

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS  
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New GSP: an incentive to respect workers' rights but El Salvador must not be let off the hook

Brussels 28 June (ICFTU OnLine): The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) today reiterated their support for the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), under which developing countries are granted preferential tariff access to the EU market, in light of the European Commission's adoption on the 27th of June of the new EU GSP trade system for the next 3 years.

"The GSP has proved to be a useful instrument, and with rigorous implementation the new enhanced GSP-plus system has the potential to serve as a powerful incentive for the respect of fundamental labour rights," said ETUC General Secretary John Monks.

The GSP-plus grants additional preferences to vulnerable countries that pursue good governance and sustainable development policies. The ratification and effective implementation of the eight Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is one of the pre-conditions applicant countries have to meet to benefit from the GSP-Plus.

However, the international trade union movement is very disappointed by the fact that a special clause was introduced, as a result of lobbying by the government of El Salvador, to enable it to enjoy GSP-Plus benefits without having ratified the ILO fundamental conventions.

"There is a serious danger that the exemption clause could free governments of their obligation to respect fundamental labour rights and lead to the weakening of the GSP incentive system," said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. "It is essential that, as a bare minimum, El Salvador ratify and fully implement all 8 Conventions by the end of 2006, as stipulated by the new Regulation. If they don't do so, the European Commission must take the necessary steps to ensure that the universal GSP plus requirements are respected."

El Salvador relied on "constitutional constraints" arguments to justify its unwillingness to ratify ILO conventions 87 and 98. However, these arguments have been refuted by both a recent ILO study and the Human Rights Ombudsman of El Salvador.

The European and international trade union movement will be following very closely the eligibility criteria of countries applying for the GSP-Plus incentive scheme.

"We will provide the European Commission with documentation of countries not respecting all the core labour standards, and we expect the Commission to refuse any application not accompanied by evidence of

their implementation", said WCL General Secretary Willy Thys.

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

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