

ICFTU OnLine...

159/121205

TRADE UNIONS DECRY EMPTY DEVELOPMENT RHETORIC AT THE WTO, CALL FOR GENUINE DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT PACKAGE INSTEAD

Hong Kong, 12 December 2005 : (ICFTU OnLine): "Aid for trade" must not be a quid-pro-quo for far-reaching concessions by developing countries that could hamper their development efforts for the foreseeable future, warned the international trade union movement today following its last internal strategy meeting prior to the opening of the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference (Hong Kong, 13-18 December 2005).

"Trade-related development assistance is certainly desirable," commented ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, "but it must not become a pretext for arm-twisting by industrialised countries pretending that it obliges developing countries to mortgage their future industrial development and public services in exchange."

Trade unions condemned the "missing letter" which the WTO had failed to attach to the declarations being sent to Ministers on their way to Hong Kong, and which emphasised that everything within them was merely a draft that was fully open to amendment, as a bad start to the week of Ministerial meetings. "This harks back ominously to the unacceptable and untransparent practices of past WTO Ministerials, when developing countries were deceived into making commitments that then turned out to be irreversible," said Ryder.

Unions called instead for developing countries' legitimate demands to be adopted at this WTO Ministerial, providing an "early harvest" through decisions such as the setting of an early end-date to the dumping of agricultural products through export subsidies and other export support, which has had a calamitous impact on the billions of farm workers who constitute the majority in developing countries. This is particularly urgent for cotton, which is of crucial importance to millions of workers in some of the world's poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The millions of jobs currently lost or under threat due to the end of quotas for textiles and clothing caused unions to demand that the WTO take early action in future to anticipate such far-reaching developments, through the implementation of employment impact assessments (particularly in employment intensive sectors like agriculture, services and light industry). Unions strongly backed the proposal from Argentina, Brazil and South Africa (in TN/MA/W/65) that countries be allowed to change their WTO liberalisation commitments if serious job losses and social disruption were the result.

"The WTO must also open up to the other UN agencies with the expertise it lacks on its own", stated Ryder. "In that respect, we welcome the reference to coherence in paragraph 50 of the draft Ministerial text, and call on Ministers to make specific reference to the ILO and other key UN agencies in their final Declaration."

Since the countries still receiving preferences in the textiles and clothing sector include many of the poorest in the world and are currently suffering such massive employment losses, unions called for that sector to be excluded from NAMA negotiations at the present time, with an end to efforts to bring about early full elimination of tariffs through sectoral negotiations.

The union meeting demanded that the NAMA negotiations on manufactured goods should not result in any requirement that all countries bind their import tariffs or accept inequitable "Swiss formula" tariff reductions, and called for the developing country proposals to exempt certain sectors (using the so-called "Article 8 flexibilities") to be endorsed

fully.

Similarly, in the GATS services negotiations, unions called for an end to efforts to do away with the voluntary, "positive list" approach on which GATS is built, through the "benchmarks" which are now being repackaged under the monicker of "mandatory plurilaterals". Unions criticised the new "regulatory disciplines" being proposed which would jeopardise future needed regulations world-wide and place a particularly heavy regulatory burden on developing countries and place serious strains on their implementation capacities.

Ends

The ICFTU's website Workers' Voice @ WTO will provide daily updates of trade union movement activities and responses to the Ministerial meeting. Go to <http://www.workersvoiceatwto.org/> for the international trade union movement's perspective on all things WTO.

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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.

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