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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Labour regulation "state of exception" in Bangladesh's EPZ condemned by new report

Brussels, 12 September 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): A new ICFTU report, issued to coincide with the trade policy review of Bangladesh at the WTO this week, condemns the abuses of workers' rights in Bangladesh's numerous export processing zones, which are subject to a special labour legislation and where the most basic human rights are not respected.

In 2005 alone, 480 workers were killed and 950 injured due to workplace accidents or violence against workers. The worst abuses occurred in the ready-made garment sector, for example at the Shan Knitting and Processing Mill on 22 January 2005, where 22 women workers were killed and over 50 injured in a fire that broke out during a night shift. The factory gate was locked, effectively trapping the workers.

On 11 April 2005, 64 workers were killed and another 84 injured when the nine storey Spectrum garment factory collapsed. The building was only three years old and had been built in defiance of all building regulations.

Despite numerous proposals from the ILO for amendments to a new draft law mooted by the government of Bangladesh to bring it into compliance with relevant international core labour standards, there is no indication that the government will act on the ILO's recommendations and address the continuing denial of workers' rights in the zones.

The report shows that even though Bangladesh has ratified ILO Conventions 87 and 98, and its constitution and national law provide for the right to join unions, these rights are not respected in practice. It denounces the compulsory quota of 30 percent of workers that is required to create a union and the fact that the government of Bangladesh has systematically ignored the recommendations of the ILO to do away with this barrier. Workers in some professions are still prevented from joining a trade union and many trade unionists are continuously intimidated. As a consequence collective bargaining is very rare while the right to strike is not recognized by law.

The study also stresses the weak enforcement of national law regarding discrimination. National law bans only some forms of discrimination, but not all. Women and religious minorities commonly find themselves discriminated against in employment matters.

It underlines the fact that Bangladesh has not ratified the ILO convention on the minimum age for employment. Children work from a very young age, frequently suffering serious injuries and even death. The penalties in force against this practice are negligible. The report calls attention to trafficking in Bangladesh, where mainly women and children are often trafficked to neighbouring countries.

The ICFTU urges the government of Bangladesh in the report to adopt a number of recommendations in order to redress the situation of non compliance with core labour rights and standards.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224971&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 241 affiliated organisations in 156 countries and territories: <http://www.icftu.org> ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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