

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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United Arab Emirates: Union Rights Announcement a Positive Sign

Brussels, 3 April 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): The announcement by the United Arab Emirates on 30 March of a planned amendment to the labour law which would allow workers in the Emirates to join unions, take strike action and engage in collective bargaining with employers was described by the ICFTU today as a positive sign. The announcement was made against a backdrop of recent protests by migrant workers against exploitation and hazardous working conditions, pressure on the Emirates authorities by international bodies, and negotiations between the UAE and the USA on a trade pact.

The Emirates is one of the Gulf countries where trade unions are totally banned. It has not ratified either of the two International Labour Organisation Conventions, 87 and 98, on freedom of association and collective bargaining. Some positive steps have been taken in recent years in the Gulf, in particular in Bahrain, where restrictions on trade union rights have been lifted.

"The UAE should ratify and implement these fundamental Conventions, and work with the ILO ensure that any restrictions on the fundamental rights of all working men and women in the Emirates are removed", said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, adding that "the international trade union movement is ready and willing to provide practical assistance to help these workers, many of whom suffer severe ill-treatment through dangerous working conditions, low wages and extremely long working hours".

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. www.icftu.org

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