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Trade Unions Unite Against Rising Unemployment: WTO Talks Could Worsen Job Climate

Geneva, Switzerland, 9 March 2007 (ITUC OnLine) - Trade union leaders from Brazil, India, South Africa, and other developing countries, traveled this week to a Global Unions meeting in Geneva to deliver a message to WTO members rising unemployment if their countries accept demands by developed countries to open up markets for manufactured goods. The trade unions' visit comes amid increasing pressure on developing countries to accept steep cuts on industrial tariffs in order to unblock the stalled Doha trade talks.

One worker, Badiah Peterson, a 41-year old clothing manufacturer from Cape Town, South Africa, already lost her job when the swimwear company she worked for was forced to close down because of the surge of cheap clothing imports, mainly from China. Clothing imports into South Africa, increased by 480% in US Dollar value over three years and contributed to 70 000 jobs being lost since 2003 - a third of the entire industry.

Stories like Badiah's are happening to manufacturing workers all over the developing world in textiles, clothing, electronic goods, white goods, paper, plastics, automobile, and metals.

"The situation could become a lot worse," said Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary "if current proposals at the WTO for draconian cuts in developing country industrial tariffs are agreed to."

Trade unions refuse to leave the fate of millions of workers in the hands of WTO negotiators. They are biting back. Trade Unions from NAMA-11 developing countries-including South Africa's COSATU and Brazil's CUT-have formed a NAMA-11 trade union group to defend the interests of their workers. The trade unions set out their demands in an ITUC press conference today to ensure industries and employment in their countries are protected.

"We call upon our Ministers to resist any further concessions in the manufactured goods negotiations," said Jacy Afonso de Melo, CUT-Brazil. "The existing NAMA-11 position already goes too far and will have negative consequences for manufacturing employment and industrial development in our countries."

"Our governments must ensure the commitments they make in relation to manufactured goods are in-line with our different stages of development and that adequate flexibilities are built into any final agreement," said Rudi Dicks of COSATU.

The full statement from the Trade Union Alliance can be found at:
http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/NAMA_tU_statement.pdf

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

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