

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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ICFTU OnLine: Decent work and trade union unity at centre stage of the World Social Forum in Caracas

Brussels, 25 January (ICFTU Online): The rhythm was Latin and the atmosphere full of enthusiasm when thousands of trade unionists yesterday took part in kicking off the World Social Forum in Caracas. Together with a large number of the 100,000 civil society activists expected for the Forum they marched the streets of the Venezuelan capital, proudly shouting their demands and holding their banners up high. The next five days, however, music and marching will take second place to serious discussions of how the labour movement achieves more and better jobs on the continent and how the movement itself strengthens its unity in the Americas.

Today and tomorrow, 25 and 26 January, the 2nd Trade Union Forum of the Americas, organised by the regional organisations of the ICFTU and the WCL, ORIT and CLAT, will be the locus of these discussions. As part of the fifth focus area of the Caracas World Social Forum - work, exploitation and reproduction of life - trade unionist from North to South of the continent will discuss how to promote decent work as a fundamental part of strategies for sustainable development, how to face more and more free trade agreements and increasing economic globalisation, what kind of regional integration the continent should pursue and how to advance the unity of the labour movement on the continent.

With the present global economy posing new challenges to workers every day - not least in Latin America and the Caribbean, where 7.7 % of the labour force is officially unemployed and 75 million of those in work earn less than 2 dollars a day - the unity of labour is as central as ever. From country to country and sector to sector, workers are faced with the same problems: an increasing risk of losing their job, pressure to do more hours for less pay, and employers bullying them not to use their right to organise. Problems that are structural and therefore best can be addressed through a united labour movement.

These issues were also a central part of the motivation of the ICFTU's regional organisation for the Americas, ORIT, when they together with affiliates and other civil society organisations created 'Labour's Platform for the Americas'. The platform, which consists of a range of actions for governments to create healthy economies based on full employment as well as social and economic justice for all, will be discussed at several events throughout the forum. Based on real citizen participation the platform combines a series of economic measures with extensive social and labour rights, to achieve its ambitious goals. The job now is for the platform to become reality. To do so it must be 'owned' by activists at all levels. The World Social Forum is an ideal place to secure such ownership.

On Sunday, 29 January, trade unionists should hopefully be able to celebrate that they have advanced the international agenda for decent work for all, strengthened their cooperation and capacity to meet the challenges of the future and the present, and moved the ambition of social justice for all a significant step forward, by taking part in the party that marks the end of the World Social Forum in Caracas. Then again, the rhythm will be Latin and the atmosphere full of enthusiasm.

For more information, contact Kristian Weise in Caracas on +45 2672 0652.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a partner in Global

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