

Human.Rights@Work

“Trade union rights are human rights”

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Decent work – promoted globally, impacting locally

While decent work is increasingly seen by the international community as a driver of development and poverty reduction, the ILO is continuing to set up country programmes to promote decent work on the ground. They ensure that the concept has a tangible impact. These two aspects featured among the issues examined by the ILO Governing Body at its 297th session on 2-17 November 2006. Also on the agenda were the situation of basic labour rights in Belarus and Burma and trade freedom in a number of countries around the world. Youth employment and labour inspection were other topics tackled at this session, during which the new International Trade Union Confederation presented its credentials.

Presenting the report of the Working Group on the Social Dimension of Globalization, the Chairman of the ILO Governing Body, South Africa's Minister of Labour M. Mdladlana, noted that support for decent work as a worldwide objective has been considerably strengthened, both within the multilateral system and at the international level. In particular, the Governing Body welcomed the adoption, by the UN Economic and Social Council, of the Ministerial Declaration on full and productive employment and decent work. This document was adopted at the end of the high-level discussion held in Geneva in July 2006 (see Human Rights@Work No. 4/2006, September 2006). It invites all the organizations in the UN system and the international financial institutions to “contribute, through their programmes, policies and activities, to the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all in accordance with national development strategies.” To that end, it advocates the adoption of a whole range of concrete measures to ensure close coordination between governments and institutions. And it assigns to the ILO the

task of elaborating, in cooperation with all the actors concerned, time-bound action plans to be implemented by 2015.

In fact, this is also a challenge for the International Labour Organization. As ILO Director-General Juan Somavia emphasized, “A more coherent United Nations, especially one that so strongly recognized the central importance of the ILO’s mandate and of decent work for all, could only work in the ILO’s favour. The ILO’s tripartite structures had a major opportunity to lead the drive for greater coherence in the global system.” But, he added, “The window of opportunity now available to the ILO would, however, not stay open for long.”

Through its spokesperson Leroy Trotman, who is the Worker Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, the Workers’ Group also welcomed moves towards greater coherency within the multilateral system. But he emphasized that the ILO must do more to get its voice heard, so as to promote the values of tripartism. In this regard, he deplored the publication by the World Bank of a document called *Doing Business*, “in which workers’ organizations are regarded as obstacles to economic activity”.

In the field, the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) are a vital link in the series of poverty reduction measures promoted by the ILO. A report submitted to the Governing Body shows that implementation of the DWCPs is now well under way, “each region having completed preparation, based on tripartite participation and having signed or agreed upon a fully developed framework document”. The process has “facilitated the involvement of constituents in influencing broader national development frameworks and deepening dialogue and collaboration with other sectors,” the document says. It cites the concrete results achieved in various countries.

While the Workers’ Group feels that it is too early to judge the full impact of the DWCPs, the ILO should take full advantage of the dynamism generated by the ECOSOC declaration, Tom Etty insisted. He was speaking for the Workers’ Group in the Committee on Technical Cooperation. But he also noted that in the present phase of implementation, “the same importance is not assigned to all the components of decent work”. He specifically mentioned freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the need to involve the tripartite constituents.

From now on, the Governing Body will, each year, examine situation reports which clearly set out the results and impact of the DWCPs. So the coherence of the multilateral system regarding the decent work objective and the establishment of programmes at the country level will obviously have top priority within the ILO’s strategy over the coming months and years. Particular focuses for the workers’ organizations will be respect for tripartism and due regard, within the process, for issues of freedom of association and collective bargaining.

New International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) makes ILO debut

With 304 affiliated unions in 153 countries, representing 168 million members, the new organization is the world’s biggest ever trade union grouping. The Governing Body decided to grant it general consultative status.

Guy Ryder, the first General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), came to Geneva on 15 November to provide the ILO Governing Body with an introduction to the new organization founded in Vienna on 1 November. The Governing Body had before it an

official request from the ITUC to be accorded the same status as previously held by the ICFTU and the WCL, which both dissolved themselves in Vienna on 31 October.

The ITUC's first-ever Congress session, also in Vienna, was presided over by Leroy Trotman, the Chair of the ILO Workers' Group.

Formed by the organizations affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour, but also by organizations without previous global affiliations, the new body adopted a four-year programme which includes a "Day of Action worldwide" to demand "a new globalization". It will be promoting a "governance of the global economy" which guarantees respect for basic worker rights, decent work for all, fair distribution of wealth, an end to mass poverty and the drastic reduction of inequality between and within countries.

The ITUC's list of demands calls for fundamental reform of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, which must recognize the primacy of human rights. Regarding the WTO statutes, the ITUC calls for the inclusion of a clause protecting basic labour standards. Respect for trade union rights will be at the heart of the new organization's action. It will also work for an end to discrimination between workers "because of their sex, religion, colour, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, political opinion, social origin, age or disability". The fight against child labour, the promotion of world peace and a drive to organize "the hundreds of millions working in the informal economy", as well as part-time and temporary workers, also feature in the ITUC programme.

The ITUC's statutes, adopted at the Vienna Congress, stipulate that it will "work to strengthen the role of the ILO, and for the setting and universal application of international labour standards, and to win representation at other international and regional organisations with a view to having their policies and activities contribute coherently to the achievement of decent work, social justice and sustainable development." Addressing delegates at the ITUC's founding Congress in Vienna, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia identified five issues on which the ITUC and the ILO can act in order to promote decent work: action for world growth that produces employment; strengthening the ILO standard-setting system so as to adapt it to new forms of production; strengthening tripartism and social dialogue; partnerships with civil society organizations which share the aim of decent work; and better promotion and protection of freedom of association.

"The principal obstacle I see," Somavia declared, "is that we have an economic system and a globalization process that have progressively devalued the dignity of work – your own dignity as workers! We live in a world that is trying to diminish workers' rights while, at the same time, increasing the rights of capital – and it is not acceptable!" The ILO and ITUC response is, he said, "the Decent Work Agenda and a fair globalization."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in his message to the Vienna Congress, said the unification of the global labour movement was a historic event. "Trade unions have constantly been among our most important civil society partners, with both the ICFTU and the WCL holding consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council," Annan recalled. "We now have one clear counterpart on social, economic and development issues as they relate to the world of work." The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) said in a press release that the new organization "consolidates the voice of the international trade union movement and provides the IOE with a singular interlocutor at the international level". "We will not agree on everything, but

we have so many things in common that present conditions with the newly born organization are even better for advancing a global consensus on those issues where shared interests can be identified”, said Mr Peñalosa, IOE Secretary-General.

Guy Ryder, a British national born in 1956, was elected as the ITUC General Secretary during the third day of the founding Congress. He had been General Secretary of the ICFTU since 2002, and he was Director of the ICFTU Geneva Office and Secretary of the ILO Workers’ Group from 1993 to 1998. He was also Director of the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities (1998-1999) and Director of the ILO Director-General’s Cabinet from 1999 to 2002.

Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and a member of the ILO Governing Body, was elected President of the ITUC.

The ITUC’s governing bodies between Congresses will be a 27-member Executive Bureau meeting twice a year and a 78-member General Council meeting once a year.

Council of Global Unions created: One of the ITUC’s first acts was to ratify an agreement with the Global Union Federations and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) to form a Council of Global Unions. The Council’s aims include promoting trade union membership and advancing common trade union interests worldwide through enhanced cooperation. “The Council will enable us to mobilize global membership around political and strategic initiatives and actions in order to confront global forces that work against the interests of working people and families,” Guy Ryder said. The Global Union Federations represent workers in the different economic sectors. “We will use this enhanced cooperation to tackle major questions of organizing and concerted campaigning. We need to combine our strengths better, and this new Council will allow us to achieve this,” declared TUAC General Secretary John Evans.

Making a world of difference: Published on the occasion of the ITUC founding congress by the International Federation of Journalists (on behalf of the Global Union Federations) a new book looks at the past and present contribution of international trade unionism to democracy and social and economic progress. The 216-page page, “Making a World of Difference – Global Unions at Work” begins with a brief survey of the history of international trade unionism, recalling some remarkable achievements and momentous events. It then looks at GUFs at work today and its final section poses some questions facing trade union leaders, setting the tone for a continuing debate about union organization in the years ahead. Stories in this book “provide a complete answer to those who predict the demise of trade unions and they illustrate that the union movement, with its unique mix of humanity and intolerance of injustice, is needed as much today as it was 200 years ago when workers first organized to defend themselves in the shadows of the industrial revolution”, says Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary and Editor of the new book.

Libya: Workers’ Group calls for Bulgarian nurses’ release

Verdict expected on 19 December.

The Workers’ Group asked the ILO to intercede with the Libyan government for the release of the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor accused of inoculating children with HIV-AIDS. ILO Director-General Juan Somavia did intercede, in a letter sent to Colonel Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gadaffi on 6 December 2006.

The five Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor have been held since 1999. They were condemned to death in 2004, but after an international outcry, the Supreme Court in 2005 ordered the holding of a new trial, which began in May 2006. When the trial resumed this November, the judge announced that the verdict would be delivered on 19 December. The defence lawyers asked that the accused be released pending the verdict, and pointed out that they have already spent more than seven years in prison, but the court turned down this request.

They are suspected of having inoculated 426 Libyan children, 52 of whom died, with HIV-AIDS at a hospital in Benghazi (North). The latest victim, a nine-year-old girl, died on 24 October. Three hundred of the inoculated children are being treated in Europe.

In a letter to the Minister of Labour of the Libyan Jamahiriya, ILO Governing Body Workers' Group Chairman Leroy Trotman requested that the charges be withdrawn and the accused be released immediately. On behalf of the Workers' Group, Trotman suggested to the Labour Minister that, rather than making accusations against them, it would be better to "use the experience of the nurses and the doctor in helping to determine what might have led to the inoculation".

A report by international experts concluded that the appearance of the virus dated back to 1997, before the six accused medical staff arrived in Libya, and that it was caused accidentally, by the re-use of unsterilized syringes at the hospital. According to the experts, poor hygiene conditions at the hospital led to the epidemic.

Burma: "Enough is enough!"

The Burmese government has shown no real commitment to cooperating with the ILO to resolve the problem of forced labour, say the conclusions adopted by the Governing Body. They call for recourse to the International Court of Justice and the UN Security Council.

There was a "widespread and profound concern" that the "practice of forced labour continued to be prevalent in Myanmar". So say the conclusions adopted by the Governing Body after a long discussion of the situation in Burma (Myanmar).

"We have reached a stage where patience has worn out," declared Leroy Trotman on behalf of the Workers' Group. Now is the time for action, he insisted. Recalling the proposals adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2006, the Workers' Group asked that the ILO should bring the issue to the attention of the International Court of Justice, place the information in its possession at the disposal of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and submit it to the UN Security Council.

The Governing Body opted to take that course by deciding, in its unanimously adopted conclusions, to make preparations to request an "advisory opinion" from the International Court of Justice. This advisory opinion on the interpretation of Convention 29 would be binding upon the ILO and the States Parties to the Convention concerned, and the UN Security Council could be informed, in order to have the court's ruling implemented.

The Governing Body also indicated that the ILO Director-General could transmit to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, "for any action that may be considered appropriate", all the documentation in the ILO's possession concerning forced labour in Burma. The Rome Statute, under which the International Criminal Court was established in July 2001,

does indeed authorize the Prosecutor to open an inquiry on his or her own initiative, on the basis of information received from any source, as long as the permission of the Pre-Trial Chamber has been obtained. However, in this case it would be necessary for Burma, which is not party to the Rome Statute, to accept the competence of the Court to judge on the crime under consideration.

Another measure provided for in the conclusions is for the Director-General to bring the situation in Burma to the attention of the UN Security Council, which already has the Burmese issue on its agenda.

The question of Burma will be revisited at the Governing Body session next March, and that meeting could possibly add, to the arsenal of measures already provided, the establishment of a special committee of the Conference - the same procedure formerly used to denounce the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Many speakers emphasized the seriousness of the situation. It is summed up in the document submitted to the Governing Body: "The pattern established over time, including by the Commission of Inquiry, suggests a systematic course of conduct in the nature of a crime against humanity, since such acts have been committed multiple times, by military authorities or under military control, against the civilian population of Myanmar. The continuing lack of adequate compliance by Myanmar with certain of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, together with the prosecution of individuals for lodging allegedly false complaints of forced labour, may point to a state policy to commit, and permit the commission of, such acts."

The Workers' Group asked the ILO to create on its website a special page dedicated to the issue of forced labour in Burma, giving all the information on the situation there and setting out the steps taken by the ILO up to now and those that it plans to take in future.

Belarus: reprieve until March

The ILO's supervisory bodies will examine the measures announced by the government. The Governing Body will decide on follow-up in March.

"What we say to the government of Belarus is that, even if its intentions are good, the way to hell is paved with good intentions. What we want is more than good intentions." That was the reaction from Workers' Group spokesperson Leroy Trotman to the Belarus government delegate's announcement of measures that might, according to the latter, meet the recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry. The commission found that freedom of association was being violated in Belarus. The Workers' Group had asked the Governing Body to examine the possibility of having recourse to Article 33 of the ILO Constitution in order to oblige the government to re-establish freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, as provided for in Conventions 87 and 98. The workers' representatives are, in fact, still sceptical about the measures announced by the government concerning the registration of trade unions, the reinstatement of dismissed trade unionists, participation by independent trade unions in the National Labour Council and amendments to labour legislation. The Russian workers' representative, Evgueny Sidorov, called them "cosmetic" measures and voiced concern over the Belarus government's refusal to grant visas to the ILO officers responsible for following this case.

But given the discussions on which the Belarus government has recently embarked with the ILO, the Governing Body decided to come back to this case in March 2007. At the same time, the

government was asked to cooperate with the ILO as a matter of urgency to ensure that the planned legislative reforms will serve to implement the recommendations, and that they will be in conformity with the ILO Conventions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The Governing Body will re-examine the situation in March, in the light of developments and the findings of the ILO's supervisory bodies.

Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association

Urgent cases in Colombia, Eritrea, Guatemala and Zimbabwe. But violations in the industrialized countries, too.

The report of the Committee on Freedom of Association, approved by the Governing Body, draws particular attention to the serious, urgent cases of Colombia, Eritrea, Guatemala and Zimbabwe. Following a complaint lodged in 1995, this was the nineteenth time that the case of Colombia had been examined by the Committee on Freedom of Association, and new allegations of assassinations, disappearances, threats and detentions of trade unionists are constantly being added to the dossier. For the Workers' Group, Ulf Edström, the workers' spokesperson on the Committee, deplored the fact that 44 murders of trade unionists were reported in 2005 while, during 2006, six activists have been murdered and one is missing, and information about serious threats has also been provided to the Committee. The Committee on Freedom of Association has asked the government to transmit information concerning the inquiry into "Operation Dragon", a plan in which official services are implicated, and which aims to eliminate trade union leaders. The Committee strongly hopes that the tripartite agreement signed in Geneva in June 2006 by the country's government and social partners will show concrete results in the near future. This plan provides for permanent ILO representation in Colombia and the rigorous pursuit of cases in order to counter the impunity which still seems to be enjoyed by the perpetrators of these crimes.

The Eritrean case concerns the arrest, in March and April 2005, of three senior trade union leaders belonging to local unions affiliated to the food and agriculture and textile workers' internationals IUF and ITGLWF. Since their arrest, the three leaders have been held incommunicado, without being charged, and the authorities have not provided any information as to their whereabouts or the charges to be brought against them. Edström asked representatives of the region's governments to press Eritrea to cooperate with the ILO.

The Zimbabwean government is also persisting in its refusal to cooperate with the ILO, while repression against members of the trade union confederation the ZCTU continues and the climate for trade unionism is further deteriorating. The Committee asked the government to retract the accusations made against trade unionists who were tried solely on account of their participation in a mass demonstration in November 2003. The demonstration was held in protest against violations of human and trade union rights in Zimbabwe!

Another urgent case concerns Guatemala. The Committee deeply deplored the murder of union leaders Rolando Raquec and Luis Quinteros Chinchilla and the attempted murder of Marco Alvarez Tzoc and Imelda Lopez de Sandoval. Quinteros Chinchilla, a member of the Trade Union Association of Municipal Market Vendors of Chiquimililla, in the Santa Rosa area, was murdered on 28 February 2005 by the local mayor, who is currently protected by his immunity,

the Committee's report notes, on the basis of a complaint lodged by the World Confederation of Labour in 2005.

Among the other cases tackled by the Committee, mention should also be made of Cambodia, where a case concerns the mass dismissal of workers after a strike and prosecutions launched against activists; a similar case in Indonesia, where strikers were dismissed and some of them were prosecuted and sentenced; and Nigeria and Iraq, two countries which the Committee has asked to modify their labour law in order to bring it into line with freedom of association.

Once again, a certain number of dossiers dealt with by the Committee on Freedom of Association concerned industrialized countries. For instance, according to the accusations included in the Committee's report, the Bush administration in the United States invoked reasons of national security in order to abolish many federal employees' right to bargain collectively. This includes 56,000 airport security officials who check baggage. In Canada (British Columbia), major restrictions have been placed on the collective bargaining rights of teaching staff. The government argued that freedom of association did not automatically imply the right to negotiate. While setting the provincial government straight on that, the Committee also repeated that the Canadian federal government is responsible for seeing to it that freedom of association is respected throughout Canadian territory and is not entitled to invoke provincial autonomy in this regard.

Finally, Switzerland found itself in the dock for the weakness of its provisions to protect trade unionists in the case of unfair dismissal. The Workers' Group expressed concern over arguments used by the Swiss federal government and which seems to be calling into question either the competences of the Committee on Freedom of Association or the obligations flowing from Switzerland's ratification of Convention 98 on the right to organize and collective bargaining. Here too, the Committee recalled that, under the ILO Constitution, States must take the measures necessary in order to put into effect the provisions of ratified Conventions. It also emphasized that its mandate is to determine if, concretely, a given law or practice conforms to the principles of freedom of association set out in the relevant Conventions. Currently, the Committee has before it 127 cases in which complaints have been transmitted to the governments concerned. During this session, it examined the substance of 30 cases.

New Digest of decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association: Set up in 1951, the Committee on Freedom of Association has examined more than 2,500 cases in the course of 55 years, creating a corpus of decisions and principles on most aspects of freedom of association and the protection of trade union rights. These decisions have been compiled into a new Digest covering the Committee's rulings up to its 339th report (November 2005). Ten years after the previous edition, the new Digest shows how the rapid evolution of the world, and more particularly the world of work, has led the Committee to tackle previously unexplored issues (for more information: libsynd@ilo.org).

ILO wants labour inspection strengthened worldwide

Workers say countries should devote more resources to make labour inspection efficient.

Adopting the report of its Committee on Employment and Social Policy, the ILO Governing Body proposed a new series of measures designed to "reinvigorate", modernize and strengthen labour inspectorates worldwide, in a move to boost the implementation of laws on working

conditions that protect the rights of millions of workers worldwide. The document points out that good workplace governance lies at the heart of the promotion of sustainable economic development. The new measures should help to prevent fatal work accidents and the spread of occupational diseases which cost more than 2 million lives every year. Effective labour inspection systems are also indispensable to the struggle to eliminate child labour, forced labour and discrimination at work.

Measures envisaged to “reinvigorate” inspection services include tripartite labour inspection audits to help governments identify and remedy weaknesses in labour inspection, the development of ethical and professional codes of conduct, labour inspection fact sheets, global inspection principles, and hands-on tools for risk assessment, occupational safety and health management systems and targeted training for inspectors.

The Workers’ Group strongly supported the idea of modernized, strengthened labour inspection systems. Ebrahim Patel, workers’ spokesperson on the Committee on Employment and Social Policy, emphasized that the ILO is “ideally placed to take on the challenges facing labour inspection worldwide”. He added that “more resources” should be devoted to labour inspection. Apart from a series of proposals including the organization of a world labour inspection day, he insisted that effective labour inspection “needs, as a complementary institution, recognized, protected, independent and competent worker representatives at the workplace”. He pointed out that “without such representatives at the workplace, it is much harder for labour inspections to identify hazardous working conditions”. And “workers, for their part, will have great difficulty in protecting their health and their rights if they cannot rely on a functioning labour inspection that has the ultimate power to enforce the law.” So, he concluded, “there needs to be as much prevention and promotion as possible, but it needs to be backed up by sanctions and tough law enforcement when necessary.”

At 135 ratifications, the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) is one of the ten most-ratified ILO Conventions to date and serves as an international reference for the application of legal provisions on working conditions and worker protection.

In brief ...

Sectoral meetings: Two sectoral meetings will be held in 2007. A four-day tripartite meeting on the impact of globalization of the world food industry on employment will take place during the week of 24 September. An experts’ meeting on 10-13 December will look at the use of instruments, knowledge, awareness-raising activities, technical cooperation and international cooperation, so as to prepare a framework for action on dangerous substances.

On the agenda in 2009: The Governing Body held a first round of discussions about topics that could be placed on the agenda of the 2009 International Labour Conference. Subjects on which there seems to be unanimity include: employment and social protection in a new demographic context; equality as a central element of decent work; and HIV-AIDS and the world of work. The Workers’ Group asked that this last topic should be approached within a discussion that could lead to the adoption of standards. Other subjects mentioned include: child labour and the protection of young workers; assessment of occupational safety and health issues; new trends in dispute resolution etc. The Workers’ Group also proposed the topics of decent work in global production chains; and export processing zones. A further discussion will be held in March 2007.

International Standards Organisation: Informed of a cooperation request from the International Standards Organisation (ISO), which wished to elaborate an international standard for occupational safety and health management systems, the ILO Governing Body asked the ISO to abandon this project. Speakers, notably Workers' Group spokesperson Leroy Trotman, recalled that the ISO could develop standards for machine and equipment specifications, but issues of rights or occupational safety and health are ILO business. A discussion on the ISO and the specific mandate of the ILO is scheduled for March 2007, during the Governing Body's next session.

Public service liberalization – winners and losers

Public services are being liberalized worldwide. They are being opened up to foreign competition, and they are being privatized, commercialized and deregulated. It is often forgotten that privatizations of this kind deprive many users of access to services, either because they cannot afford them or because they are not in the social class at which the services are aimed. Little is known about the changes taking place. Is there still such a thing as a right to public services? What impact has privatization had on the economic and social security of public service employees? What has become of the users? How fast is liberalization proceeding, and in which countries? These are just some of the questions tackled in the book *Winners or Losers? Liberalizing Public Services*, produced by Public Services International, Education International and the International Labour Office. It looks at seven groups of public services: healthcare, secondary and higher education, pensions, public employment services, vocational training, social services and prison services. It analyses the impact of liberalization on employment, income security, working conditions, occupational safety and health and career prospects for public service personnel. The role of the international financial institutions is scrutinized and recommendations are made for political decision-makers, employers, unions, civil society organizations and research institutes.

EU to promote decent work in Europe and beyond

On 1 December, the European Council approved proposals from the European Commission aimed at strengthening European strategies, action and programmes to promote decent work both within and outside the European Union.

“The notion of decent work for all represents a means of fighting against inequalities,” declared Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, announcing the adoption by the Council of strategies to promote decent work in Europe and beyond.

The Commission's communication “Promoting decent work for all”, dating from 24 May 2006 and approved by the Council on 1 December, does not confine itself to promoting minimum work-related rights, but rather gives clear pointers to the promotion of decent work. This involves the promotion of job creation and employability, the extension of social coverage, improvements in governance and social dialogue, the identification and amendment of decent work shortfalls and improved cooperation between the main actors and between international organizations. It also makes out a business case for decent work, arguing that it can improve economic efficiency.

Proposals include constructing instruments for measuring decent work, encouraging greater ratification and implementation of international labour standards, mobilizing the decent

employment opportunities offered by trade, strengthening the input of decent work into external development and assistance policies and reinforcing cooperation with regional and international organizations, business and other civil society actors. To that end, the Commission is stepping up its cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international and regional organizations on the issue of decent work.

To analyze the latest developments, the Commission held a conference on decent work on 4-5 December 2006, in cooperation with the Finnish EU presidency. Among those taking part was ILO Director-General Juan Somavia.

The Commission will publish an overview of the progress made in this field by the summer of 2008.

HIV/AIDS and work

A new ILO report estimates that more than a million new jobs a year are being lost because of AIDS. It says the workplace should become a major focus for prevention and access to treatment.

The relentless advance of HIV/AIDS is markedly reducing economic and employment growth in the countries hit hardest by the epidemic, jeopardizing their efforts to reduce poverty, create new jobs for young people and fight child labour, says a new ILO report released on 1 December.

HIV/AIDS and work: global estimates, impact on children and youth, and response 2006 reports that about 36.3 million people of working age are now living with HIV/AIDS - the vast majority in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, the report says that a reduction in employment growth resulting in 1 million fewer jobs per year in the worst-hit countries is attributable to the epidemic. The report presents an economic model which captures the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on economic and employment growth in 43 countries with over 1 per cent HIV/AIDS prevalence, for which sufficient data were available. This made it possible to arrive at an estimate of the annual cost to the global economy in terms of curtailed job growth.

Among the report's main conclusions:

- In addition to the 24.6 million workers living with HIV/AIDS, about 12 million more people, mostly women, who are engaged in some form of productive activity at home are now living with the virus.
- The 43 worst-hit countries lost on average 0.5 percentage points in their rate of economic growth every year between 1992 and 2004 due to the epidemic. Among them, 31 countries in sub-Saharan Africa lost 0.7 percentage points of their average annual rate of economic growth and forfeited 0.5 percentage points in employment growth. Altogether, the job shortfall is put at 1.3 million a year, of which 1.1 million were lost in Africa alone.
- The impact of the epidemic is particularly severe for children and young people whose lives, hopes and future are blighted directly or indirectly by HIV/AIDS. Globally, 2.3 million children live with AIDS and there are an estimated 15 million AIDS orphans. When children in worst-affected countries do reach working age they face a severe shortage of legitimate job opportunities.

- Young people have a 2 to 3 times higher risk of unemployment than adults. This makes young people more vulnerable to poverty, but the report also highlights the increased risk of exposure to HIV of large numbers of unemployed youth in resource-poor settings. Young people account for half of all new cases of HIV transmission. An estimated 5,000 to 6,000 young people aged 15-24 acquire HIV each day.
- In 2005, more than 3 million labour force participants worldwide were partially or fully unable to work because of illness due to AIDS, and three-quarters of them lived in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Globally, 41 per cent of the labour force participants living with HIV are women, and in sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion is even higher at 43 per cent.

How the unions are fighting the pandemic: A new report from the ILO, UNAIDS and the global unions contains 11 case studies showing how trade union organizations are meeting the challenge of HIV/AIDS and how, with the help of their international organizations, they are combating discrimination against HIV-positive workers, acting within workplaces to promote prevention and improving access to treatment. *Global Reach: how trade unions are responding to AIDS* is out now in English and will soon also be available in French, Spanish and Russian.

More unemployment and poverty for hundreds of millions of young people

The number of young unemployed people aged between 15 and 24 has risen over the past decade, a new ILO report says. And hundreds of millions of young working people are still living in dire poverty.

The number of young people out of work rose from 74 million to 85 million between 1995 and 2005 – a rise of 14.8 per cent. At the same time, about a quarter of all young people - 300 million of them - live beneath the poverty threshold of 2 dollars a day.

The ILO report (*Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, October 2006.

<http://www.ilo.org/trends>) estimates that at least 400 million productive, decent employment opportunities – in other words new, better-quality jobs – will be needed if young people are to achieve their full productive potential. It also points out that young people are three times more likely than adults to find themselves unemployed, and that their comparative disadvantage is even more marked in the developing countries, where young people make up a much bigger proportion of the labour force than in the developed economies.

The report highlights the fact that young people are now highly vulnerable at work, and it voices concern over the lack of decent work. If that lack is experienced during youth, it can permanently damage a person's employment prospects. The paper repeats the UN's warning that strategies must be developed to give young people the opportunity to maximize their productive potential through decent work.

Key points from the report:

- Of the world's 1.1 billion young people aged 15 to 24, one in three either is unsuccessfully looking for employment or has completely given up the search for a job, or else is working but is having to live on less than two dollars a day.
- While the youth population grew by 13.2 per cent between 1995 and 2005, youth employment rose by only 3.8 per cent, to 548 million.
- The young unemployed account for 44 per cent of all the world's unemployed people, whereas the proportion of young people in the working age population (aged 15 and over) is only 25 per cent.
- The unemployment rate among young people, which rose from 12.3 per cent in 1995 to 13.5 per cent last year, is much higher than for adults (4.6 per cent in 2005).

Pointers

Migrant workers' rights: On the occasion of International Migrants Day (18 December), the International Trade Union Confederation reiterated its determination to prioritise the fight for the respect of migrants' rights. A 4-day ITUC seminar attended by some 60 trade unionists and representatives of international organisations defined priorities and adopted a concrete action plan with a view to better organising migrants, defending and promoting their rights and improving their working conditions. Focusing on four priorities - protection of rights, unionisation, sustainable development and awareness-raising – this realistic action plan sets out the specific steps to be taken at national, regional and international level, both within the trade union movement and in partnership with NGOs and other civil society players. The first priority – promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers – involves: 1) enhancing legal protection, specifically by more actively promoting the ratification and application of ILO instruments (Conventions 97 and 143) and the UN Convention on Migrants (1990), and 2) fighting discrimination, racism and xenophobia at all levels, especially within trade unions.

Nepal's post conflict scenario: Expressing his gratitude to the ILO for its support during the difficult times of the People's Movement II in his country, Nepal's Prime Minister reaffirmed his government commitment to not only ratify, but more importantly implement, the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association (No. 87). He expressed his extreme concern over the use of children in Nepal's recently ended armed conflict and sought ILO's support for the rehabilitation of these children in the post-conflict scenario. These and other issues were on the agenda of a meeting between the Prime minister and an ILO delegation led by Executive Director Kari Tapiola. The meeting took place in Nepal on 15 December.

Cambodia/textiles: More than 80 per cent of the 212 textile factories inspected by the ILO's "Better Factories" project in Cambodia conform with national legislation and with the international labour standards on working conditions (contracts, pay, working hours, holidays, welfare, industrial relations and health and safety). So says the 17th summary report published last month by the Committee running the project. The committee includes representatives of the Cambodian government, the textile producers' association and the unions. However, the report notes that improvements are still needed concerning respect for basic rights and principles at work.

Decent work prize: The ILO's International Institute for Labour Studies has created a research prize to annually reward outstanding contributions to the advancement of knowledge on the ILO's central goal of decent work for all. The prize will be awarded during the next International Labour Conference (June 2007, Geneva), where the winner will be invited to give a lecture to the government, employer and worker delegates. The institute has launched a call for nominations (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/download/nom.pdf>).

Syndicoop in East Africa: Through four case studies in Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Uganda, a leaflet from the ILO, the International Cooperative Alliance and the International Trade Union Confederation shows how workers in the informal economy are managing to improve their lives and get their voices heard. The schemes originated in the ILO's SYNDICOOP project, which promotes trade unions and cooperatives as an alternative to the informal economy and as a means of achieving decent work (see www.ilo.org/coop).

Human Rights Council / Darfur: The Human Rights Council is to hold a special session on Darfur. The Council's President, Mexican Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba, announced the decision the day after Kofi Annan appealed for such a move. The extraordinary session on Darfur will be held immediately after the third regular session, which should end on 12 December. In its latest report on this issue, the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) denounced new "large-scale" massacres perpetrated by Arab militias, supported by the Sudanese government, against villages in Darfur, inhabited mainly by African tribes.

WHO – good news for African newly-borns: For the first time since the 1980s, a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows improved survival rates for newly-born infants in Africa, where one million babies die each year during their first few months. Six low-income Africa countries - Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Madagascar, Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania – have achieved significant decreases in deaths among the newly-born, the report says.

Blue helmet deployment at all-time high: Deployment by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations reached a historic high in October, with 80,976 military and police personnel and 15,000 civilians taking part in 18 missions worldwide, on a budget of 4 billion dollars. The current surge began in October 2003 with the deployment of five major operations in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Burundi and Sudan and the expansion of the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Over the past three months, the newly established mission in Timor-Leste and the increased deployment in Lebanon have contributed to the record-breaking number of uniformed personnel helping to maintain peace in the field.

UNDP: The Human Development Report 2006 urges the international community to urgently adopt an action plan, under G8 leadership, to resolve the crisis over water and sanitation. Two million children die each year because of bad sanitation. In large parts of the developing world, unsafe water is a bigger threat to human security than conflicts are, according to the report, which is published by the United Nations Development Programme.
