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New Report on Workers' Rights in Singapore

Brussels, 14 July 2008 (ITUC OnLine): A new report by the world's largest trade union body, the ITUC, on core labour standards in Singapore, to coincide with the Trade Policy Review of Singapore at the WTO, draws attention to various restrictions on the trade union rights of workers in Singapore and other areas of noncompliance with core labour standards.

Singapore has not ratified Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise. Various legal provisions restrict the right to organise, for example with regard to the registration of unions and the right to organise for public sector workers, although in practice exceptions are made. The right to strike is recognised but restricted, particularly for workers in "essential services".

With regard to discrimination, the report notes that the profile of working women is improving, due to educational efforts and positive action programmes, although wage gaps persist. In the private sector women still hold few leadership positions. Thirty percent of the total workforce are foreign workers from neighbouring countries, most of them unskilled. Many are domestic workers, with an estimated 150,000 domestic female workers employed in Singapore. Foreign workers' working hours tend to be long and their housing conditions, particularly for construction workers, are reported to be inadequate.

The report further notes that Singapore has ratified both ILO Conventions on child labour. Despite recent efforts in this domain, there remain some elements of Singapore's legislation on child labour which still need to be brought into conformity with international standards. However, in practice there is no indication of child labour in Singapore, as a result of the high priority accorded to education. Finally, the report notes the problem of trafficking of women from neighbouring countries into Singapore, often for the purpose of forced prostitution.

In the report, the ITUC calls upon the government of Singapore to ratify urgently the three core ILO Conventions it has not ratified, namely Convention Nos. 87, 111, and 105. Legislation has to be brought into conformity with ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98, including the provision of the legal right for public sector workers to form unions, and the ending of legal restrictions on strikes. Furthermore, the government needs to continue efforts to address wage gaps and occupational constraints on employment for women, as well as strengthen measures to protect migrant workers including construction and domestic workers.

To read the full report:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Singapore_11-July-2008.final.pdf

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

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.

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