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G-20 Trade union leaders urge labour ministers to push for job-intensive recovery strategies

Brussels, 20 April 2010 (ITUC OnLine): A delegation of trade union leaders from the G20 countries told G20 labour and employment ministers during a meeting in Washington yesterday afternoon that the current fragile economic recovery will be a jobless recovery, or even revert to a renewed decline in output, if governments do not put a stronger emphasis on decent employment creation.

Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Congress of Trade Unions and of the ITUC told the ministers: "Governments must show the same political will to attack global unemployment and underemployment as they did to tackle the banking crisis in late 2008. We cannot afford a lost decade of stagnant labour markets." International agencies ranging from the ILO to the IMF have predicted that there will be no decline in unemployment rates in the coming years if governments do not adopt aggressive job-creation strategies.

Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO which hosted the union delegation in the US, added: "Labour ministers must be central players in formulating government economic policy. They must pay particular attention to the growing gap between economic recovery and employment growth, and between productivity and wages."

Trade union leaders from Brazil, Canada and several other countries noted the problems of increased employment insecurity, deteriorating working conditions and falling real wages, and urged governments to adopt policies based on the Global Jobs Pact adopted at last June's ILO Conference. Trade union leaders objected to the proposals of some employers' representatives, also participating at the ministers' consultation, who advocated even more precarious forms of employment. Union leaders spoke in favour of green jobs strategies, measures for vulnerable groups based on decent work, and the creation of a universal floor of social protection.

The delegation also addressed the fiscal implications of the current crisis. They insisted that governments must not reduce stimulus efforts until employment rates return to pre-crisis levels on a sustainable basis, and called for an equitable sharing of the burden of crisis recovery costs through more progressive tax systems, including the adoption of a financial transactions tax.

Referring to the G20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth, adopted at the Pittsburgh G20 Summit last September, the trade union leaders called on the ILO to be given the specific mandate for making recommendations to the G20 on employment and social protection issues, rather than leaving this responsibility to the IMF.

The union leaders urged the G20 labour and employment ministers to create a task force on decent work and to continue meeting on a regular basis. ITUC general secretary Guy Ryder noted that the ministers' work had only just started: "Stimulus policies adopted by G20 countries may have saved from 12 to 14 million jobs, but 30 million other jobs were lost during the global recession. Ministers have their work cut out for them to ensure that creating decent work becomes the primary goal of their governments," said Ryder.

"Ministers must also address 20 years of worsening of income inequality that contributed to the unstable bubble economy that led to the crisis. They must strengthen, not weaken institutions such as collective bargaining and minimum wages that encourage fairer income distribution," commented John Evans, general secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD.

The trade union delegation was composed of leaders of ITUC affiliated organizations from G20 countries and of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Leaders from some countries were unable to travel to Washington since European airspace was largely closed due to volcanic ash.

The detailed proposals put forward by the union delegation are set out in Global Unions statement issued for the meeting: http://www.tuac.org/en/public/e-docs/00/00/06/AF/document_doc.phtml

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