious violations of core labour standards in Ecuador"

BRUSSELS, 8 June 2005, ICFTU Online: A new report by the ICFTU on core labour standards in Ecuador, produced to coincide with the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) review of Ecuador's trade policy this week, shows serious shortcomings in the application and enforcement of core labour standards. In particular, the report notes a lack of trade union rights of workers, discrimination and child labour.

The report highlights that the right to form trade unions is not only subject to legal restrictions (a minimum of 30 workers is required to form a trade union) but that in practice employers also try to prevent the formation of trade unions and collective bargaining by subcontracting, so that they need not employ more than 30 workers. The end result of this is reduced protection for workers.

The report further notes particularly serious violations of fundamental workers' rights on banana plantations. Workers' rights are not respected, trade unions are almost non-existent, child labour is widespread and health and safety severely lacking. Ecuador is the largest banana exporter in the world, and its attempt to increase banana exports has driven down labour, social and environmental standards to be some of the lowest levels in Latin America. Banana production is concentrated in low-wage, largely non-unionised Ecuador, driving down wages and conditions on plantations throughout Latin America and especially in Central America. The reform of the EU banana regime is likely to worsen conditions and wages for workers even further, and a full evaluation of the economic, social, gender and environmental impacts of different tariffs and supply management scenarios for EU banana imports is therefore necessary.

Finally child labour is widespread in Ecuador, including in the export sector, on banana plantations and in the flower industry. Nearly half a million children under 15 are at work. On banana plantations children work long hours, under dangerous conditions, without proper safety equipment, and are exposed to pesticides, which are sprayed whilst they work. Many children are also employed in the flower export industry. Safety and health conditions are deficient and a large number of children are engaged in fumigating activities, leading to cephalaea, tremors, and migraine for a number of children. Many children under the age of 15 are used as "helpers" or in "training", and thus employed at low cost or entirely free.

To read the full report: <http://www.icftu.org/www/pdf/clsecuador2005.pdf>

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>

For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0206 or +32 476 621 018.

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