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117/140706

Middle East: UN Envoys Offer Prospects for Rapid End to Violence

Brussels 14 July 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): With the cycle of provocation and reaction on all sides risking spiralling into a major conflict, the ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour have welcomed the decision by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to dispatch a three-member team of specialist officials to the Middle East to defuse the current crisis involving Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. The team is being led by Special Political Adviser Vijay Nambiar. The envoys' meetings with Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese authorities, and contacts with other countries which have the possibility and the obligation to help reduce the tensions, should offer real prospects for a rapid end to the violence.

The decision comes following Secretary General Annan's call for restraint by all parties and his strong criticism over the capture of Israeli soldiers by Hamas and Hizbollah and over Israel's disproportionate use of violence which has further escalated the crisis. Once again, innocent civilians are bearing the brunt of armed conflict and the failure of politicians to find pragmatic, effective and peaceful solutions.

Alongside concerted international action to end the violence, urgent attention must be given to the serious and deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. Immediate action needs to be taken to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the Gaza Strip, along with steps by the international community to help break the stalemate in relations between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

The ICFTU and the WCL call upon all parties to the conflict to cease all hostile acts, and to negotiate a peaceful end to the crisis, based on mutual recognition of co-existing sovereign states, in accordance with UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as well as the full implementation of the "Road Map" for peace.

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