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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Guatemala: end impunity now!

Brussels, 1 February 2008 (ITUC OnLine): Yesterday saw the conclusion of the international conference on the role of trade unions in the fight against impunity, held in Guatemala City by the ITUC, its regional organisations ORIT and CLAT, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the ITUC's Guatemalan affiliates, the CGTG and CUSG. The event was inaugurated by the President of Guatemala, Alvaro Colom. At the close of the event, the Conference Declaration was handed over to the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Edgar A. Rodriguez, for submission to the Guatemalan authorities.

The aim of the Conference was to devise and apply political and trade union strategies to promote respect for core labour standards, to build trade union capacity to fight impunity, and to secure full investigations into the murders of trade unionists, so that those responsible are brought to justice and sentenced as soon as possible.

Guatemala is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists; a fact confirmed just one day prior to the Conference when two armed men attacked the head office of the CGTC. The two individuals forced staff at gunpoint to open one of the offices, from which they took two computers containing valuable information.

In its conclusions, the Conference emphasised the need to fully investigate the cases of Pedro Zamora, Marco Tulio Ramirez, Raúl Castro Bosel and Rosalío González Villatoro, all of whom have been killed over the last 12 months due to their activities as trade union leaders. The Conference noted its agreement with President Colom regarding the urgent need to lay solid foundations for social dialogue, as a means of generating trust between the social partners. Another priority is the need to step up labour inspections.

The Conference also called on the international community to intensify political and material support for the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, promoted by the UN. Its director, Carlos Castresana, left a very strong impression on the conference delegates.

Given the continuing increase in the murders of women in Guatemala and Central America at large, the trade union movement committed to prioritising the fight against "femicide".

The Conference also stressed the need to wage an international campaign in Guatemala and Central America to strengthen the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, as established in Conventions 87 and 98 of the ILO.

"The fight against impunity is crucial. It is a fight that has to begin with the strengthening of the rule of law in Guatemala," said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC.

To read the declaration in full:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/declaration_guatemala_conf_310108.pdf

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>.

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