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World March of Women in Bukavu: Massive Trade Union Mobilisation to End Violence Against Women

Launched for the first time in 2000, the World March of Women (WMW) is set to close its third edition from 14 to 17 October 2010 in Bukavu, in the province of South Kivu in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A vast global movement mobilising groups and organisations fighting for the eradication of the causes of poverty and violence against women, the WMW will bring together, in Bukavu, an international delegation of 250 women from over 160 countries, alongside 900 Congolese women from the nation's ten regions.

During its latest World Congress in Vancouver in June of this year, the ITUC reaffirmed its priority to combat all types of violence obstructing women's rights to participate fully in society. Women in eastern DR Congo in particular are victims of extreme violence perpetrated on a massive scale. For over ten years, rape and sexual violence have been systematically used in the region as a weapon of war, to spread fear, and as a method of ethnic cleansing. The ITUC has repeatedly condemned the fact that in spite of successive high-level missions and reports, the extreme violence against women has continued to grow over the years, as the Congolese and international authorities regrettably stand by, powerless to tackle the problem.

Women members of the Congolese unions, the CDT, CSC and UNTC, together with other civil society groups in DR Congo, have for several years been involved in a broad campaign to combat violence against women.

The women trade unionists gathering in Bukavu to take part in the WMW activities will also participate in a trade union conference on 14 and 15 October. The aim of the conference is to strengthen women's participation in social dialogue as a key tool in conflict prevention and resolution and especially as a means of protecting women victims of war.

Alongside its participation in the WMW activities, the Congolese trade union movement is also holding, on 11 and 13 October, a tripartite seminar on the role of trade unions in contributing to peace in the Great Lakes region through social dialogue, with the support and involvement of the international trade union movement as well as a number of Belgian (CGSLB-CSC-FGTB) and Swedish (LO-TCO) trade union centres.

Representatives of the Congolese government, the ILO and UNIFEM will also take part in these two trade union activities.

"There is an urgent need to consolidate peace in eastern DR Congo. The only way to achieve this is to tackle every aspect of the conflict, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the many shortfalls in terms of governance, the endemic poverty and the lack of decent work opportunities for men and women. Social dialogue is a key factor in securing peace and bringing an end to the intolerable acts of violence committed against women," said Sharan Burrow.

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