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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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18 December - International Migrants Day

New report on trade union action for migrants in Costa Rica

Protecting migrant workers from the fallout of the crisis

Brussels, 18 December 2008: "The international trade union movement is keeping a close watch on the responses to the economic and financial crisis to ensure that they are not at the expense of the fundamental rights of migrant workers," warned Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC.

At a time of massive job losses, migrant workers, often confined to the most precarious and least protected jobs, are in the front line of the economic and financial crisis. Their families in their countries of origin could also be badly affected, as they often depend heavily for their survival on money sent home by the migrant workers.

Migration is a key item on the agenda of the ITUC's General Council, meeting this week in Brussels.

"Solutions to the world financial crisis should provide guarantees for rather than restrict the mobility of persons," warned Sharan Burrow, president of the ITUC, at the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Manila last October.

Recalling the dramatic impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis on migrant workers, which resulted in the sudden expulsion of many migrants, the international trade union movement is anxious to ensure that the same errors that had such painful consequences for migrants are not repeated and that on the contrary migrants are considered as full participants in long-term development strategies and socio-economic policies, both in their host countries and countries of origin.

"The close link between climate change and migration is another huge challenge that the international community must respond to by respecting peoples' fundamental rights," adds Guy Ryder.

The ITUC's founding Congress in Vienna in November 2006 made combating discrimination one of its top priorities for action. Particular emphasis is placed on the gender dimension of the action to be taken, as women migrant workers make up a significant, growing and heavily discriminated part of the migrant workforce.

In December 2006, the ITUC set up a trade union "action plan" to organise migrants more effectively, defend and promote their rights and improve their working conditions, with a particular focus on collective bargaining. The ITUC also promotes partnerships with NGOs and other civil society stakeholders.

As part of its strategy to strengthen South/South solidarity, the ITUC has launched three partnership agreements between affiliates in the different regions, with the support of the LO/TCO Sweden. These three pilot projects

involve Indonesia (SPSI) and Malaysia (MTUC), Senegal (CNTS) and Mauritania (CGTM), Nicaragua (CST,CUS, CUSa) and Costa Rica (CTRN)(*). Information and support centres for migrant workers have been set up in Malaysia by the MTUC, in Mauritania by the CGTM and in Costa Rica by the CTRN(*). Many trade unions have long-established projects aimed at ensuring the full integration of migrant workers and their families. In Hong Kong, migrants have set up their own trade union, which is affiliated to the HKCTU (Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions).

The trade unions continue to put pressure on the governments of the countries of origin and destination to integrate this rights-based approach for migrant workers at the national level, within the framework of bi-lateral and regional agreements, and to harmonise their approach at world level. The international trade union movement cites the existing legal instruments of the ILO (Convention 97 and 143) and the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families(1990) whose ratification it promotes. It is also calling for a new ILO Convention specifically aimed at protecting domestic workers who are a particularly vulnerable group of women migrant workers.

(*) An international ITUC mission went to Costa Rica last November as part of the follow-up to bi-lateral trade union partnership agreements, to look at the work carried out in the field by the Costa Rican national migrant workers' union (CSM). More information can be found in the new "Union View" report on "Costa Rica: Helping Migrants Organise" (16 pages)

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

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