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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

## ITUC Online

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### Indian Workers Trafficked to US

Brussels, 18 March 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has today called on the US and Indian Governments

[http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Protest\\_letter\\_Pascagoula\\_case\\_Attorney\\_General.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Protest_letter_Pascagoula_case_Attorney_General.pdf) to take action on behalf of nearly a hundred Indian workers who on 10 March protested the trafficking practices they suffered when they were recruited in India only to be exploited on a shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

The workers are demanding that the U.S. Department of Justice open a criminal investigation against their traffickers and that it act to ensure that future workers and their families do not face the same modern-day slavery. Reportedly, on the same day a law suit has been filed on behalf of about 500 Indian dock workers. The 82-page complaint accuses Signal International, a marine construction company, and American and Indian recruiters Malvern Burnett and Dewan Consultants respectively, of subjecting over 500 Indian workers to forced labour, trafficking, fraud and civil rights violations.

The workers claim that they have been trafficked by an international recruiter from India to the U.S. Gulf Coast. Enticed by deceptive recruitment advertisements promising legal and permanent work-based immigration to the U.S. for them and their families, the workers took on loans of up to 20,000 USD for their recruitment fee, only to realize that they would only receive a residence and work permit for a period of ten months, barely enabling them to repay the loan they took from their recruiter and not allowing family members to follow. The workers lived in overcrowded and isolated labour camps; they were refused transportation and monitored around the clock by security guards. Reportedly with up to 24 people stacked in small trailer-like bunk houses, 1,000 USD per month was withheld from their salary for accommodation. The workers reported severe discrimination and racist speech. In spite of repeated evidence of past fraud, the recruiters and the employer threatened, coerced and defrauded these workers into paying additional amounts. They also altered contracts, which they forced the workers to accept under threat of destruction of their passports and/or visas. Last year an organized attempt to improve the working conditions was violently suppressed by the employer, who locked up and attempted to forcibly deport the leaders.

The workers are supported by the Low-Wage Immigrant Worker Coalition, the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, and the Alliance of Guestworkers for Dignity as well as the ITUC affiliated AFL-CIO. The ITUC joins these organizations and supports the call of these workers for protection as victims of trafficking and urges the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency to put the rights of the victims first and not to punish this group of workers for exercising their legal rights.

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

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