

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Bamako: African and European trade unionists demonstrate at the opening the World Social Forum

Brussels, 20 January 2006 (ICFTU Online): The demonstration marking the start of the first World Social Forum in Africa brought some 20,000 to the streets of Bamako, calling for the abolition of poverty in Africa to become the number one priority for national leaders and the international institutions.

The trade union delegation consisted of members of the Malian confederations, UNTM and CSTM, and of the ICFTU and WCL African regional organisations. The Global Union Federations, particularly from the transport (ITF), education (EI) and public service (PSI) sectors, were also present.

The Malian unions, who were out in force, expressed their joy at seeing their demands supported by such a strong international presence. "This demonstration is supporting our aspiration to live in dignity and with economic and social justice. It is also showing us some of the benefits to be gained from alliances with civil society", declared Hammadou Amion Guindo, General Secretary of the CSTM (Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Mali), which has 30,000 members.

The issue of cotton production took centre stage at the demonstration as Mali is an agricultural country with 85% of the population living in rural areas. Many Malian families manage to eke out a living from cotton production, which accounts for 60% of exports and 30% of national production.

Despite that, if the world trade rules were fairer, the living conditions of these families could improve considerably. So it is no surprise that one of the most popular slogans at the demonstration was "Destroy the subsidies in rich countries, not production in Africa".

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The ICFTU represents 155 million workers through its 236 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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