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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Organising and defending the rights of migrant workers

Brussels, 13 December 2006 (ITUC Online): Around 60 trade unionists from all over the world and representatives of international organisations dealing with migrant workers' rights are meeting in Brussels for a seminar organised by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The seminar runs until 15 December and it will address the question of organising migrant workers and protecting their rights.

The seminar has three main objectives, explains P. Kamalan, the Director of the ITUC Equality Department: "The first is to share trade union information and experience on promoting and defending migrant workers' rights. The second is to support initiatives by organising partnerships of trade unions in the countries of origin and in the countries that receive the services provided by migrant workers, whilst focusing on the needs of migrant women workers who are suffering particularly harsh discrimination. And the third is to draw up a trade union action plan for organising, promoting and defending migrant workers aimed at improving their living and working conditions".

Recalling that the recent Founding Congress of the ITUC, in Vienna last month, had made combating discrimination one of its main priorities for action, Mamounata Cissé, ITUC Assistant General Secretary, opened the seminar by stressing the duty of trade union organisations to fight for migrants' rights to be given a higher profile in the worldwide debate that is currently raging on the subject of immigration. "That debate is focusing far too exclusively on security issues and ignoring the rights of migrants, and more specifically their rights as workers", Ms. Cissé said.

Since roughly 90 million of the 191 million migrants around the world are employed, the issue of decent work needs to be a core concern of immigration policies. In the countries of origin it is frequently the lack of decent work that is driving workers to emigrate, not through choice but as a means of survival. In the host countries, however, these migrants are largely stuck in the most insecure, difficult and degrading types of jobs, i.e. the least "decent".

Patrick Taran, a migrant labour specialist at the ILO, considers immigration - and the treatment of non-nationals - as "key to reasserting the agenda of the trade union movement in obtaining decent work, social protection and human welfare. Implementing a rights-based framework for non-discrimination and equality of treatment of migrants is imperative to social cohesion world wide. This requires organising, advocacy, social dialogue and action".

- Please also see the interview with Sartiwen Binti Sanbardi (HKCTU-Hong-Kong): "Migrant women domestic workers are exploited as they don't know the law" here :
<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article472>.

Founded on November 1 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

For more information, contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or mobile phone +32 476 62 10 18

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