

## INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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### New ICFTU report: Infringement of trade union rights in Iceland

Brussels, 8 June 2006 (ICFTU Online): In a report published by the ICFTU to coincide with the trade policy review of Iceland at the WTO this week, the Icelandic government is criticised for intervening in the country's industrial relations. Again and again the Icelandic government has interrupted collective bargaining processes and denied certain groups of workers the right to strike.

Though law and practice in Iceland generally complies with internationally recognised labour standards, including trade union rights, one category of workers - workers on fishing vessels - have found it difficult to exercise their rights to both collective bargaining and to strike. Thus, disputes between certain fishers' trade unions and the federation of the fishing vessel owners concerning the determination of the fishers' wages and terms of employment have on numerous occasions led to government interventions, with the effect of fixing fishers' wages and terms of employment through the imposition of arbitration processes.

"The Icelandic Government's interference in industrial relations in the fishing industry has been a stain on an otherwise great democratic and industrial tradition," said ICFTU General Secretary, Guy Ryder. ""They should change this legislation right away so that there can be no doubt that all Iceland's workers have these fundamental rights", Ryder emphasised.

The concerns of the ICFTU are shared by the International Labour Organisation, the UN body assigned to deal with issues related to the world of work. Thus, it has frequently criticised Iceland for imposing solutions which should be the result of free and voluntary collective bargaining and for intervening in industrial disputes, in effect disrupting fully legal strikes by fishers. Indeed, the ILO has found it necessary to emphasise to the Icelandic government that the right to strike may only be restricted in services the interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population, and that a work stoppage in the Icelandic fishing industry does not seem to do so.

"The government must refrain from interfering in industrial relations in the way it is presently doing, in order to comply with the commitments Iceland accepted in the WTO Ministerial Declarations in Singapore in 1996 and Doha in 2001, and in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted in June 1998," Ryder concluded.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224508&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations

in 154 countries and territories. <http://www.icftu.org>

The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions.

For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.