

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine:

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World trade union moves towards unification finish line, urges WTO to stem the global clothing and textile jobs haemorrhage

Brussels, Thursday, 23 June (ICFTU online): The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions yesterday determined to hold an extraordinary congress of the ICFTU next year at which the organisation will join forces with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and a number of currently unaffiliated national trade union centers in a historic step towards achieving one united world trade union international.

"The speed with which we are implementing the resolutions of the 18th ICFTU World Congress, held as recently as December last year in Miyazaki, Japan, is further proof of how serious we are about creating a truly global and united trade union movement equipped to tackle the challenge of globalisation and represent workers on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented strength," ICFTU General-Secretary Guy Ryder said today.

At its Executive Board meeting in Brussels this week (21-22 June), the body also demanded that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) urgently examine the impact of trade liberalisation on the textile and clothing sector, following the end of the quota system in December 2004.

"Many of our members, both in developing and developed countries are already feeling the pain of the end of the quota system, and we are not even six months into it. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, largely in developing countries. The cost of such massive social dislocation is enormous and could have been avoided had the WTO heeded our call for a special transitional programme which would have helped countries cope," Ryder added.

"Furthermore, major brands and retailers are openly signalling they intend to further consolidate their sourcing, with companies such as Walmart indicating they will reduce their country supply base from 63 to 12 by the year 2007. An emergency Policy Coherence Initiative on clothing and textiles detailing some sound trade policy and funding for aid must be adopted at the up-coming WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong if we are to stem the haemorrhaging of jobs," Ryder concluded.

The Executive Board also affiliated the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo (BSPK -Kosovo) in an important step that lends further support to Kosovo's trade unionists in the struggle for better working conditions in the troubled province.

A new series of ICFTU Special Action Programmes (SAPs) was approved, with major campaigns together with Global Unions partners planned in the following areas: a political project to tackle globalisation; the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP); Export Processing Zones (EPZs); China; and migrant workers.

Both the political project to tackle globalisation and the GCAP will focus on building alliances with civil society to protect workers, their families and communities from the negative consequences of market liberalisation and the unjust lending practices of international financial institutions. Direct support for the representation of workers' interests in China and organising in EPZs will be a main feature of those two programmes. The SAP focusing on migrant workers will shine the international trade union movement spotlight on one of the most exploited sections of the labour market and will promote the provision of trade union support and services to them.

In the course of the two-day meeting, the Board condemned the proposed plans by the Australian Government to remove basic protection from workers and violate trade union rights and pledged to

mobilise the support of the entire international trade union movement behind Australian trade unions in what is shaping up to be a lengthy and historic struggle.

The Board also condemned the management of a Pepsico stock-food plant in Grodzisk Mazowiecki(near Warsaw, Poland) for their blatant refusal to investigate the sexual harassment of women workers by supervisory staff and their subsequent forced resignation and dismissal of the victims.

In a resolution on Fiji, the Board expressed its alarm at the proposed Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill which the Government is trying to push through Parliament without any genuine consultation. The Bill would retrospectively legalise criminal activity, including treason, involved in the 2000 coup d'état, and undermines the role of the judiciary, amongst many other grave threats to civil liberties it contains. The ICFTU General Secretary has written on behalf of the Board to the Fijian Prime Minister urging the withdrawal of the bill, inviting ICFTU affiliates around the world as well as Global Union Federations to take similar action.

The Board took note of the struggle against job losses and poverty by the Congress of South African Unions (COSATU) and expressed its solidarity for their planned protest action on Monday, June 27.

For the full resolution on the liberalisation of the clothing and textile industry, see:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221944&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organizations in 154 countries and territories.

ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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