

ITUC OnLine

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APEC fails to address most pressing issues

Brussels, 20 November 2006 (*ITUC OnLine*): The leaders of the 21 member states of APEC once again neglected some of the most serious problems in the region, when they met in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 18-19 November.

"It is disappointing to see that APEC Leaders continue to ignore the everyday concerns of the people of their region" said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), continuing "it is unacceptable that they seem to only be paying lip service to issues such as sustainable development and social cohesion."

"In spite of strong economic growth over the last decades, much of the Asia-Pacific region is still plagued by a lack of decent employment opportunities, with a majority of the people in many countries confined to struggling to make it through the day in various informal economic activities. Yet jobs and workers' rights figure virtually nowhere in APEC cooperation. And though there is some talk about inclusiveness, nothing substantial is ever done about it", said Ryder.

"APEC aims at ensuring stability, security and prosperity for the Asia-Pacific region – laudable objectives, but they are not getting the recipe right. This year the leaders even pledged to work towards a dynamic and harmonious community by building strong societies for the well-being of their peoples, but they think that trade liberalisation alone will do the trick. This is plainly naïve. Indeed, if APEC continues down this road, it will actually create more problems for its people than it will solve, it will make the community less harmonious, and it will erode the well-being of large numbers of its peoples", said Ryder and concluded "it is obvious that if APEC is to be relevant, it must have a much more dominant social dimension."

The Asia-Pacific Labour Network (APLN) last week urged APEC Leaders to use the APEC forum to promote decent work, establish effective rules for the global economy and strengthen labour market security, with full involvement of trade unions in APEC economies. As immediate points for action, the APLN called on APEC Leaders to:

- 1) Adopt concrete measures to promote labour participation in APEC and endorse the establishment of an APEC Labour Forum;
- 2) Further develop the analysis and ideas presented in the 2006 study on socio-economic disparities in the APEC region, initiated by Korea, to increase the relevance and value of APEC to the population of the region;
- 3) Strengthen the Human Resource Development (HRD) agenda within the APEC process and hold the next HRD Ministerial Meeting with full consultation of the social partners, and

a strong emphasis on the creation of decent and productive employment through comprehensive APEC Employment Guidelines;

- 4) Promote fundamental workers' rights in multilateral, bilateral and regional trading systems as well as in APEC;
- 5) Develop APEC guidelines to ensure the proper implementation of non-discriminatory policies with regard to gender and other forms of discrimination;
- 6) Develop an APEC framework for a rights-based approach to migrant workers;
- 7) Launch an APEC initiative to promote a conducive legal and policy framework to mainstream informal economic activities;
- 8) Develop an APEC framework to encourage social dialogue in multinational enterprises, and revise the APEC Non-binding Investment Principles; and
- 9) Start an APEC initiative for effective policies to promote decent work and sustainable investment and trade rather than, frequently, allowing sweatshop manufacturing production and exploitation in EPZs, where the majority of workers are women.

The full text of the APLN Statement, as discussed by an APLN delegation to meet the host of APEC, the Prime Minister of Vietnam in Hanoi on 9 November 2006, can be found in English and Spanish on the ITUC web-site at:

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 307 national affiliates.

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