

ICFTU OnLine...

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APEC must do more to tackle Asia Pacific inequalities

Brussels, 21 November 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): The annual Leaders' Summit of APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum, held in Busan, Korea last weekend has failed to take effective measures to change the unbalanced economic development of the region, the ICFTU said today.

The leaders spoke of the importance of ensuring that all their citizens have the opportunity to share the benefits generated by trade liberalisation and economic growth. Yet, apart from agreeing to conduct a study on economic disparities, they took no concrete measures to attain that goal.

"The hundreds of millions of workers in the Asia-Pacific region believe that APEC has yet to address their main concerns: a decent job, enabling a decent living, as well as better access to health services and social security", said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU .

Though it has long been a stated objective of APEC to make the forum more responsive to all its citizens, the meeting brought nothing new on how to include anything other than business interests in its processes. "APEC seems set to continue down its business friendly road at full speed, without noticing that it leaves most of its citizens behind", Ryder added. "As long as workers have no say in the process, it's hard for them to believe they're invited along on the economic growth joyride and towards prosperity. They must be given genuine representation."

Last week, a delegation from the ICFTU's Asia Pacific Labour Network (ICFTU-APLN) met Korean Prime Minister, Lee Hai-chan and urged APEC leaders to endorse the establishment of an APEC Labour Forum, resulting in an APEC formal consultative mechanism with trade unions comparable with the current arrangements for access by the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC).

But rather than improving outreach to unions and citizens, it was improving Asia-Pacific's business environment that emerged as one of the main priorities from the meeting. "APEC are surprisingly old fashioned if they honestly think that such a one-dimensional approach to economic progress will bring sustainable development and rising living standards. It won't. Rather it will benefit the few and hurt the many", Ryder emphasised.

The need for further trade liberalisation, particularly through the WTO and Regional Trade Agreements, was repeatedly underlined in the APEC leaders' final declaration.

"APEC are missing the central part of the equation, if their trade reforms are to be good for people in the region: jobs!" stated Ryder. "The biggest contribution the leaders could have made to strengthening the multilateral trade system and the WTO, would have been to support taking employment issues into account in trade negotiations. But they missed their chance and so the negative experience of the loss of millions of jobs in poor developing countries, due to the end of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), risks being repeated in other countries worldwide as a result of concluding the Doha trade round", Ryder concluded.

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

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