

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

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On World Poverty Day union leaders warn against current trajectory of trade negotiations

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On October 17, as the world commemorates the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the world trade union body warned that the current round of WTO negotiations is on the wrong track if it is to deliver decent jobs and help end poverty.

Together with its GCAP partners, unions will today commence a series of lobbying meetings with key WTO players in order to remind them that in the eyes of world citizens the success of the Doha round hinges on what it delivers for the world's poor and exploited.

Also today, world trade union leaders will commence a week long symposium, organized by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, on the role of trade unions in the fight against poverty. Trade union leaders from 45 countries, from Morocco to Malaysia to Mexico, will discuss together with the World Bank, the IMF, UNCTAD and the ILO how the goal of more and better jobs can be achieved.

"As world trade union leaders turn their minds to how the trade union movement can best contribute to the fight against poverty, so must government negotiators meeting at the WTO General Council turn their minds to getting development back on the Doha agenda," Guy Ryder, the General Secretary of the ICFTU, said today.

"The last few weeks have seen a worrying trend for workers in countries south and north: on numerous fronts the Doha round, instead of fulfilling its promise of alleviating poverty, has deteriorated with even less transparent negotiations taking place. Everyone understands the importance of making the round deliver: but the question remains - deliver for whom?", Ryder continued.

In the NAMA negotiations, despite loud protests from developing countries, the so-called Swiss formula is still on the table, even though if utilised it will lead to steep and sudden tariff reductions precisely at a time when developing countries are trying to industrialise their economies and create jobs.

"Have we learnt nothing from the pain inflicted by the factory closures, job losses and economic shocks caused by the end of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing?" Lawrence Egulu, from the ICFTU's African regional organization asked.

"Workers cannot have the faith that trade will deliver decent jobs and a chance to break the cycle of poverty whilst they are forced to bear the brunt of economic re-structuring. The WTO must put in place adequate support mechanisms to ensure workers are not left on the scrap heap as a consequence of its policies," Egulu continued.

In the GATS negotiations, the benchmarking proposal, which goes against the principle of voluntary offers, is still being pushed by some industrialized countries, even though it could be used to force countries to open up their service markets in areas where they need to preserve the right to direct domestic policy the most: health, water, education, transport and telecommunications.

"It would be a crying shame if the same year as 30 million of the world's citizens united in an unprecedented campaign to stop poverty, key world trade players listened even less to those affected the most by

unjust trade rules- the Least Developed Countries, the African and Caribbean countries. Once again these countries face effective exclusion from the negotiations and their workers stand to lose out unless serious steps are taken at this General Council to change tack," Ryder concluded.

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 150 countries and territories - www.icftu.org

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

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