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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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APEC must address the real challenges of the Asia-Pacific, including the ugly faces of globalisation

Sydney, 31 August 2007: Meeting for the 13th Asia Pacific Labour Network meeting, union leaders from the region sent a strong message to the upcoming Leaders summit: rather than continuing to narrowly focus on trade and investment liberalisation, APEC must broaden its scope to deal with the economic and social realities of the majority of the people of the region. The Asia Pacific is on the brink of a jobs crisis, with lack of decent work opportunities as more people toil in the informal economy, inequality rises, social standards plummet, and millions of people leave their countries to seek a basic living . Yet APEC is addressing none of this.

"More and more people find it impossible to obtain regular, formal employment and those who do, see their real wages decrease and other benefits removed. In many places, wages fail to keep pace with productivity increases or even inflation, and job security lost. Working time is on the rise and working conditions on the decline. Millions of people find that the only prospect to earn a living and support their families is to toil in the shadows of the mainstream economy, where working time, conditions, benefits and wages have limited meaning, rights do not exist", said Sharan Burrow, President of both the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). "Looking at what the APEC Leaders will be discussing next week, you get the impression that they know nothing about this reality of their region," she said.

"Unions believe that the APEC leaders must acknowledge the social dimensions within their agenda, and listen to the voice of workers and other citizens. While trade and finance ministers meet on a yearly basis, ministers responsible for labour, social protection and education have not met since 2001. These issues require their attention", said Sharan Burrow. "The union leaders of the Asia Pacific have presented APEC with 11 concrete recommendations on how to make the cooperation broader and more relevant. The question now is whether they are willing to listen. We will follow that closely."

"People trafficking, the sex trade and the exploitation and abuse of workers, especially migrant workers, are the ugly faces of globalisation. These are important issues and should not be left off the APEC agenda", said Sharan Burrow, pointing out that today 1.36 million people in the Asia Pacific are victims of trafficking across borders for sexual or economic exploitation, with children accounting for up to 50 % of these victims.

"We continue to see reports of migrant workers exploited, bullied or killed while working in sometimes slave-like conditions in the Asia Pacific. APEC leaders need to come up with new solutions to safeguard human rights and labour rights in the region, and to prevent exploitation and abuse, especially among vulnerable migrant workers,

women and children", Sharan Burrow emphasised.

ITUC/APLN 2007 Statement to APEC Economic Leaders Meeting:
http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/APLN_statement_2007 - final-22_August.pdf

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: www.ituc-csi.org

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