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New ILO Study emphasizes possible impact of global economic crisis on forced labour

Brussels, 12 May 2009 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has welcomed a new ILO Global Report on forced labour worldwide, which will be submitted to the ILO's annual International Labour Conference in Geneva in June.

Entitled "The Cost of Coercion", it details, among other aspects, the growing number of unethical, fraudulent and criminal practices that can lead people into situations of forced labour, and calls for increased efforts to eradicate these forms of exploitation. The report also charts the significant international and national progress in reducing and preventing forced labour, but warns of the possible negative impacts of the global economic and jobs crisis on efforts to eliminate it.

The report's USD 20 billion estimate of the "opportunity cost" of the coercion of workers affected by these abusive practices, in terms of lost earnings, puts the economic case alongside the clear moral and legal imperatives to eliminate forced labour.

It also points out that among intensified international and national efforts to reduce and prevent forced labour, are new laws and policies at national and regional levels as well as growing provision of social protection for those most at risk of forced labour and trafficking. In addition, it offers much-needed guidance and expertise on effective means to combat these practices.

The ITUC, through its own forced labour programme, is supporting union action on the issue in general, along with specific attention groups, such as domestic workers, where the extent of forced labour is not widely recognized. One area of growing concern which the report did not emphasise concerns the use of forced prison labour, which is regulated by ILO Convention 29, and which is also subject to WTO restrictions under article XXe of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

"The fact that forced labour still exists, and especially on such a huge scale, is an absolute scandal which the international community simply should not tolerate. Governments must work together, especially to combat the scourge of human trafficking, through effective laws and proper enforcement," said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder, adding that "trade unions, often working with NGOs and governments, are actively working to prevent forced labour and to identify and assist those affected."

To see the ILO report:

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_106230.pdf

To see an ITUC video on forced labour:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzpsVLYmVds&feature=channel_page

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 312 affiliated national

organisations from 157 countries and territories.

<http://www.ituc-csi.org> <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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