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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Trade Unions Call on UN High Level Dialogue (HLD) on Migration to deliver on migrant workers' rights and consultations with trade unions on global migration policy

Brussels, 13 September 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): In a Joint Statement issued today, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the World Confederation of Labour and the Global Union Federations called on Heads of State and Ministers participating in the General Assembly High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development to adopt a strong rights-based approach to global migration policy.
(<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224998&Language=EN>)

The Statement makes a number of key recommendations which Member States are asked to consider, with a view to incorporation in the Conclusions of the High Level Dialogue which takes place at the UN Headquarters in New York from 14-15 September, 2006. In so doing, it draws on the Conclusions of the Informal Interactive Hearings of the General Assembly with Civil Society, which was held on 12 July, 2006.
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/447/86/PDF/N0644786.pdf?OpenElement>

"Migration should not be used as an alternative to decent employment opportunities in sending developing countries" commented Sharan Burrow, President of the ICFTU, who will make the case for coherence on migration policy at a Round table of the High Level Dialogue on Thursday 14 September. Burrow expressed concern at the dominant paradigm informing the preparatory debates for the HLD. They tend to treat migrant labour as a commodity to be shuffled around in response to labour market shortages in industrialized countries. "This approach fails to recognize the negative social costs associated with economic migration", said Burrow. "It fails to address the need for equal treatment of migrants, protections against exploitative wages and conditions of work, and migrants' rights to join trade unions to improve their conditions of work and life".

The Statement asks Member States to seize the opportunity of the HLD to shift the policy debate in a more positive direction, one which places human and trade union rights and the decent work agenda at the heart of the discussions. Policies must also focus on the provision of quality public services, particularly in education and health, and social protections, with a view to stemming the brain drain, and achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed goals. Special attention should be paid to vulnerable groups such as young women, subject to abuse as domestic workers and in the entertainment industry, as well as those that are trafficked.

Trade unions further call on Member States to adopt a gender-friendly, normative framework for migration policy, based on core UN human rights instruments, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and ILO Conventions 97 and

143 on Migrant Workers, as well as the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration. Deploring the low level of ratifications of the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, particularly by receiving industrialized countries, the Statement says that the Conclusions of the HLD should include a call for all Member States to ratify the Convention.

Trade unions are criticizing the WTO for dealing with labour migration as a purely trade issue under the GATS Mode IV, while ignoring the human and social dimension. Given its competencies and tripartite consultative structure, the ILO should be the relevant locus for addressing the social and labour issues arising out of the cross border movement of persons, according to the Statement.

The Statement calls on Member States to define a clear follow-up procedure to continue the dialogue in this critical area, with a view to adopting best practice on migration policies. Trade unions are recommending a transparent, Consultative Forum located within the UN, for discussions with Member States as well as relevant specialized agencies, funds, and programmes of the UN, and intergovernmental organizations with special competencies. The forum should recognize and make use of the special competencies of the ILO on labour migration policies. It should be open to consultations with civil society and the private sector. Given their critical role in shaping migration policy, trade unions should be allowed to participate fully in this forum.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 241 affiliated organizations 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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