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031/090211

Unions Highlight Importance of Decent Work for Poverty Eradication at U.N. Commission for Social Development

Brussels, 9 February 2011 (ITUC OnLine): As the 49th session of the UN Commission for Social Development opens in New York today with the priority theme of poverty eradication, the ITUC has urged UN member states to highlight the importance of decent work and social protection to achieve that goal.

“The Commission must focus on employment creation and decent work as the fundamentals for eradicating poverty,” stated ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. “Emphasising basic labour rights, including freedom of association and the right to social protection, is a key strategy to reducing inequalities within societies, improving access to quality public services, raising demand and achieving sustained and sustainable economic growth.”

The Commission, which operates on a two-year review and policy cycle, will this year hear statements from governments and civil society that identify root causes of poverty, describe progress towards reaching poverty eradication targets, and emphasise key challenges faced by developing countries.

The background report of the UN Secretary-General makes clear that the debate must highlight the significance of decent work to this theme. Trade unions welcome the UN Secretary-General’s statement that “adequately remunerated jobs provide income security, access to social protection, better health and educational status and, ultimately, a way out of poverty.”

Trade unions draw attention to the report’s recognition that “the promotion of productive employment and decent work has generally not been an objective of macroeconomic policy.” The report is also critical of financial liberalisation, regressive taxation, and poorly-managed privatisation, which have all been major contributors to increasing inequality, and notes that “poverty levels decline when the share of GDP that goes to wages grows.” These UN conclusions, which correspond to trade unions’ analysis of the crisis, highlight key issues that must be addressed in order to alleviate the impact of the global financial crisis and to improve economic stability in the long-term.

Similarly, adequate social protection for all is a vital mechanism for protecting vulnerable people from poverty, expanding access to social services and compensating workers for income losses, whatever their causes. It would also provide increased jobs and help raise demand for goods and services. The ITUC therefore urges the Commission to thoroughly review and support the development of a global social protection floor as advocated by the ILO, which would ensure the provision of essential services (including health care, education and adequate nutrition) to all.

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

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