

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Massive EPZ workers' rights violations in Nicaragua, ICFTU report shows

Brussels 25 July 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): The ICFTU has just published a new report on core labour standards in Nicaragua, to coincide with the WTO's review of the country's trade policy this week. The ICFTU report highlights the numerous barriers to the effective application of fundamental workers' rights in the country.

The report points to the serious problems taking place in the country's export processing zones which employ about 60,000 workers, the overwhelming majority being women. "The massive violations of workers' rights in Export Processing Zones are a source of great concern. It is urgent to put an end to the practices of some maquilas which seek systematically to sack, repress and threaten unionists. The widespread use of blacklists should not be tolerated. The consequences of the lack of union representation can be seen in the poor and often dangerous working conditions that characterize the EPZs of Nicaragua," said Guy Ryder, ICFTU General Secretary.

The report demonstrates that trade unionists are not adequately protected by the law. It denounces the situation of workers in public state enterprises, universities and higher technical education institutions, whose fundamental rights are not explicitly recognised by law. In addition, either in law or in practice, trade unionists are not sufficiently protected against employers' anti-union strategies: it is extremely easy for employers to dismiss trade unionists and fines levied by the Ministry of Labour against employers violating the Labour Code are far too low to constitute effective deterrents. The report further highlights the serious limitations attached to the right to strike and notes that even the Labour Ministry has recognised that it would take about six months for a union to go through the entire process in order to be permitted to hold a legal strike.

Despite well-developed legislation to tackle discrimination in remuneration and in access to employment and occupation, the report sustains that a serious pattern of discrimination against women, workers with disabilities and indigenous people persists. Salaries for male and female workers differ significantly, with men sometimes earning twice as much as women in the same position. The ICFTU report expresses serious concern with regard to the poor quality of the education system and the lack of effective government enforcement of the law on child labour, which result in a high number of children younger than 17 working throughout the country. Finally the report notes that forced labour occurs in Nicaragua in the form of trafficking of human beings, especially children for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.

The report in English:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224848&Language=EN>

& Spanish:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224849&Language=ES>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 241 affiliated organizations in 156 countries and territories: <http://www.icftu.org> ICFTU is also a

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