

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine:

097/250705

Core labour standards in Egypt: genuine implementation urgently needed

Brussels 25 July 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): Despite having ratified all eight core labour standards, workers' rights are still badly violated in Egypt, 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, and in particular with regard to trade union rights.

Freedom of association is strongly limited by the legal obligation imposed on all trade unions to affiliate to the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which has a close relationship with the government. In addition and despite some recent improvements in the legislation, the report notes that there are still substantial obstacles to collective bargaining throughout the economy.

"The apparent progress made with the new labour law introduced in 2003 is more apparent than real in several respects. Take for example the newly introduced right to strike: first, strikes are prohibited in certain establishments which the Prime Minister is the only one authorized to define. Second, for those cases where the right to strike is recognized, the conditions attached to it are in practice so difficult to fulfill that strikes not infringing the current labour law are virtually impossible", commented Guy Ryder, ICFTU General Secretary.

Despite the severe restrictions on independent trade unions or strikes, there were a considerable number of industrial conflicts over the last few years. These were frequently repressed vigorously, often with violence.

Egypt has ratified both the fundamental ILO Conventions on discrimination, but the ICFTU report draws attention to various weaknesses in the provisions of the law concerning protection against discrimination in employment. Women are generally confined to employment in poorly-remunerated occupations. While the gender pay gap has been narrowed somewhat in the public sector, the underpayment of women is conspicuous in the private sector where, on average, a female is being paid slightly over two-thirds of a male's wage.

"Women's fragile position on the labour market has been further worsened by the wave of privatizations which took place in recent years. Women were disproportionately affected also by reorganization in the public sector", added Guy Ryder.

The report notes that child labour is employed extensively in Egypt, in both the rural and the urban sectors. Notwithstanding recent legislative improvements combined with some governmental programmes to tackle this issue, child labour remains a serious cause for concern. Further improvements are needed both in law and in practice.

"Egypt's political commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labour needs to be urgently translated into reality," Ryder concluded.

To read the full report, go to the ICFTU web-site:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222017&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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