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Tens of Millions Strike in India to Defend Labour Rights

Brussels, 2 September 2015 (ITUC OnLine): Tens of millions of Indian workers have joined a national strike called by ten major trade union bodies today, in what may be the largest strike in history. The unions are protesting at plans announced by Prime Minister Modi to deprive large segments of India's workforce of labour law protection at the behest of local and foreign investors. Workers from manufacturing, mining, the public sector, transport and other sectors, along with workers in the informal economy have joined the nationwide movement.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, "The government's plans will widen India's already huge economic inequality and make it even harder for workers to organise unions to protect their interests. With one of the highest economic growth rates of any country, India should be concentrating on lifting people out of poverty and ensuring economic security for working families rather than delivering yet more benefits to the wealthiest and bowing to the demands of foreign investors."

Eighty-five per cent of manufacturing firms in India employ less than 50 workers, and around half of these workers are kept on short-term contracts and earn just \$5 or \$6 per day. The government's proposals would deprive them of vital legal protections leaving them in even more precarious circumstances.

"India has one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Today's joint action by the country's trade union federations, involving their members and many more people, is an unequivocal signal to Prime Minister Modi and his government that the enormous wealth being generated in India must be shared fairly and that working people are determined to defend their rights," added Burrow.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 328 national affiliates.

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