

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Exploitation not a path to alleviating poverty, trade union body warns at end of services negotiations at WTO

Brussels, 7 April 2006: At the end of two weeks of negotiations on services, world trade union bodies the ICFTU and Public Services International today warned that if they remain on the same course, the GATS negotiations could have a disastrous affect on basic human rights in developing and developed countries.

One of the most alarming proposals on the table is the request from China and India to take the concept of wage parity that some countries have specified in their offers out of the negotiations on Mode 4, the part of GATS that deals with the movement of workers.

"Not only is it bad enough that the WTO, which has no expertise in migration issues, has undertaken to conduct such discussions, but this latest proposal does nothing except undermine the fundamental human right workers have fought for centuries - the right not to be discriminated against," Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU said today.

If adopted the proposal would mean that workers from developing countries would be contracted to work in industrialized countries for a quarter or even less of the local wages.

"This would do nothing but contribute to social dumping, provide racists with a soapbox and increase people's fears of globalization. If we are serious about a pro-development round, discrimination on the basis of nationality is not the way to go about it. It sends the wrong signal to all those who think exploitation of workers is a competitive advantage in the quest for profits," Ryder added.

On the question of the ability of countries to preserve their public services and the right to regulate them as they see fit, again the current negotiations undermine the universal human right of access to education, health and water.

"A democratically elected government must have the right to provide its people with quality public services, and to increase regulation of multinational service providers if need be, without fearing they will be taken to court at the WTO as a result. With much talk of poverty alleviation in recent years and the AIDS crisis growing, seeking to liberalise and constrain public services in this manner again questions the WTO's commitment to ensuring trade benefits those who need it the most," said Mike Waghorne, PSI's Assistant General Secretary.

Amongst many other issues, questionable WTO processes which work to disempower those in whose name the Doha round is being negotiated remain

a grave concern.

"In Hong Kong and since then we have continually been promised that no country would be forced to liberalise its service markets. But if the events of the last two weeks are anything to go by, those promises ring hollow with the age old tactics of arm twisting making developing countries very nervous that again it will be their sovereignty on the chopping block, as they can't stay outside any agreement without making concessions in other areas", Ryder concluded.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. <http://www.icftu.org>

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