

International Day of the World's Indigenous People

New ITUC report on indigenous peoples in Latin America

Brussels, 08 August 2011 (ITUC OnLine): To mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, the ITUC is releasing a new report entitled "The Alliance Between the Indigenous Peoples and Trade Unions in Latin America". The report points to the discrimination, feudal exploitation, isolation and forced labour suffered by indigenous peoples in Latin America.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People, observed by the global community each year on 9 August, serves to raise awareness about indigenous peoples' cultures and the great diversity they represent. It is also an opportunity to scale up efforts to tackle the exclusion, discrimination and poverty that remain an everyday reality for a large part of these peoples. Many are those still faced with discrimination, marginalisation, extreme poverty and conflict around the world, especially in Latin America, where indigenous peoples suffer the worst violations of their rights, despite it being the continent where ILO Convention 169 has been the most widely ratified.

The ITUC report explains how in Guatemala a new bill conflicting with ILO Convention 169, concocted by the private sector in cahoots with the Guatemalan government, is currently before parliament. The international trade union movement, together with indigenous peoples' organisations from the country, has firmly denounced this bill breaching the Convention. "This bill poses a serious threat to the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples, especially with regard to consultation," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "It responds exclusively to national and international private economic interests."

The international trade union movement also recalled during the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June that Guatemala must comply with the precautionary measures advocated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which has called for a suspension of works at the Marlin gold and silver mine - an immense operation violating the Mayan people's rights.

The indigenous peoples of Colombia and Guatemala have demanded their right from the European Parliament to be consulted over free trade and association agreements. "ILO Convention 169 must be included in the free trade agreements the EU is negotiating with the sub-regions of Latin America, along with mechanisms to ensure that governments and companies respect the Convention," insisted Manuela Chavez, who is in charge of trade unions and indigenous peoples in Latin America at the ITUC.

In Paraguay, as the ITUC report highlights, thousands of indigenous workers and their families are subjected to feudal exploitation on the large ranches and farming estates. According to trade union and indigenous peoples' organisations, the days of slavery, now in the contemporary form of forced labour, are far from over. Women and children are also exploited in large numbers as domestic labour.

In Brazil, the Quilombolas* and indigenous peoples suffer violations and discrimination in the areas of consultation and participation, the right to land and natural resources, development and

health. The Brazilian government has pledged to meet with the national trade union confederations before the end of 2011 to tackle these issues, and particularly those related to land rights violations.

(*) The Quilombolas emerged during the fights against slavery and racial discrimination in the country, during which black communities with social and community relations were formed.

See the Union View on "The Alliance between the Indigenous Peoples and Trade Unions in Latin America": <http://www.ituc-csi.org/the-alliance-between-the.html>

Also see the videos:

El Chaco: a rights-free zone for indigenous workers: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/el-chaco-a-rights-free-zone-for.html>

Paraguay: better protection for domestic workers: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/paraguay-better-protection-for.html>

Guatemala: gold mine plundering sacred resources : <http://www.ituc-csi.org/guatemala-gold-mine-plundering.html>

And read the spotlight interview with Crecencio Caceres (Chaco Inter-Ethnic Council Paraguay): <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-crecencio.html>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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