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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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The 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) opens in New York on 2 March, 2009

Brussels, 2 March 2009 (ITUC OnLine): A 40-strong trade union delegation from the ITUC, Education International (EI) and Public Services International (PSI) will be participating in the two-week meeting which comes at a time when the world is facing the worst economic downturn since the great depression of the 1930s. Impacts on working women and men and their families are set to be very severe. It is already clear that with structured inequalities in the world of work and in society, women are bearing a disproportionate burden of the impacts of the multiple crises of food, fuel, finance and climate change.

"The gender aspects of these crises must be taken fully into account in all policy responses," said ITUC President Sharan Burrow. "Women and families are falling deeper into poverty," continued Burrow. "Impacts are set to be particularly severe among women in rural areas and in the informal economy, as well as among minority and excluded groups: women living with AIDS, children, older people, migrant and domestic workers."

These concerns are also uppermost in the minds of the trade union delegation to CSW, as they formulate key messages for lobbying governments on the priority theme of the 53rd Session, "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS," as well as the sub-theme, "The gender perspectives of the financial crisis".

Trade unions will be presenting their Statement to governments, emphasizing that policy responses to the crisis must take account of its gender impacts. The unequal sharing of family responsibilities and the greater involvement of women in unpaid care work limit their chances of finding and keeping decent jobs. In its Global Trends Report 2009, the ILO predicts harsh labour market conditions as a result of the crisis. A highly probable worst case scenario predicts an increase of 50 million unemployed worldwide, and a rise to 1.4 billion people classified as the working poor, earning less than USD \$2 per day, and unable to lift themselves out of poverty. A large percentage of the new unemployed and working poor will be women.

Government cuts in social spending and their failure to provide adequate public health, childcare, publicly funded education and other essential social services increase the burden on women as care givers. Responses in the social policy domain and in the fight against HIV/AIDS must address these deficits, as well as the structured inequalities operating in the

social, sexual, political and economic spheres that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS.

Trade union delegates to the CSW are strongly recommending to governments the adoption of policies and laws that promote equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, and that eliminate discrimination against women in the labour market. In the context of stimulus packages being put in place to restore growth, trade union women are recommending the strengthening and broadening of social safety nets and social protection guaranteeing access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection, quality education and health care, as well as measures which would enable reconciliation of work, and family life. Further, there is a need for increased and predictable funding for employment creation, based on gender-sensitive decent work objectives.

A gender-friendly enabling regulatory environment must include ILO Conventions 100 on equal remuneration (1951), 111 on elimination of discrimination in employment (1958), 183 on maternity protection (2000), 156 on workers with family responsibilities (1981), as well as Recommendation 165 on workers with family responsibilities (1981).

The ITUC-EI- PSI Statement to CSW53 is available from the following link:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/En_ITUC_EI_PSI_Joint_Statement_2009.pdf
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