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China: New ITUC Report on Core Labour Standards

Brussels, 10 May 2010 (ITUC OnLine): A new report by the ITUC on core labour standards in People's Republic of China, 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 China accepted when it joined the WTO.

China has ratified only four of the eight core ILO labour Conventions. The report notes that Chinese trade unions have to be affiliated to the ACFTU, and any effort to establish independent unions is repressed. Although there are some efforts to promote collective wage consultation systems, the right to collectively bargain is severely restricted and many Chinese workers are not covered by collective agreements. Despite the lack of a right to strike except in cases of "health and safety work stoppages", many workers undertake industrial action to pressure for long standing unresolved issues, claim unpaid wages and demand better working conditions and wages. Industrial actions and protests have increased in recent years.

The ITUC report finds that institutionalised discrimination against migrant workers from rural areas remains a serious problem, despite recent legislation. Immigrant workers who live unregistered in the cities do not have access to public services such as education for their children. Discrimination on the grounds of gender is prohibited by law but, in practice, women are not equally remunerated and tend more often to find employment in unskilled and labour-intensive sectors. Moreover, ethnic minorities and persons who live with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B frequently suffer from discrimination in remuneration and in access to employment, education and public services.

While national legislation stipulates that no children younger than 16 years old are allowed to work, the report finds that child labour is a serious problem in China. Children are sometimes employed in the worst forms of child labour. Work-study programmes, run under school auspices, frequently result in forced child labour.

Forced labour is prohibited but occurs in commercial enterprises. China imposes forced prison labour as a form of "re-education through labour", and a similar forced labour system for "rehabilitation" is in force for drug addicts. Trafficking in human beings is prohibited by law but remains a serious problem. There has not been much progress in prosecuting traffickers and in protecting and assisting victims of trafficking, which affects women, men and children.

The ITUC report is available at: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Chinal_Final-2.pdf

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates.

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