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APEC must redress its imbalanced agenda and give space to labour interests

Hanoi, Vietnam 10 November 2006: If the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is to have a positive impact on ordinary people's lives, it must broaden its scope of work to include a social dimension, trade unions yesterday told the Prime Minister of Vietnam, this year's host economy of APEC.

"So far APEC has failed to address the real concerns of the people of the Asia-Pacific", said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. "Its imbalanced, business-oriented agenda ignores the most pressing problems in the region", he continued before stressing: "Trade liberalisation and facilitation, which is at the core of APEC's work, is no simple recipe for development, poverty eradication and social progress. In fact, without active measures on labour and social issues, trade can have negative consequences in the form of job losses and downward pressure on working conditions".

In the meeting with the Vietnamese Prime Minister, a delegation of trade unionists assembled for the 12th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Labour Network (APLN). The network used this occasion to submit a statement to APEC leaders, which contains nine major recommendations on how APEC should give the highest policy priority to achieving social justice through the creation of decent work for all, based on the full respect of fundamental workers' rights.

"It seems that APEC is slowly recognising that trade and investment liberalisation without a social dimension often creates social troubles, not least in the form of permanent social and economic exclusion of increasing parts of the people in the region. Yet while APEC might be getting the diagnosis right, it is still not prescribing the right medicine," Ryder pointed out. "If APEC is serious about addressing social concerns, it must make a u-turn in its work. It must put employment at the heart of its cooperation and include labour standards in its approach to trade and investment," said Ryder.

"APEC is wide-open to criticism that it is only serving the interests of business. As APEC has included the voice of business in its formal governance structure while ignored and omitted that of labour, this is no wonder" said Ryder and emphasised: "Indeed, APEC would ease its work and thus do itself a favour by creating parity between labour and business through the establishment of a permanent APEC Labour Forum. This would show that APEC is committed to

serving all citizens of the Asia-Pacific, not just its economic elites,” Ryder concluded.

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The APLN Statement can be found here: (please http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/APLN_statement_2006_-_Final.pdf)

On November 1, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories and has 30/ national affiliates.

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