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ITUC-Online

Israel: Trade Union Centre Histadrut to Allow Migrant Workers Full Membership

Brussels, 6 January 2010 (ITUC OnLine): A decision taken by the ITUC's Israeli affiliate Histadrut to allow migrant workers membership is a significant step towards ensuring an end to exploitation and helping ensure full respect for their rights at work. The December 28 decision by the national trade union centre removes an anomaly whereby only citizens and residents of Israel were entitled to join and to stand for election positions within the Histadrut.

To date, most of Histadrut's activities in support of migrant workers have been conducted via a special office in the Tel Aviv Regional Labour Council, as well as political lobbying and support for legal cases.

Migrant labour accounts for some 7% of Israel's labour force, and maltreatment of these workers is prevalent, in particular in the agriculture sector where poor working and living conditions, long working hours, sub-minimum wages and other forms of exploitation have been documented. Alongside workers from Eastern Europe and various Asian countries, tens of thousands of Palestinians work for Israeli employers as documented or undocumented migrants. At the June 2009 International Labour Conference, the ILO called on the Israeli government to ensure that migrant workers have the same rights as Israeli citizens in law and in practice, as well as in social security provision.

"While the impacts of Israel's blockade of Gaza and continued occupation of the West Bank on Palestinians are well known internationally, the plight of migrant workers inside Israel, whether from Palestine or elsewhere, has received little international attention. Histadrut's decision can only help to improve their situation and we welcome it," said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

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