

Fundamental labour standards in Niger and Senegal: ITUC extremely concerned

Brussels. 12 November 2009 (ITUC OnLine) : A new ITUC report on the respect of fundamental labour standards in Niger and Senegal, released yesterday to coincide with the WTO's review of these countries trade policies, denounces violations of the rights of Nigerian and Senegalese workers and trade unions.

Although Niger and Senegal have both ratified all the ILO's fundamental labour standards, the report clearly shows that serious problems persist in the application of these standards, both in legislation and in practice.

On freedom of association, the report notes that social dialogue is still far too weak in Niger and that there are many restrictions on the right to strike. The report also criticises the power of the authorities to dissolve a trade union by means of a simple administrative decision. The right to strike is limited in Senegal, among other things by the authorities' power to requisition workers to replace those on strike. Trade union organisations report that trade unionists often suffer harassment and have denounced the failure to respect agreements concluded by the social partners.

On discrimination in employment, the report highlights the extremely vulnerable situation of Nigerian women. It is difficult to measure the exact extent of the discrimination they suffer given the absence of statistics segregated by sex. However, in the words of ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder "it is unacceptable that in Niger women represent two thirds of those living below the poverty line. A coherent and efficient national policy to promote women in the labour market is desperately needed, as efforts to combat discrimination are partial and ineffective."

The report also deplores the persistence of child labour, including the worst forms of this in both countries. According to the report, government action for the protection and welfare of children is far too weak. In Senegal, the exploitation of young talibés (Koranic students) by marabouts (religious teachers) who force them to beg is extremely worrying and the ITUC calls for more determined government action to get the children off the streets.

Finally, on the respect of ILO standards on forced labour, the report expresses concern at the existence of slavery in Niger. The ITUC urges the government to step up its efforts to put an end to slavery, and ensure that the victims can in practice defend their rights effectively. In Senegal, the report pinpoints the trafficking in persons, including children, for economic or sexual exploitation.

To see the full report in English go to : http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/WTO_report_Niger_Senegal_en_200911101.pdf

To see the full report in French go to : http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Rapport_OMC_Niger_Senegal_200911101.pdf

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