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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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ITUC and ETUC Welcome European Convention Against Human Trafficking

Brussels, 30 January 2008 (ITUC Online). The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) have welcomed the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Convention becomes legally binding on the first ten countries to have ratified it (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia), on 1 February, with Bosnia-Herzegovina, France and Norway following on 1 May. Most European countries have taken the first steps to ratify the Convention, with the UK having already announced its intention to complete the ratification by the end of 2008.

“Human trafficking is an appalling reality which exists in much of Europe. Putting this Convention into place, alongside the relevant International Labour Organisation Conventions, will help ensure that Europe plays its part in tackling this worldwide scourge. It is the first legally binding European instrument on this issue”, said John Monks, General Secretary of the ETUC and of the ITUC’s Pan-European Regional Council (PERC).

Trade union organisations throughout Europe are active in the fight against human trafficking, and will form part of a Global Trade Union Alliance to combat forced labour and human trafficking. The alliance is being established by the ITUC with support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO estimates that some 2.45 million people, most of them women and children, are victims of trafficking around the world. Around 43% of the total are trapped in commercial sexual exploitation, while around one-third are exploited in agriculture, sweatshops and private households.

“We are encouraging our member organisations in Europe to push their governments to ratify this Convention and to make sure it is fully enforced. The criminal gangs and the recruiters who organise this trade in human beings must be stopped and punished, and the factors which make people vulnerable to this exploitation must be dealt with”, said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

The Council of Europe is a pan-European organisation with 47 member states. The PERC, which has the same geographical coverage, will be seeking cooperation with the Council to promote and implement the Convention, as is already the case with the revised European Social Charter.

“Our global alliance against forced labour and trafficking will mobilise increased trade union action around the world against this form of modern-day slavery”, said Ryder.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates.

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