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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Forced Labour: ITUC Kicks off Global Trade Union Action Programme

Brussels, 31 August 2007 (ITUC OnLine): Globally, at any given time, at least 12.3 million people are working in forced labour conditions as defined in Convention number 29 of the International Labour Organisation. More than 2.4 million of these victims have been trafficked. They are subjected to psychological or physical coercion. In practice this means amongst other things that bonded labourers are being forced to work in humiliating conditions in order to pay off prohibitively inflated debts to their employers; domestic workers are being abused and exploited; some people are still held in slavery by their traditional masters and another significant minority is still being forced to work on public projects by the state in dire circumstances with disregard to their human dignity. Groups of people who are poor and likely to be subjected to discrimination are also the most vulnerable to be subjected to forced labour. Trade unions are the main instrument to denounce and to act against abuse and exploitation of any worker and therefore have an essential role to play in the abolition of forced labour.

To build up a global trade union action programme to tackle this severe exploitation, the ITUC is organising its first Inter-Regional Conference on Trade Union Action and Strategies on Forced Labour and Trafficking from 9 to 11 September, 2007 in Malaysia.

"Most trade union organisations already have policies, strategies and action plans related to child labour, migrant workers, domestic workers and/or trafficking for sexual exploitation. Nevertheless the link between these issues and forced labour is not always clear. This Conference will set out a comprehensive and realistic international trade union policy and strategy to fight forced labour and trafficking together, initially for the coming two years", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

The Conference is being organised in cooperation with the ILO Special Action Programme against Forced Labour, the ILO's Workers Bureau ACTRAV, and the Global Union Federations. Participants representing the trade union movement in the different regions and industries in the world will be attending together with trade union and other experts in the issue of forced labour and trafficking.

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