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ITUC OnLine

Korea-US Free Trade Agreement a Job-Killer

Brussels, 16 December 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC, supported by its Korean and US affiliates, has warned that the new “KORUS” free trade agreement between the two countries will cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. The agreement was rushed through the Korean parliament in a hastily-convened session designed to catch opposition parties off-guard and minimise the possibility for public reaction.

“This agreement will have devastating consequences for thousands of families at time when governments should be focused on creating jobs, not undermining decent work and driving living standards down. It does not provide adequate mechanisms to protect people’s rights at work, it will fuel even more financial speculation, and the dispute-settlement procedures which override national law are effectively anti-democratic,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

Independent estimates of the agreement’s employment impact show there could even be loss of as many as 130,000 agricultural jobs in Korea, and more than 150,000 in the US. Even the US’s own International Trade Commission concluded that the employment impact would probably be negligible, contrary to claims from the American Chamber of Commerce that it would create as many as 280,000 new jobs.

“The American Chamber of Commerce has made fictitious job-creation claims around previous such agreements. History has proven them wrong, but the truth is again being sacrificed to the special interests of the 1%. Some big corporations will profit from this deal, but the overall impact is likely to cause serious economic and social damage,” said Burrow.

The Korean trade union centres FKTU and KCTU have expressed their opposition to the KORUS, with the KCTU organising a 40,000-strong protest against it in Seoul on November 13. The KCTU has described the agreement as “damaging to workers and working families in the US and Korea”, while AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka has stated that it does not live up to the new trade model the labour movement has been advocating, nor does it contribute to a sustainable global future. “It is essential that both countries bring their labour laws and practice fully into compliance with international standards prior to implementation of the agreement,” according to Trumka.

“The KORUS agreement should be postponed until it has been redesigned to promote decent work and respect for core labour standards,” said Burrow. “The Investor-State Dispute Settlement Mechanism should be removed from it and a full public assessment of the economic and social impact of the FTA on workers in both countries needs to be carried out.”

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

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For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 62 10 18.

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