

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Forced Labour: New ILO Protocol to Ramp Up Action

Brussels, 12 June 2014 (ITUC): A new global protocol to fight forced labour, adopted this week by the International Labour Organisation, will accelerate action against modern slavery. The private sector is responsible for 90% of the estimated 21 million victims of forced labour, reaping some US\$150 billion from some of the most severe forms of exploitation in existence today. 92% of the government, employer and worker delegates at the ILO Conference voted in favour of the protocol, which the ILO describes as bringing one of its longest-standing instruments, Convention 29, “into the modern era”. Qatar, which is under the spotlight for using forced labour to build the 2022 World Cup infrastructure, abstained from the vote.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said “This week the world learned that a huge slice of the global seafood market is based modern slavery in the Thai fishing industry. This is just one part of a much bigger picture of vicious exploitation in global supply chains. The new ILO protocol must revitalize action to end forced labour, and we are putting those who make money from slavery on notice that the international trade union movement and our allies will chase them down and bring them to account.”

People trapped in forced labour today are most likely to be migrants, indigenous peoples or other disadvantaged groups working in agriculture, construction, domestic work, fisheries and other sectors where union organizing is restricted or repressed.

“Governments need to show leadership in cleaning up global supply chains, and in ensuring that those who are most marginalized and whose work is concealed from view can be empowered to throw off the shackles of oppression. We’re looking to all governments to ratify this protocol and put it to work without delay,” said Burrow.

The adoption of the protocol, and an accompanying recommendation, is the culmination of two years of international campaigning by a coalition of trade unions and other civil society groups <http://act.equaltimes.org/en/protocol>

ILO press release: http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_246549/lang--en/index.htm

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