

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

Stop Violence, Impunity and Sexual Harassment at Work

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Brussels, 25 November 2011 (ITUC OnLine): To mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the ITUC and its affiliated organisations are mobilising across the globe to say 'stop violence, impunity and sexual harassment at work'.

"The trade union movement feels particularly concerned by violence against women, be it in the private or public sphere or at work," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "Trade unions have a key role to play, starting with denouncing the facts and breaking the silence."

Women in precarious jobs are particularly vulnerable, such as domestic workers, for example, a largely undervalued, widely exploited group, generally unprotected by labour laws. Migrant women are also highly exposed to the risk of violence at work.

To mark this year's international day, the ITUC and the ICEM are publishing a new report "Violence against Women in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Whose Responsibility? Whose Complicity?" The report underlines the economic dimension of the conflict and its links to the violence endured by women.

Control over the DR Congo's natural and mineral resources has always been disputed. It is this staggering wealth of resources that fuels the conflicts plaguing the country and profits the military and rebel groups using sexual violence as a weapon of war. According to a recent UNEP report, the DRC's untapped mineral reserves are estimated to be worth 24 trillion US dollars.

The electronics industry is a major consumer of the minerals sourced from the DRC and which are essential to the production of computers, mobile phones and other electronic devices. Initiatives taken at international level such as the Dodd-Frank Act passed by the US Senate or the OECD Guidance are useful but do not go far enough. It is highly regrettable that the European Commission has not yet responded to the European Parliament's calls for it to take legislative action.

But the economic interests at stake are huge, as seen with the fierce opposition to the Dodd-Frank Act voiced by the American Chamber of Commerce, which has been trying to dilute the new control and traceability systems developed by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and to delay their implementation.

Urgent action is needed to protect the people affected and to ensure decent work for the men and women being exploited in the mines of eastern DRC.

As the electoral campaign in the Democratic Republic of Congo enters full swing, the country's trade unions, the UNTC, CSC and CDT, are denouncing the endemic poverty, the rampant corruption and the appalling lack of decent work.

"Impunity must be ended and justice must be done for the huge numbers of women victims of these conflicts. Powerful vested interests linked to the region's mineral resources must stop taking precedence over respect for the life and dignity of women," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "It will be up to the newly-elected government to establish effective legislative and punitive

measures to combat all forms of violence against women," she insisted, at the same time as expressing regret at the poor level of women's participation in the political life of the country.

The ITUC has also published a new report under the heading "Stop Violence and Impunity: Justice for the Women of DRC", covering the many forms of discrimination, exploitation and isolation suffered by Congolese women.

Read the report "Violence against Women in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Whose Responsibility? Whose Complicity?" <http://www.ituc-csi.org/violence-against-women-in-eastern.html>

Read the report "Stop Violence and Impunity: Justice for Women in DRC" <http://www.ituc-csi.org/stop-violence-and-impunity-justice.html>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 308 national affiliates.

Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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