

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Better maternity protection: a social emergency, a trade union priority

Brussels, 2 March 2007 (ITUC OnLine): Pregnancy tests as a precondition for employment, dismissal of pregnant women, inadequacy and non-application of the right to paid maternity leave, women in atypical sectors deprived of maternity rights, insufficient health care for mothers and young children... the reproductive function of working women remains a flagrant source of inequality and gender discrimination. In the run up to International Women's Day, on 8 March, the ITUC calls on governments, employers and trade union organisations to make maternity protection an action priority.

Although the legislation in many countries guarantees health care, employment protection and paid maternity leave, the gap between the law and rights in practice is often huge. Women in atypical work, such as informal economy activities, agriculture, home-based work, domestic work or even part-time employment are the most vulnerable, being all too often excluded from any form of social or employment protection.

Only a small minority of countries (13) has ratified ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection, adopted six years ago. The ITUC is therefore calling on the governments and all those concerned to take every step towards the ratification and implementation of this Convention, together with accompanying Recommendation 191, the provisions of which include 18 weeks paid maternity leave. The ITUC insists on the need to ensure that the law protects all women, including those working in atypical sectors, whose numbers are ever increasing with the deregulation of labour markets throughout the world.

"The fundamental challenge is not only to meet the individual needs of mothers but to recognise the value of the essential social function they assume for the benefit of society as a whole. Maternity is too often perceived as an obstacle to productivity and the accumulation of profit. And yet recognition should be given to the considerable contribution made by women, through their reproductive function, to the renewal of populations and thus the labour force," says Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary.

The ITUC calls on governments, employers and unions to work toward valuing the fundamental social role assumed by women and to take measures to promote the involvement of both parents in bringing up and taking care of their children.

In the run up to International Women's Day, on 8 March, the ITUC is releasing a new video portrait on maternity protection in the informal economy. You can view the video portrait of Salissa, a new mother and market gardener from the outskirts of Ouagadougou, at:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/video/burkina_en.wvx

In addition to this new video, the ITUC has also published a 12-page special report on organising the informal economy in Burkina Faso, which you can read at: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Burkina_EN_Smaller.pdf

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

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