

>>> "ITUC Press" <press@ituc-csi.org> 17.10.2008 16:50 >>>

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

180141008

Trade unions fighting against human trafficking

Brussels, 22 October 2008 (ITUC OnLine): On October 18, the second EU anti-trafficking day will be held across Europe. On this occasion, the ITUC, its Pan European Regional Council (PERC) and the ETUC emphasise that labour rights are human rights which apply to all, regardless of immigration status. Human trafficking, as one of the worst forms of exploitation of migrant workers, has in previous years been identified as a priority issue on European and international trade union agendas. As a result, the Greek Confederation of Labour GSEE is hosting a conference in Athens on 21-23 November 2008 organised in cooperation with ITUC, PERC and ETUC to develop a specifically targeted trade union strategy to better defend the rights of these "invisible" workers.

Unreasonably restrictive migration policies throughout the world, including in Europe, render migrant workers extremely vulnerable and often push them into informal and unprotected working conditions. This is happening increasingly in mainstream economic sectors such as agriculture and construction. Women in domestic work are also known to be particularly at risk. Trade unions fighting for decent work are working to ensure that these workers are protected and freed from forced labour. In reality, most of them suffer not only forced labour but are at the same victims of child labour and discrimination, and are legally prevented from organising. Ensuring freedom of association for all workers offers an effective tool for workers to protect and defend their interests themselves, and to help victims of trafficking regain their lives and dignity. Many children are also trafficked, and trade union actions on child labour are also a key area of action.

Policies focusing on the migration phase of trafficking have proven to be inadequate. The only way to sustainably eradicate human trafficking is by also acting against the exploitative situations which arise from it. Ensuring full respect for workers' rights will deter opportunistic employers from looking for a cheaper alternative to their workforce, thus effectively diminishing demand for cheap labour and other abusive employment practises.

"Human trafficking is a phenomenon that is still growing," said Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary. "Major efforts are needed to eradicate it without delay. Every country is responsible for safeguarding the human rights, including labour rights, of the people on its territory."

To see the second newsletter of the Global trade union alliance to combat forced labour and trafficking:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/doc/Newsflash_2_EN.doc

To see the ITUC Video on forced labour:
<http://fr.youtube.com/watch?v=hzpsVLYmVds>

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