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Serious Workers' Rights Problems in Armenia

Brussels, 6 April 2010 (ITUC OnLine): A new report (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Armenia_cls_report.pdf) by the ITUC on core labour standards in Armenia, published to coincide with the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) review of its trade policies, has found that further measures are needed to comply with the commitments Armenia accepted when it joined the WTO, including commitments undertaken at Doha in the WTO Ministerial Declaration in 2001, as well as in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998 and its Social Justice Declaration in 2008.

Armenia has ratified all eight ILO Core Labour Standards Conventions. Workers have the right to form and join independent trade unions of their choice, except for those serving in the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. In addition, civil servants are barred from collective bargaining and participating in social dialogue. In practice, however, most workers are unable to exercise the right to unionise and collectively bargain, due to flexibilisation of the Labour Code and the government's tolerance of the very high level of informal employment relationships.

The report finds that the right to strike is provided, except for civil servants; however, in reality it is limited. Collective bargaining and tripartite agreements at the national level have been virtually non-existent until 2009, when a first agreement was finally signed between the social partners.

Equality between women and men in remuneration and employment is regulated by Armenian labour law. However, despite equality in law, women and men do not enjoy the same rights in practice, and discrimination is pronounced. The report finds a significant wage gap between women and men in Armenia.

Child labour is prohibited by law and the minimum age for employment is 16 years of age. However, children are allowed to work from the age of 14 with permission of a parent or a guardian. Child labour occurs in Armenia, and it is estimated that many children work in informal activities in agriculture or as street vendors.

The law prohibits forced and compulsory labour, including by children, as well as all forms of trafficking in persons. Yet it is reported that women and girls are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and men for forced labour, particularly in the construction industry. The government has made progress in prosecuting traffickers and providing assistance to trafficking victims. The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) has set up a project to provide legal advice and other information to Armenians who plan to work abroad and to organise workers intending to migrate, with a view to reinforcing protection of Armenian migrant workers abroad.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 312 affiliated national organisations from 155 countries. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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