

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

### ITUC OnLine

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### **ITUC Meets in Zimbabwe to Demand End to Harassment of Unions, Implementation of ILO Report**

Harare, Zimbabwe, 29 September 2010 (ITUC OnLine): The international labour movement sent a resounding message of support to Zimbabwe's trade unionists at a ground-breaking conference in Harare which heard how workers' representatives continue to face violence and intimidation despite gradual improvements under the power-sharing government. "Trade unions around the world stand in awe of your absolute determination, of the vision that you have for a dignified, democratic Zimbabwe. We stand by you, you should have no doubt about that," Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, told delegates at the first ITUC meeting to be held in Zimbabwe. "The ZCTU must be the strongest voice of working people, the strongest possible voice for democracy; we aim to see that the ZCTU is able to fulfil the promise for the future and be an example for the whole of Africa," she said. The meeting, hosted by the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in Harare, followed up on the recent report of the International Labour Organisation which found widespread abuse of trade union rights including violations of the right to strike and demonstrate and widespread violence against of union members.

"The labour movement in Zimbabwe has been tried and tested and it has passed the test, but we are still in a complex environment," said ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo, who suffered his most recent arrest in November when he was detained in police cells for four days. "We've been through rough and tough times and we've succeeded thanks to the inspiration from all our colleagues in the trade union movement." The report from the ILO's enquiry commission put forward a series of recommendations to the Zimbabwe authorities including the immediate halt to victimisation of trade unionists; creation of an effective Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission; training on human rights for the security forces; strengthening of the rule of law; and legislative changes to comply with international labour laws. International trade union delegates at the two-day conference — which included trade union officials from around Africa — urged the authorities to make good on a pledge to implement the ILO's recommendations.

"We acknowledge that the formation of the inclusive government heralded the mark toward some healing, but we would like to say that progress in the right direction has been too slow," said Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, general secretary of ITUC-Africa. "Unions must have the right to express themselves on economic, political and social issues." Under the "inclusive government" of President Robert Mugabe and former ZCTU leader Morgan Tsvangirai as prime minister, the country has seen the level of political violence decline, and the introduction of replacement of the national currency with the US dollar had ended the hyper-inflation which brought economic ruin. However, much of the population remains gripped in poverty, and unemployment is running at an estimated 86 percent. Opposition voices are stifled by restrictions on the independent media, and the threat of violence remains. There have been fatal attacks on dissident voices during meetings to discuss the drafting of a new constitution, and many fear elections expected next year could trigger a new wave of attacks by Mugabe's supporters.

Conference delegates pledged to help the ZCTU build up its capacities and overcome financial difficulties caused by the erosion of membership dues because of the economic collapse. In response, the ZCTU expressed its determination to remain in the forefront of the struggle to ensure justice, workers rights and full democracy in Zimbabwe. "If your message to us is 'you'll never walk alone', then ours to you is 'we will never let you down,'" ZCTU General Secretary Wellington Chibebe told the conference. "We are still in the trenches and we will keep up the fight. We are in a position to once again take the lead."

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 301 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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