

## **INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS**

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#### **Kyrgyzstan must step up its efforts in combating child labour**

Brussels, 9 October 2006 (ICFTU Online): Kyrgyzstan, one of the Central Asian states formerly in the Soviet Union, must do more to ensure workers' rights and to eliminate its serious child labour situation, a new ICFTU report finds. Released to coincide with the Trade Policy Review of Kyrgyzstan at the World Trade Organisation, the report also finds that the country's labour code has been weakened under influence of the international financial institutions and foreign investors.

"It is clear that the Kyrgyz government hasn't enforced child labour laws adequately. Although employers caught violating the law can in principle be charged with different kinds of penalties, punishment is usually minimal", said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU.

Child labour is a widespread phenomenon and particularly evident in the poorer south. Even though national statistics present it as only a minor problem, experts cited by the UN estimate that up to 125,000 children undertake work in ways that contravene the international conventions on child labour. Many children are involved in family enterprises, domestic duties, agriculture, and selling products at roadside kiosks. And minors often work up to 12 hours a day alongside adults, despite being paid less. There are also reports of schools which require children to participate in the tobacco harvest. The income from this goes to the schools, not to the children or their families. In other cases, classes have been cancelled and children sent to fields to pick cotton. Finally, children are also discovered engaged in commercial sexual exploitation in urban areas throughout the country.

"The awareness of the problem of child labour seems to be rather limited among the authorities. At least, that is the only way we can explain their inaction. What is sure is that far-reaching action is needed to achieve progress in this area", Ryder continued, "action like that undertaken by the affiliates of the Federation of Trade Unions that have been working with authorities and families to prevent the worst forms of child labour, in particular in rural areas of the south."

The report moreover finds that the right to strike, one of the central workers' rights which ensures that trade union organisation has an effect, is limited unduly in many non-essential occupations, such as railway and public transport, civil aviation and postal services. The UN's International Labour Organisation has concluded that according to its international conventions in this area - which have been signed by the Kyrgyz government - these sectors cannot be exempted from the right to strike and should not be in Kyrgyzstan.

"These are not essential services in the sense that should be exempt from basic national labour laws," Ryder said, continuing, "The Kyrgyz

government should amend its legislation so as to ensure that workers in these sectors may exercise the right to strike."

Finally, the report finds that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank together with pressure from foreign investors have influenced Kyrgyzstan to substantially weaken its labour laws.

"The Labour Code adopted in 1998 was generally regarded as the best for protecting workers' rights in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at that time", said Ryder before emphasising "yet the 2004 amendment, made on recommendations from the international financial institutions among others, reduced the rights related to work and primarily reflected the interests of employers. It is another unfortunate case of how these institutions undermine the social progress of the countries they are supposed to assist."

The full report can be downloaded here:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991225098&Language=EN>

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

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