

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

196/181210

International Migrants Day – the ITUC calls on governments to ratify the United Nations Convention

New ITUC report: from Bahrain to Malaysia: Mobilising to Defend Migrants Rights

Brussels, 18 December 2010 (ITUC OnLine): To mark International Migrants Day, the ITUC is condemning the violations of migrant workers' rights taking place all over the world. Migrants, most of whom work in the most precarious, least protected sectors, are feeling the full force of the current economic crisis and deterioration of job markets. The ITUC is calling on the governments of destination countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

"Migrant workers are constantly the target of racist and xenophobic attacks in the countries where they live," said Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the ITUC. "The governments of these countries should address the problem and create protective mechanisms to ensure that the rights of migrant workers are actually respected in their territory."

The ITUC, which works in close cooperation with the group Global Unions, also condemns the role of middlemen and other fake employment agencies. They operate in a complete legal vacuum and the governments of countries of origin often turn a blind eye to their practices. "It is totally unacceptable for the recruitment industry to treat migrant workers like goods for sale while they line their pockets," continued Ms Burrow. On the eve of International Migrants Day, the international trade union movement is highlighting the inconsistency of host countries that either do not respect the rights of migrant workers or strive to protect them but cause considerable distress to migrant workers while doing so. It is important to note that the economy and growth are increasingly reliant on the cheap labour provided by migrants. The personal care, construction and agricultural sectors are extremely dependent on foreign workers, who are often cheaper than local workers. In view of this, migrant workers should be treated with the respect they deserve as human beings and key socio-economic actors bringing growth and progress to both their destination countries and their countries of origin.

Furthermore, the ITUC advocates the creation of a worldwide governance structure for migration, which should be rooted in the fundamental rights of migrant workers. There must be dialogue between destination countries and countries of origin, but this must take place within a normative framework established by the international community. For this reason, it is vital that the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families be ratified and implemented, especially by migrant destination countries.

The principle of treating migrant and local workers equally must actually be implemented. The ITUC is extremely concerned about current migration policies that flout this principle. It is only by guaranteeing equal rights for all workers, no matter where they come from, that governments will manage to optimally manage migratory flows. Ageing in our societies, the lack of workers in certain sectors and the globalisation of the markets all mean that people's view of migrants must change, and this change can only take place if it is based on the strict application of the principle of equal rights and duties for all workers.

Finally, the ITUC and its affiliates urge governments to adopt a new Convention and Recommendation on domestic work at the ILO in June. This is an essential tool for the protection of migrant domestic workers, who are all too often ill-treated and exploited.

To read the ITUC "Union View": From Bahrain to Malaysia: Mobilising to Defend Migrants' Rights: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/from-bahrain-to-malaysia.html?lang=en>

The Middle East is a dark zone for migrant workers' rights, especially domestic workers. What concrete, on-the-ground initiatives are trade unions taking to defend their rights? Reports from Bahrain, where trade unions are fighting alongside migrants and are managing to make headway, together with testimonies from Malaysia and India, where the ITUC is supporting projects for migrants as part of its international cooperation policy for Asia.

To read the spotlight interview with Fadhel Abbas Ali (GFBTU-Bahrain): <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-fadhel.html?lang=en>

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For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018

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