

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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El Salvador ratifies four ILO Conventions - signalling a victory for international and trade union pressure

Brussels, 14 September 2006 (ICFTU - WCL - ETUC OnLine): The pressure exerted by the trade union movement on President Saca and the Salvadorian government has borne fruit. El Salvador, after much resistance, has at long last ratified four ILO Conventions. The Salvadoran president signed, on 29 August, Conventions 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organise, 98 on the right to organise and collective bargaining, Convention 135 on the protection of workers' representatives and 151 on labour relations in the public service.

According to the new Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme adopted by the EU in 2005, countries wishing to benefit from such preferences must have ratified a series of 23 international instruments, including all eight Core Conventions of the ILO.

In spite of the international trade union movement's repeated demands that no country should be allowed to derogate from this rule, an exception had been made in the case of El Salvador, which was given preferential access to the European market for a trial period ending in December 2006. This concession had been granted on the condition that the instruments must, meanwhile, be ratified.

The stakes in terms of trade for this Central American country were huge, as were the social stakes for the trade union movement and workers of El Salvador. "The Core Conventions of the ILO are non-negotiable. No excuse can be found to justify a departure from this principle. No country has the right to use its workers as a bargaining chip, sacrificing their basic rights in the race for competitiveness," insisted ICFTU general secretary Guy Ryder in a recent statement.

El Salvador had claimed that it was unable to ratify the Conventions owing to "constitutional constraints". This purported excuse was finally overridden by political resolve. The vote in the Legislative Assembly was, moreover, unanimous. For Willy Thys, general secretary of the WCL, "this decision is most opportune at a time when negotiations for an Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America have just commenced. The social dimension and decent work must be at the core of this Agreement."

"We are left with the task of ensuring that all the countries benefiting from GSP in this region and other continents fully respect all these Conventions, in addition to having ratified them," added John Monks, general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation.

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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