

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

33/211206

ETUC and ITUC acclaim EU decision to impose trade sanctions on Belarus

Brussels, 21 December 2006 (ITUC OnLine): The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the ITUC warmly welcome the European Council's decision to withdraw trade privileges from Belarus, in response to the government's failure to respect trade union rights.

The trade union movement has been campaigning for this action, at international, European and national level, since 2003. An International Labour Organization (ILO) Commission of Inquiry in 2004 called on Belarus to stop the harassment of trade unions and guarantee freedom of association and the right to organise. This has not happened, and the ETUC and ITUC welcome the European Commission's call to Member States to exclude Belarus from EU Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) trade benefits.

ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder said "this is a welcome decision from the EU, and can only help bring the Lukashenko regime to realise that its repression of democratic and independent trade union has to stop".

EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson has recognised this as a test case of the EU's collective commitment to the promotion of workers' rights as an integral part of its trade policy.

"In the past, the EU has made many fine declarations about using its trade strategy to promote fundamental human and trade union rights and core labour standards, but seldom delivered on them," said ETUC General Secretary John Monks. "In this case it has shown it is willing to take concrete action in support of workers denied their basic rights. We hope the Belarus government will now act to protect fundamental trade union freedoms."

Founded on November 1 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates.

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