

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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End of global textiles agreement leads to worsening labour conditions in the Philippines New ICFTU report submitted to the WTO

Brussels, 5 July 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): Despite having ratified all eight core labour standards, labour violations in the Philippines continue unabated, according to an ICFTU report released today to coincide with that country's trade policy review at the WTO this week.

The report shows serious shortcomings in the application and enforcement of all eight core labour standards, in particular in the clothing and textiles industries, where due to the end of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC, formerly called the MFA), the government has exempted the garment sector from the country's minimum wage legislation in order to compete in international markets.

"What we have here is yet another example of a race to the bottom - a country lowering its labour standards in order to deal with the impact of the disorderly end of the ATC. Put simply, countries are being forced to compete by exploiting workers," ICFTU General-Secretary Guy Ryder said today.

The report notes that in the Special Economic Zones, where export production takes place, labour legislation is not enforced effectively by the Department of Labour and Employment. Union organising is very difficult and employers refuse to recognise or negotiate with trade unions. The managers of the zones claim they have the right to carry out their own labour inspections. Wages are low, working hours long and production rates very high. There is particular pressure on working time in textiles and clothing firms where overtime is the norm rather than an exception.

"Workers in the Philippines are in grave need of collective organising and yet their attempts to do so are met with indifference or violence," Ryder added.

For example, in October 2004 after workers at the Hacienda Luisita Sugar Mill and Plantation went on strike for better wages, police and soldiers responded by killing 14 people and severely injuring another 35. Amongst the dead were two children aged 2 and 5.

"This case illustrates all too graphically why more strenuous monitoring and implementation of core labour standards must take place and why the WTO should request that the ILO intensify its work with the Government of the Philippines and report back to the next WTO General Council," Ryder concluded.

The report further notes that child labour remains a serious problem in the Philippines, with an estimated 4 million children economically active (16.2%) in the 5-17 age group, many of them in the worst forms of child labour, such as child prostitution, mining, domestic service, pyrotechnics, deep-sea fishing, drug trafficking and agriculture. At least three out of five children were exposed to a hazardous environment, including physical and chemical hazards. Most children working in agriculture were engaged in crop cultivation, including planting, weeding, harvesting, and spraying pesticides. Many children are recruited as domestic workers, sometimes in exchange for loans to their families. Children are also trafficked for the purpose of sexual servitude or forced labour. A Time Bound Programme was launched in 2002 with the assistance of ILO/IPEC to reduce the worst forms of child labour by 75% by 2015.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221967&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global

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