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ILO-WTO Joint Report: A Step Towards Sensible Global Policy

Brussels, 19 February 2007 (ICTU OnLine): World trade union body the ITUC today welcomed the publication of the first-ever joint study by the ILO and the WTO, "Trade and Employment: Challenges for Policy Research", as an unprecedented step forward towards achieving genuine coherence in the way the world's major institutions work together.

"The findings in this research study justify many of the long-standing positions of the world trade union movement," stated ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder. "It points the finger at many of the major problems faced by workers and their trade unions, such as employers threatening to transfer production around the world to keep wages low; the potentially negative effects of trade on income distribution; and the inadequacy of social safety nets and active labour market policies such as education and training in many countries around the world."

The study neglects however to tackle other serious problems such as the impact of trade on women workers, many of whom are missing out on the potential benefits of global trade due to discrimination at work, and the plight of workers in many of the world's 5,000 export processing zones where unions are effectively outlawed. Possibly the major omission from the report is analysis of the effect of China's policy of suppressing workers' rights, and thus wages, both on China's workforce and on those developing countries whose economies face ruin by unfair competition from China based on its low wage policy. The fundamental issue of whether trade can in some cases lead to reduced national output and growth, hence jeopardising any positive benefits for employment, was also largely unexplored in the study.

"Nonetheless, this paper heralds an important start in ILO-WTO cooperation, as called for in the recommendations of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation," concluded Ryder. "It shows that these two institutions need to do much more work together, to enable trade to lead to higher living standards for all rather than undermining decent work. Those governments which have been selling their own citizens short by refusing to recognise the obvious link between trade and labour standards should read this report, and learn its lessons".

Summary and Initial Commentary on "Trade and Employment: Challenges for Policy Research" - Joint ILO-WTO:
http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ILO-WTO_paper_summary_and_comments_-_final.pdf

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

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