

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Belarus is once again censured by the ILO

Brussels, 14 June 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): The ILO Committee on the Application of Standards has denounced the persistence of serious violations of Convention 87 in Belarus, which is threatening the very survival of independent trade unions in the country. In the conclusions of its debate, the Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference urged the Belarus government to implement all the recommendations formulated by the Commission of Enquiry, insisting that it must take urgent steps to ensure that Convention 87 is finally applied in law and in practice and that the independent unions of the Official Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus are allowed to form and operate freely, without any more government interference.

The ICFTU welcomed the ILO Committee's decision to include its conclusions in a Special Paragraph devoted to the totally unacceptable situation still prevailing in Belarus concerning trade union rights violations.

Notwithstanding, the ICFTU also expressed its "total bewilderment at the election of the Belarus government to the ILO Governing Body".

"Without wanting to interfere in the free choice of governments to appoint their representatives, the ICFTU nonetheless considers the election of the government of a country that has been flouting trade union rights for many years, and that fails to respect its own commitments to fulfil the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry, to be shocking. The Belarus government should have been the first to understand that it is one of the least well-placed to take part in governing an organisation whose recommendations it refuses to apply," said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU.

It should not be forgotten that following an official complaint lodged by the workers' delegates during an International Labour Conference, the ILO had decided in November 2003 to set up a Commission of Enquiry, the strongest measure this Organisation can take against a Member State and one which is only deployed for exceptionally serious cases. This action was taken following the Belarus government's refusal to abide by the recommendations of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, which has been dealing with this case for several years already. Following a six-month enquiry by the Commission, the ILO had, last October, published a report confirming each of the charges brought by the international trade union movement against Lukashenko's government regarding the registration of free trade unions, the meddling of the State and employers in trade union affairs, the discrimination, harassment and retaliatory measures levelled against trade unionists, and the arsenal of laws undermining trade unionism and social dialogue. Based on this report, the ILO had called on the Belarus government to rapidly implement changes and to comply with a series of important recommendations, most of which should have been implemented by 1 June 2005 at the latest.

Unfortunately, the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards has noted that the Belarus government has done nothing to comply with this request. The international trade union movement sees this as further proof of the Belarus authorities' unwillingness genuinely to work towards respect for trade union rights, and is thus even more determined to continue with its already longstanding campaign for effective measures to be taken against the Belarus government, particularly by the European Union, with a view to convincing it of the need to respect internationally recognised social standards and fundamental workers' rights.

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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