

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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005/160106

Malaysia - New ICFTU report submitted to the WTO: Flagrant Disregard for Union Rights

BRUSSELS, 16 January 2006 (ICFTU Online): A new ICFTU report on core labour standards in Malaysia finds serious shortcomings in the application and enforcement of core labour standards, in particular with regard to trade union rights and discrimination against migrant workers. The report has been prepared to coincide with Malaysia's trade policy review at the WTO this week.

The entire electronics industry was designated a "pioneer industry" back in the 1970s, making it a union free sector. Although the pioneer status lapsed after 10 years, national unions are still not allowed to register. Only in-house unions exist, thus denying more than 100,000 workers, mainly women, a viable and strong trade union. This continued denial of effective industrial unions has kept wage levels low and working conditions inferior. The multinational companies dominating the electronics industry have been using their power constantly to resist union recognition.

The report further notes that a large number of migrant women are employed as domestic workers in Malaysia. Work permits of migrant workers stipulate that they are not allowed to join any association, which affects in particular women domestic workers. Many are severely exploited, working long hours, seven days a week, for low pay and often subject to verbal and physical abuse. Domestic workers are excluded from several provisions of labour law such as rest days and hours of work as well as from termination, lay-off and retirement benefits. In some cases payments for domestic workers are delayed till the end of the two-year contract, thus denying the workers their wages and creating coercive conditions that make many domestic workers unable to leave their place of employment. Memoranda of understanding between Malaysia and the sending country prohibit migrant workers from joining trade unions and forming associations, and in some cases permit employers to hold workers' passports.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223267&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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