

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

046/070410

Action plan for preventing future trafficking cases in Eastern Europe

Brussels, 7 April 2010: A two-day meeting was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 31 March and 1 April, to discuss the SerbAz company case, which involves the trafficking of workers from the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Azerbaijan. This case concerns 700 migrant construction workers and as such is one of the largest registered cases of human trafficking for labour exploitation purposes in Europe.

In October 2009, the ITUC/PERC was informed by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and ASTRA, an NGO in Serbia, of the dramatic situation facing workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia, who were working on construction sites managed by the SerbAz company in Azerbaijan. The workers had first been given tourist visas when arriving in Azerbaijan and had to hand over their passports to their employer. They were never provided with any legal work permit, thereby making them illegal migrant workers. Since the summer of 2009, their salaries had been delayed or reduced and in October the workers did not receive any wages at all. In addition, the workers had been living in appalling conditions with no food or water or proper medical services, leading to two deaths. According to the testimonies of workers who have returned, apart from not being paid for their work, they had suffered severe physical and psychological violence. Since October 2009, the return of workers to their home countries has been organised by SerbAz in such a way as to cover up any evidence of exploitation. Trade unions, NGOs, international organisations and embassies have been involved in the repatriation process and provision of assistance to these workers (most of whom have now returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina). Investigations have been launched by the national authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Azerbaijan.

In December 2009, a delegation of ITUC representatives and trade union leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina visited Azerbaijan to discuss the case and organise assistance to the workers. The April meeting was organised at the same time, with invitations sent to all organisations involved in the case including representatives of the OSCE, the ILO, the ITUC, the BWI (Building and Wood Workers' International) as well as trade unions and NGOs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia and Azerbaijan.

The meeting in Sarajevo last week produced an action plan for preventing future trafficking cases including the establishment of a network to exchange information. A press conference was also held to publicise the case. The event received considerable attention from the local media. Furthermore, participants met around 20 former SerbAz workers who gave the power of attorney to an Azerbaijani NGO, whose lawyers had agreed to represent them in court to claim unpaid wages as well as compensation for physical and psychological injuries. Workers were also informed about the protection they could gain from joining a trade union.

Another of the meeting outcomes was the signing of an agreement, prepared with support from the BWI, on cooperation and protection of migrant workers between construction workers' unions from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Azerbaijan.

According to the latest information, SerbAz later took 50 workers from Bulgaria to Azerbaijan and recruited workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina to work in Russia. Participants decided to inform the Bulgarian trade unions and to start to prepare material in Bulgarian to explain the possible dangers to the workers.

Through its Global Trade Union Alliance to Combat Forced Labour and Human Trafficking, the ITUC has pledged to keep monitoring this case, to support the workers and to inform international organisations about the case. A follow-up meeting is planned for November in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates.
<http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or + 32 476 62 10 18

You are currently subscribed to ituc-online as:

To unsubscribe click here: [http://forum.ituc-](http://forum.ituc-csi.org/u?id=38591.9b9f95bf74798c23c71e69445d2c53d3&n=T&l=ituc-online&o=14231)

[csi.org/u?id=38591.9b9f95bf74798c23c71e69445d2c53d3&n=T&l=ituc-online&o=14231](http://forum.ituc-csi.org/u?id=38591.9b9f95bf74798c23c71e69445d2c53d3&n=T&l=ituc-online&o=14231)

or send a blank email to leave-14231-38591.9b9f95bf74798c23c71e69445d2c53d3@forum.ituc-csi.org