

Human.Rights@Work

“Trade union rights are human rights”

A regular newsletter produced by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)

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The WILL is there – let's WORK together – the ILO has a WAY

**UNEP and ILO organize the first trade union assembly on labour and the environment.
Freedom of association recognized as crucial for workplace involvement.**

The Workers' Initiative for a Lasting Legacy (WILL 2006) was the first ever trade union Assembly on labour and the environment. It was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in co-operation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), SustainLabour and the Global Compact and took place in Nairobi from 15-17 January 2006. The Assembly very much reconfirmed the ILO's important role in promoting environmentally sustainable development.

Assembly outcomes

The outcomes from both the plenary sessions and the working groups highlighted the importance of respect for existing national and international standards on labour and environmental issues. There was a strong focus on workplace initiatives, capacity building, and involvement of the workers in decision making, as well as strengthening of social dialogue. The outcome document stressed the enhancement of “...*dialogue between labour and management, consultation and negotiation in the workplace on sustainable development...*”

There is a clear link between economic, social, and environmental issues, and alliances– at national and international level – are needed to address them in a coherent way in order to build a more environmentally sustainable world.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director, UNEP, said his organization fully supports the WILL initiative. “This will serve as a ‘Common Trade Union framework for workers’ action for the environment and sustainable development”, he said. “And we surely see this as the beginning of



a new process for rapid change”. “UNEP”, he added, “encourages trade unions to become involved with other elements of civil society in such voluntary initiatives”. Speaking on behalf of the two international trade union organizations, the ICFTU and the WCL, Willy Thys, WCL’s General Secretary, said “My expectation is that we get out of this Assembly with objectives and concrete tracks that we can implement at all levels and integrate in the fights, in order to address the challenges of the environment and sustainable development.”

For COSATU’s President Mr. Willy Madisha there are three important areas: “Poverty reduction, unemployment, and disease. When we talk about the environment, we encapsulate all of these three. This Assembly is historical because it is the first time that Trade Unions are coming together with the ‘greens’ to share knowledge and experience, and plan how to move forward on issues that are important for all of us and the environment. It is a process that first started in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, continued in Johannesburg in 2002, and we must now push further forward.”

For Maria Neira, representing the World Health Organisation, labour standards are important. “We need to emphasise standards for health workers”, she said. “Unfavourable working conditions are to blame for the shortage of health care personnel in some parts of the world and create obstacles for health interventions. The involvement of civil society and the trade unions in particular, are essential for the success of such action,” she added. For WILL to be successful, there is a need to mobilise the international community, with the UN bodies taking a leading role”, she concluded.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), Mr. Brent Wilton, also participated at the Assembly and stressed the importance of more dialogue and the need to play important roles as social partners in the field of environment.

Alliances and strengths of the ILO

The direct link between the assembly outcomes and the work of the ILO indicates that the ILO should play an even more central role in reinforcing the social and labour dimension of environmental conservation and sustainable development. The comparative advantages of the ILO, namely its standard setting activities together with its tripartite structure, are important in this work.

The ILO’s Conventions and Recommendations were highly relevant to all the themes of the Assembly - whether on climate change and energy policies, chemicals and hazardous substances, access to water, health and safety issues such as HIV/AIDS and asbestos, or corporate social responsibility.

The Assembly underlined that freedom of association is the basic pillar for any workplace involvement of workers and a decisive factor in strategies to protect both natural and human environment. In his opening speech, Mr. Jim Baker, Director of the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV), stressed that: “It is, in fact, freedom of association that gives workers the possibility of being actors rather than simply victims. It is that right that allows trade unions to combine the force of their argument with the argument of their force. It is what makes trade

unions a powerful tool for workers. And, freedom of association forms the basis for any real democracy and for moving society forward.”

Cooperation is key and the ILO’s work in strengthening the social partners and promoting and facilitating social dialogue should be increased. The ILO and UNEP first signed a memorandum of understanding in 1977 concerning cooperation and the ILO should continue this collaboration in addition to cooperate with the world of labour and other organizations and UN bodies in this endeavour.

The will, the work, the way

In continuing to WORK on the development, the adoption, the implementation and the enforcement of international labour standards, the ILO WILL contribute to advance the environmentally sustainable development agenda. In using its tripartite structure, strengthening the social partners and improving social dialogue, as well as influencing partnerships with trade union organizations and other UN bodies, the ILO has a WAY that can make a difference in improving people’s livelihoods.

Global Labour University prepares for next intake.

Interested trade unionists have until 1 March to apply for the 2006/07 course.

Offering the first-ever university Master’s programme on labour policy and globalization, the Global Labour University (GLU) is now preparing for its third consecutive academic year and is receiving increasing recognition in the trade union movement. The GLU project was initiated in 2002 by the ILO Bureau for workers activities (ACTRAV) in order to facilitate discourse, stimulate research, and provide university-level qualification programs on the political, economic and social dimensions of globalisation for labour and trade union experts.

The ILO, the Hans Böckler Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation now support it. The ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities and its project partners offer a limited number of scholarships to applicants from developing and transition economies. Applicants need to have the endorsement of a trade union to apply for a scholarship. The grant is conditional on a contribution of 1,500 Euros from the supporting trade union or another donor.

Women are strongly encouraged to participate and strict gender criteria will be applied in awarding places and scholarships. As a rule, applicants should not be older than 40 years of age.

“Challenging the conventional wisdom, analysing the changing pattern of work and societies, building alliances and bridges between labour and academic institutions, and providing academic qualification programmes for trade unions are the motivating forces to build a Global Labour University and global union research networks,” says Dan Cunniah, Deputy Director, who is leading ACTRAV’s efforts to improve workers’ education.

The first activity of the GLU network in the pilot phase from 2002-2005 was the development and implementation of a pilot Master’s course on “Labour Policies and Globalisation” at the universities in Kassel and Berlin. An international group of academics and trade unionists developed the curriculum for this course over the last three years at a series of workshops. International labour experts joined the staff from the two universities to teach on the pilot course.

International and national trade unions actively engaged by offering internship opportunities to the students. The GLU promotes cooperation between trade unions and the research community and in that way contributes to strengthen the analytical, research and policy development capacity of trade unions.

In September 2005, 23 students from 18 countries successfully graduated from the pilot course and a second group started their studies in September 2005. Interested trade unionists have until 1 March to apply for the 2006/07 course.

And there is more to come: in 2007, the Universities of Witwatersrand (South Africa) and Campinas (Brazil) will offer additional Master's programmes on labour policies and globalisation within the Global Labour University framework. This will further strengthen the North/South cooperation within the GLU and allow students to pursue their studies partly in the north and partly in the South. An international graduate school on the social dimension of globalisation for PhD students will be launched in 2007 at the University of Kassel.

More detailed information, and the application form, is available on the Internet at: <http://www.global-labour-university.org/>.

Africa Cup of Nations shows red card to child labour

During this year's Africa Cup of Nations football tournament millions of Africans received the ILO red card message to eliminate child labour. ACTRAV took an active part in the campaign.

From its kick-off in January to to the final in Cairo on 10 February (won by the host nation, Egypt) the Africa Cup of Nations football tournament was marked by numerous activities aimed at sensitizing public opinion and decision makers about the need to continue the fight against child labour. "Thousands of spectators will waved the Red Card to Child Labour, the song and TV spot of the campaign were disseminated by radio, television and in stadiums, flags, cards, pins, key chains and T shirts bearing the campaign logo were distributed, and mobilization and information activities were carried out in Egypt and in other African countries...", reported the ILO.

The ILO campaign, supported by the African Football Confederation, was launched in Cairo in the presence of the wife of Egypt's President, Mrs. Hosni Mubarak.

Initiated in Bamako (Mali) during the previous Africa Cup of Nations tournament, in 2002, the ILO Red Card Campaign has already sensitized more than one billion people worldwide.

Today, throughout the whole of Africa, millions of children work instead of going to school. They work in agricultural enterprises, plantations, mines, factories, and shops, or as domestic servants. Some are sold and trafficked to be exploited as slaves. Others are forced into prostitution or forcibly recruited into armies.

"A number of football players participating in the 2006 Africa Nations Cup have escaped such conditions to become what they are today," says the ILO.

The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities is actively involved in the Red Card to Child Labour campaign, promoting and supporting trade union efforts to raise awareness and carry out action.

In many respects, Africa spearheads the fights against child labour. It is the first continent to have taken the political decision at the level of heads of states to promote the ratification of Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour (Algeria, 1999). Seychelles and Malawi were the first countries to ratify the new Convention. In total, 40 African countries out of 53 (132 out of 174 in the world) have ratified it to date.

Nonetheless, according to ILO estimates, Africa is the continent that continues to suffer most from this scourge.

Decent Work tops International Maritime Conference agenda

All maritime conventions brought together in one comprehensive instrument.

An International Labour Conference devoted to the maritime sector is currently taking place in Geneva. The Conference, which runs from 7-23 February 2006 is considered by the ILO to be “without doubt the most far-reaching international conference on maritime labour issues held since its founding in 1919”. Its aim is the unprecedented task of adopting a comprehensive international Convention to consolidate almost all maritime labour Conventions and Recommendations currently in force (over 60 texts) and set out the conditions for Decent Work in the increasingly globalised maritime sector. In view of the large number of maritime Conventions and the fact that they are usually very detailed, it has so far been difficult for governments to ratify and apply all these standards, especially since many of them are out of date and no longer correspond to the working conditions and life on board vessels. Many of these Conventions have only been partially ratified.

The proposed new Convention sets out rights to decent conditions of work for the world’s 1.2 million seafarers and covers a wide range of subjects including freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, health, safety, minimum age, recruitment, hours of work and other vital issues affecting a seafarer’s life. It must apply across the globe, be easy to understand, simple to update and implemented in the same way. It is due to become the ‘fourth pillar’ of the international maritime regulation by complementing the fundamental Conventions of the International Maritime Organisation. The countries that are going to ratify the new Convention will no longer be bound by the existing Conventions once the new Convention enters into force. Those countries that are not going to ratify the new Convention will remain bound by the Conventions they have ratified. Click [here](#) to find out more about the Conference.

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) is coordinating the work of the Workers’ group participating in the Conference. Brian Orrell (United Kingdom) has been elected spokesperson for the Workers’ group and Jon Whitlow (ITF) has been elected secretary of the Workers’ group.

Global unemployment: youth now make up half those out of work

The number of people unemployed worldwide climbed to new heights in 2005.

Robust economic growth has failed to offset an increase in people seeking work – especially among the vast and growing legion of jobless youth, said the ILO in its annual [Global Employment Trends](#) released on 24 January 2006.

What's more, the ILO report said, the weakness of most economies to turn GDP growth into job creation or wage increases, coupled with a spate of natural disasters and rising energy prices, hit the world's working poor especially hard.

The ILO trends report showed that despite 4.3 per cent global GDP growth in 2005, only 14.5 million of the world's more than 500 million extreme working poor were able to rise above the US \$1 per person, per day, poverty line.

In addition, in 2005, of the more than 2.8 billion workers in the world, 1.4 billion still did not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US \$2 a day poverty line – just as many as 10 years ago, the ILO said.

According to official estimates, the unemployment rate remained unchanged after two successive years of decline at 6.3 per cent. The total number of jobless stood at 191.8 million people at the end of 2005, an increase of 2.2 million since 2004 and 34.4 million since 1995. The ILO said that while more people are actually "in work", at the same time, more people are unemployed than ever before.

The ILO report said almost half of the world's unemployed are young people aged 15 to 24, and that they are more than three times as likely as adults to be out of work.

Confronted with record levels of youth unemployment, delegates at the 2005 International Labour Conference last June discussed pathways to decent work for youth. In its final report, the Conference Committee on Youth Employment concluded that an ILO plan of action to promote youth employment should be practical and based on building knowledge, advocacy, the promotion of young workers' rights in line with international labour standards, and technical assistance.

Throughout the discussions in June, the Workers' group, through its spokesperson Sharan Burrow (Australia), insisted on an approach aimed both at increasing the number of jobs and at ensuring that they are high-quality and based on decent work.

Migrant Workers: new ratifications of ILO Conventions

Non-binding ILO framework for a rights-based approach to labour migration to be tabled to Governing Body.

The Philippines Senate has just ratified the two ILO Conventions on migrant workers (Conventions 97 and 143). And Moldova announced ratification of Convention 97 in December last year. This brings the number of ratifications to 45 for Convention 97 and 19 for Convention 143. Convention 97 provides for equality of treatment between migrant workers and nationals in four areas: living and working conditions, social security, employment taxes and access to justice. Convention 143 provides for protection for workers in abusive situations (including workers in irregular situations) and reaffirms the basic human rights of ALL migrant workers, regardless of their status. Provisions deal with equal treatment and equal opportunity.

"As a major country of origin of migrant workers worldwide, it becomes our legal and moral duty to accede to these conventions," said Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, head of the Philippines Senate committee on foreign relations.

Philippines and Moldova were amongst the 20 countries that announced their intention to ratify or consider ratification of one or the two ILO Conventions on migrant workers in the wake of the general discussion on migrant workers that took place at the International Labour Conference in 2004. The Conference adopted a plan of action that provides for a campaign to ensure the widest ratification of the two ILO conventions and the preparation of an ILO multilateral framework on labour migration. The framework, which has now been finalized by a tripartite group of experts, will be submitted to this March session of the ILO Governing Body. This document sets out a series of guidelines on decent work, international cooperation on migration, capacities for collecting and processing information, effective migration management, the protection of migrant workers, the prevention of abusive practices, the migration process, the integration and social inclusion of migrant workers, and the development aspects of migration. An important element in the draft multilateral framework concerns migrant workers' rights encouraging governments to integrate the principles of relevant ILO Conventions into their law and practice and urging governments that have ratified the Convention to implement them fully.

The importance of ratifying the Conventions was recently underlined at a meeting of labour lawyers in Italy attended by ACTRAV. Italian labour lawyers were unanimous in saying that the fact that Italy had ratified both ILO Conventions 97 and 143 had prevented successive changes in labour and migration legislation from undermining the basic rights of migrant workers to equal treatment and their rights, regardless of their status, to exercise their fundamental human rights.

- **New research by the International Institute for Labour Studies:** Two books published by the International Institute for Labour Studies address aspects of labour migration. The first, entitled Competing for Global Talent, looks at how talent crosses borders as countries compete to attract skilled workers. With contributions from a number of international and national experts, the book looks, among other things, at such issues as brain drain and at policies in countries such as China and India aimed at encouraging the return of successful emigrants. The second book, Merchants of Labour, analyses the present role of private recruitment agencies in the migration process as well as efforts to regulate their activities. The book includes contributions from Verena Schmidt and Luc Demaret, from the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities.

A tool for the promotion of labour standards

Corenit, a database developed by ACTRAV helps analysing trends in the application of international labour standards throughout Latin America, as well as identifying bad practices.

Did you know that most of the violations of the ILO Convention No. 87 on freedom of association tend to concern its Article 3, which says "Workers' and employers' organisations shall have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organise their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes"? Did you know that the participation of employers' organisations in the supervisory work on standards is minimum and the workers' participation is higher but tends to concentrate on the freedom of association conventions? Maybe you guessed. However, Corenit, the database developed by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities and the ILO regional office for Latin America, will help you with a few clicks to find out for sure about this, and a lot more. The database systematizes, for Latin America, the information derived from the ILO Committee of experts on the application of Conventions, Recommendations, and reports from the ILO Conference Committee on the

application of Standards concerning ILO Core labour standards, priority Conventions, and other Conventions related to freedom of association.

In short, Corenit (which is a Spanish language database) helps identify gaps between standards and practices as well as flaws in labour legislation that may constitute obstacles to the full implementation of ratified Conventions. It also helps identify trends at regional level and actually provides for an optimal use of ILO supervisory mechanisms allowing trade unions to target campaigns and benefit from the wealth of information, including cases of progress, in their day-to-day action at national, regional and global levels.

Together with [ILOLEX](#), the ILO database on international labour standards; [Applis](#), which contains information on ratification, reports by constituents and comments by the supervisory bodies; [LibSynd](#), which contains reports by the Committee on Freedom of Association and information related to the application of freedom of association Conventions; and [Natlex](#), the ILO database of national labour, social security and related human rights legislation; [Corenit](#) is a tool to promote respect for international labour standards in Latin America. It complements the other databases developed by ACTRAV and the ILO regional office for Latin America, known as [QVILIS](#); which concentrate on violations of trade union rights worldwide and is available in English, French and Spanish.

Pointers

ILO Governing Body: The 295th Session of the ILO Governing Body will be held in Geneva from 16-31 March 2006.

European Union General System of Preferences (GSP): While the international trade union movement applauded the EU decision to integrate respect for ILO core labour standards as criteria for countries to be given preferential access to European markets for their goods and services, the ICFTU, the WCL and ETUC criticized the recent EU decision to grant those trade preferences to 15 countries which, they say, are “amongst the worst violators of trade union rights”. The list of countries is Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Sri Lanka and Venezuela.

ILO in Davos: Speaking at this year’s World Economic Forum in Davos, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia proposed five concrete steps to address the present employment crisis: shifting economic and social policies to put decent work at the centre of national and international development efforts and create a new balance between economic and social policies; promoting employment-rich, sustainable economic growth to create lasting, decent jobs; creating the right policy and regulatory environment to encourage competitiveness and enterprise development; expanding training, lifelong learning, education, and other means of enhancing human capacities, with a particular focus on young people; and promoting better international governance to integrate the efforts of governments, business, trade unions and other elements in civil society with the purpose of reducing poverty and creating jobs.

ILO official calls for ban of asbestos: “It is a big, but important, challenge to expand the asbestos ban to all countries in the world”, said Jukka Takala, Director of the ILO’s Safework department in an [interview](#) published on the organisation’s website. The ILO estimates that 100,000 people die each year from work-related asbestos exposure. Asbestos-caused cancers will

kill at least 15,000 people in Japan in the next five years and up to 100,000 people in France over the next 20 to 25 years. In the United States, hundreds of thousands of injury claims have been filed since the 1970s for deaths, cancers and other health problems related to asbestos exposure, bankrupting dozens of U.S. companies. “Asbestos is one of the most, if not the most important single factor causing work-related fatalities, and is increasingly seen as the major health policy challenge worldwide”, commented Jukka Takala. Trade unions worldwide are engaged in a “ban asbestos” campaign. So far, 25 countries have banned asbestos.

Organizing entertainment and art sector workers in Russia: The ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities is providing support for a project carried out by the ICFTU and Union Network International with a view to organizing entertainment and arts workers in Russia. According to reports, the media, entertainment and art sector in Russia is predominantly unorganised and workers in the sector face many challenges linked to the protection of their labour and trade union rights.

Emerging food crisis in Africa: In 2006, the UN’s World Food Programmes aims to provide food assistance to some 43 million people across Africa, with a price tag of over US \$1.8 billion. Of the 43 million Africans requiring food assistance, some 35 million are in need of emergency food aid. The highest numbers of needy to be targeted by WFP are some 18 million in 11 countries of East Africa, where an emerging food crisis caused by drought is threatening the lives of an estimated 5.4 million people across Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. In Southern Africa, where HIV/AIDS has hit hardest, WFP seeks to assist 9.2 million people in seven countries. And in West Africa, where war and poverty are the main scourges, WFP anticipates that at least 8.5 million people require urgent food aid in 14 countries across the Sahel region.

Forced labour and sexual exploitation in Germany: The ILO has recently published a new piece of research on human trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation in Germany. The document, available by [clicking here](#), examines the main sectors in which trafficked persons are exploited: the sex industry, domestic service, agriculture, the restaurant industry and so on. It also reviews issues such as the role of private intermediaries, demand-related aspects, the role of the authorities and the role of the unions in helping victims. The ILO’s Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour conducted the research. This piece of research, like other research conducted on the same topic in other countries (Russia, France, Albania, Moldova etc.), aims to prepare the ground for actions against forced labour and trafficking, in both the countries of origin and destination.

2005, most dangerous year for journalists: The Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) says that 150 journalists and media staff were killed last year, the highest number ever, and has warned that the situation will get worse unless political leaders act to bring the killers to justice. Some 89 of the listed killings were journalists and media workers murdered “in the line of duty” many of them assassinated by ruthless killers working for political gangs or criminals. The IFJ says the most dangerous countries for journalism were Iraq (35 killings), the Philippines (10 killings) and Colombia, Mexico and Haiti, the notorious “deadly triangle” of countries plagued by drugs gangs in which nine journalists were murdered. “In more than 90 per cent of all cases there are few serious investigations by the authorities and only a handful of the killers are ever brought to trial,” the IFJ said.

Eliminating hazardous child labour in agriculture: Raising awareness of farmers and their communities about the problem of child labour, providing them with essential information on how to eliminate it, and helping them improve occupational safety and health conditions on their farms and promoting ILO standards - these are the main aims of a new Training Resourcing Pack developed by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). An estimated 22,000 children are killed every year at work, many of them in agriculture. For details contact: Peter Hurst, IPEC (hurst@ilo.org)

Decent work on the ECOSOC Agenda: Ali Hachani (Tunisia), elected last month as President of ECOSOC for 2006, stressed that the United Nations had yet to fully promote social progress and improved living standards. He added that the theme of this year's high-level debate – promotion of employment and decent work for all – would be particularly relevant to the forthcoming General Assembly's high-level dialogue on international migration and development.

New Convention on the rights of disabled persons: The Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities has completed its work which should lead to the adoption of a first-ever UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The ILO has been actively involved in discussing the new draft. The final text will be tabled to this year's session of the UN General Assembly.