

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

142/180906

Time for the World Bank/IMF to listen to workers

Brussels, 18 September 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): As government ministers from around the world prepare to meet with officials of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund at the institutions' Annual Meetings in Singapore this week, the international trade union movement is weighing in on the major debates of the meetings, including reform of the IMF and the World Bank's new anticorruption campaign.

In a joint statement released by the Global Unions group* and the World Confederation of Labour (web link to statement), the trade union movement proposes a major rethinking of the roles that the IMF and World Bank play in the global economy, in light of the growing number of countries that are questioning the institutions' influence in domestic economies as well as their effectiveness in meeting major international challenges.

"We believe that the World Bank and IMF could play a positive role in furthering equitable globalization," said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, "But they must adopt different approaches to issues such as privatization and labour market deregulation. Rather than insisting on harmful economic policy conditions, the World Bank and the IMF need to work more closely with trade unions, civil society organizations, and UN bodies such as the International Labour Organization to develop policies that support the decent work agenda."

WCL Secretary General Willy Thys called attention to "the lack of policy coherence within the World Bank on its attitude towards decent work. On the one hand, the Bank has endorsed respect for the ILO's core labour standards and produced studies showing their importance for development. But on the other, the Bank's highest circulation publication, Doing Business, has designated countries that have no workers' protection and are not even ILO members as the world's 'Best Performers' for their labour regulations."

The trade union movement endorses the view that the World Bank and IMF must redistribute country representation on their executive boards so that low-income countries have greater say in the matters that affect them - an issue that the IMF is expected to address in Singapore. The trade union statement further asserts that any new IMF measures aimed at avoiding international economic crises must be developed in an open and transparent manner and not include job-destroying austerity and structural adjustment conditionality. It also insists that the World Bank must improve its transparency, particularly in its heightened efforts to combat corruption.

"Better cooperation with and support for the rights of trade unions, civil society organizations and free media should be at the heart of the Bank's anticorruption efforts," said Ryder.

He pointed out that when the World Bank and IMF choose to work together with the international trade union movement and other civil society organizations, they could make important advances towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. "The World Bank and IMF's commitment at the 2005 Annual Meetings to deliver debt cancellation to the poorest countries stands as perfect example of the progress that can be made when these institutions cooperate and deal openly with trade unions and civil society," Ryder said.

The ICFTU and WCL expressed strong disagreement with the decision of Singaporean authorities to prevent some civil society groups from entering the country to attend the meetings as well as outlawing demonstrations. They noted that trade unions had encountered problems at earlier IMF and World Bank meetings, notably in Dubai in 2003, when the local government - which bans trade unions - had attempted to prevent Arab trade unionists from attending the meetings. "If the World Bank and IMF truly believe in better relations with trade unions and civil society, they should refrain from holding their meetings in countries that do not fully respect the rights of these organizations to attend the meetings and express themselves freely," said Willy Thys.

The full statement is available at:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224903&Language=EN>

* The Global Unions group is composed of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Global Union Federations and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD.

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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