

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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New Trade Union World Briefing (12 pages)

Export processing zones in the Philippines: SMS-ing against exploitation

Brussels, 21 November 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): Can you imagine life without your mobile phone, internet access, your MP3 or video game console? Not in this digital age! In this case, you can be very thankful to the Filipino workers featured in this latest ICFTU report, as it is highly probable that some of the components used to manufacture the electronic gadgets you use on a day-to-day basis have been manufactured in one of the export processing zones in the Philippines, which provide direct and indirect employment to more than one million workers.

Whilst unquestionably constituting an important source of employment, these EPZs fuelling international trade and the profits of the world's leading electronics and clothing brands, are characterised by their dismal working conditions. Conditions that are worsening as a result of the race to the bottom in labour standards following the deregulation of the global market.

Forced overtime, non-payment of social security contributions, poor working conditions, sexual harassment and union bashing ... This latest Trade Union World Briefing, supported by first hand accounts and new figures, reports on the sordid realities of the exploitation suffered by the workers, mostly women, in the EPZs of the Philippines.

Faced with the employers' systematic breaches of both international standards and national labour laws, the TUCP, affiliated to the ICFTU, is fighting to develop new organising strategies. Targeting young workers, it is playing the creativity card to counter employer hostility, for example by using text messages as a campaign tool.

This new Briefing also provides the proof that social dialogue can make all the difference. The report takes us to Bataan, where some 5000 young women employed by the Japanese company Mitsumi produce electronic components for top brands such as Pioneer, Nintendo, Sony, HP or Kenwood. They enjoy much better pay and working conditions than at the other EPZ factories, but given the real threat of relocation to China, with its "slashed" wages, they are aware of the need to compensate for this pay increase with a productivity increase. "If we are paid better, we work better... We are trying, in turn, to reduce the number of workers per production line," explains Daisy, worker and head of a production line making electronic components for the well-known "Game Boy" consoles. Proof that respect for workers' rights and the presence of a trade union within a company can contribute to boosting its performance.

-To read the Trade Union World Briefing : "Export processing zones in the Philippines - SMS-ing against exploitation"
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223089&Language=EN>

Also read the Spotlight interview with Josephine de Jesus (TUCP/ALU - Philippines): "Management and workers must work hand in hand. Not only for the company's success but also for the sake of the employees.":
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223075&Language=EN>

Also read the Spotlight Interview with Anna Lee M. Fos, (TUCP- Philippines): "When Texting Helps Organize EPZ Workers"
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223073&Language=EN>

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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