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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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APEC remains distant to citizens' reality

Brussels, 13 September 2007 (ITUC Online): Meeting in Sydney, Australia, 8-9 September, the leaders of the 21 member states of APEC - including the US, Russia, Japan, China, Mexico, Malaysia, Peru, Indonesia, the Philippines and the host, Australia - failed to tackle the real challenges of the billions of workers and ordinary people around the Pacific rim.

"Once again, the presidents and prime ministers of the APEC countries have met to discuss their increasing cooperation yet touched upon virtually none of the issues that matter to the people of their countries", said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

"The region is facing a jobs crisis and economic inequality runs rampant in most of the countries. Low wages, bad conditions and a lack of rights are becoming the face of work in the developed economies in APEC, while underemployment, outright exploitation and toiling in the shadow of the formal economy is the everyday reality of more and more people in APEC's developing economies. But APEC is doing nothing to redress this", emphasized Ryder.

In the next 10 years hundreds of millions of jobs will have to be created in the Asian part of APEC alone, argues the Asian Development Bank among others. While economic growth remains strong in the region, it creates fewer and fewer jobs. Indeed, some APEC countries have even experienced rising real unemployment in years of record setting growth rates. It is therefore hard to see where the jobs should emerge from unless employment is prioritised in national and international policies.

"In the light of stalling negotiations on trade tariffs and other barriers in the WTO in particular, APEC is now increasingly focusing on so-called 'behind-the-border' structural reforms and other measures to increase trade and keep economic growth high. However, this is not even half the answer to the region's troubles. To really address the economic and social challenges so clear within these countries, cooperation must evolve around a whole set of other issues", said Ryder, pointing to the recommendations to APEC from the international trade union movement.

The Asia-Pacific Labour Network (APLN), meeting in Sydney prior to the APEC Leaders' meeting, encouraged APEC to promote decent work, establish effective rules for the global economy and strengthen labour market security, with full involvement of trade unions in APEC economies.

Concretely, APLN called on APEC Leaders to:

- 1) Adopt concrete measures to promote labour participation in APEC and endorse the establishment of an APEC Labour Forum;
- 2) Strengthen the Human Resource Development (HRD) agenda within the APEC process, resume the tradition of HRD Ministerial Meetings, and hold the next such meeting with full consultation of the social partners, and a strong emphasis on the creation of decent and productive employment through developing comprehensive APEC Decent Employment Guidelines;
- 3) Promote fundamental workers' rights in multilateral, bilateral and regional trading systems as well as in APEC in general;
- 4) Act on the commitment to addressing the social dimension of globalisation by further developing work in this area;
- 5) Approach the issue and stated priority of structural reforms in a balanced way that prioritises a high road, rather than a low road, to development;
- 6) Tackle climate change and global warming in an ambitious and

comprehensive manner, including by paying attention to its employment and workplace aspects;

7) Develop APEC guidelines to ensure the proper implementation of non-discriminatory policies with regard to gender and other forms of discrimination;

8) Develop an APEC framework for a rights-based approach to migrant workers;

9) Launch an APEC initiative to promote a conducive legal and policy framework to mainstream informal economic activities;

10) Develop an APEC framework to encourage social dialogue in multinational enterprises, and revise the APEC Non-binding Investment Principles;

11) Start an APEC initiative for effective policies to promote decent work and sustainable investment and trade rather than, frequently, allowing sweatshop manufacturing production and exploitation in EPZs, where the majority of workers are women.

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.

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