

Human.Rights@Work

“Trade union rights are human rights”

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ILO Governing Body – consistent about decent work

No doubt about it – the concept and the promotion of decent work are making their mark in international circles. Once again, the ILO Governing Body (which met in Geneva on 1-16 November 2007) pointed to progress in this field. One instance of that progress was the discussion on the link between climate change and decent work. Top leaders of the UN agencies concerned took part in that debate. But there are also some downsides. For instance, the good working relationship between the ILO and the World Bank, and the steps taken by the Bank to support basic labour rights within its lending policies, do not square at all with the Bank's report Doing Business, which seems to thumb its nose at workers' rights.

Doing Business 2008 is the fifth in a series of annual reports published by the World Bank since 2004. For the first time, it was singled out for detailed attention by the ILO Governing Body. In a document for discussion and guidance, the International Labour Office recalls that the ILO and the World Bank have built up strong working relations and that since the adoption in 1998 of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, these relations have intensified. In fact, as the document points out, respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work is now a criterion for infrastructure loans or assistance to the private sector by the Bank's subsidiary, the International Finance Corporation.

The ILO document is distinctly less enthusiastic about the latest instalment of *Doing Business*, which came out in late September 2007. The Employing Workers Indicator (EWI) in *Doing Business* “raises policy coherence issues central to the ILO's mandate on labour standards, social protection, social dialogue, employment creation and the promotion of sustainable enterprises,” the ILO paper says. *Doing Business* ranks 178 countries on the basis of ten indicators which supposedly show the climate for private sector expansion. The hiring indicator is the one that bothers the ILO. The Office points out that this indicator “suggests that reducing protection to a minimum and maximizing flexibility is always the best option”. Also, it “does not take into account the *raison d'être* of labour legislation”. And so, the ILO document concludes, “to the

extent that *Doing Business* is also used by private firms as a basis for investment decisions, it not only sends signals for capital flows but also exerts additional pressure on countries to deregulate towards minimal worker protection”.

Workers’ Group representatives hammered that point home during the discussion that followed. The group’s spokesperson and chair Leroy Trotman said the World Bank publication boils down to the suggestion “that an employer must have full freedom, whatever the circumstances, even where there are collective agreements, to hire and fire, and where the law circumscribes that practice, the law should be changed”. Ebrahim Patel, the Workers’ Group spokesperson in the Governing Body’s Committee on Employment and Social Policy, said that if the World Bank’s criteria had been used during the apartheid era, the laws applied to black workers “would have resulted in South Africa being ranked at or very near the top of the (*Doing Business*) table”. As he pointed out, this means that “the reforms introduced under by President Mandela would have shifted South Africa right down the league table”. *Doing Business* does indeed put South Africa in 91st place. But not to worry. Even worse are Norway (94th), Sweden (107th) and Finland (127th), as Ulf Edström (Sweden) hastened to point out. He is the Workers’ Group spokesperson in the Committee on Legal Issues and International Labour Standards. “The EWI is an insult to the Nordic countries,” he said. “It reflects a pattern of primitive capitalism which has no place, has nothing to do when you are trying to create a modern economy and a modern society.” At the end of the discussion, ILO Director General Juan Somavia promised to convey the meeting’s views to his counterpart at the World Bank, Mr. Zoellick, and to continue the dialogue. He said Mr. Zoellick would be invited to the March 2008 Governing Body session to discuss the whole issue of cooperation between the ILO and the World Bank.

Policy coherence, and decent work as an element in that coherence, were highlighted when the Governing Body reviewed the ongoing reform of the United Nations. Juan Somavia said the ILO is “well positioned within the multilateral system”. At the world level, its agenda is “more and more appreciated, recognized and respected,” he stressed. He also announced that a meeting will be held in April 2008, at the invitation of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which will bring together the heads of the OECD, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the ILO to discuss “policy coherence”. In the discussion, the Workers’ Group again expressed its concerns over the reform of the United Nations: the workers insist that the tripartite character of the ILO must be maintained and promoted, as must the international labour standards – notably, but not solely, those on trade union freedom and social dialogue. According to the workers’ spokesperson, these are all not only fundamental values but also important assets for the whole UN system.

Decent work for sustainable development – the challenge of climate change

The Governing Body set another good example of policy coherence by holding a multilateral discussion on responses to climate change. The Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization held a roundtable on the link between climate change and decent work. Taking part were Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Mathew Farrow, Head of Environment Policy at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and Joaquín Nieto, Secretary for health, safety and environment issues at Spain’s Comisiones Obreras

(CC.OO.).

Opening the discussion, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia recalled that the ILO has a particular part to play in a multilateral response, in view of its tripartite structure and its culture of dialogue.

UNEP's Executive Director stressed that the response to these challenges must go hand in hand with the creation of viable, decent employment. He added that, in order to arrive at a definition of decent work, it is necessary to understand the environment in which people produce and earn a living.

Joaquín Nieto, from the Comisiones Obreras (Spain), is the President of Sustainlabour. He emphasized the need to support workers and enterprises during the transition to a sustainable, environment-friendly development process, and he pointed to the crucial importance of tripartite dialogue. A "great transition" will have to be effected in order to reduce emissions of carbon and other pollutants, and this must be accompanied by a "just transition" based on rights, social protection and training.

The unions insist that, by anticipating the changes, engaging in dialogue and collectively deciding the measures to be taken, it is possible to pave the way for a just and environmentally responsible society, in both the developed and the developing countries. Joaquín Nieto gave examples of how the adaptation to climate change can prevent job losses and create new jobs. He stressed the need to help workers who lose their jobs to find new ones, to strengthen social protection systems and to promote economic diversification.

Workers' Group spokesperson Leroy Trotman drew attention in particular to the assistance that will be needed by developing countries and the changes in consumption patterns that will have to be adopted by the more developed countries. He asked for a more detailed document on these issues to be presented to the next Governing Body meeting, and he concluded by emphasizing that the ILO has an important part to play in solving the problems posed by climate change.

A Convention for domestic workers?

There are almost a hundred million domestic workers worldwide. The majority of them are women. Most are excluded from the protection of labour laws. Ever since 1965, the ILO has been advocating the adoption of a standard to protect them.

The Workers' Group gave its full backing to the proposal by the Office to place the promotion of decent work for domestic workers on the agenda of the 2010 International Labour Conference. The aim is to develop ILO instruments – possibly a Convention plus a Recommendation – that can provide guidance to the constituents on policies and practice concerning domestic work. The proposal on domestic workers is one of four possible agenda items listed for the 2010 Conference. A choice will have to be made at the March session. The three other proposals are a general discussion on decent work in global supply chains, a general discussion on social finance (microfinance) and a general discussion on the right to information and consultation in the framework of economic restructuring. While not disputing the usefulness of the other proposals, the Workers' Group pointed out that the proposal on domestic workers is the only one involving standard-setting action and that, in the case of domestic workers, such action is more than necessary. A number of governments immediately supported the proposal.

Workers' Group spokesperson Leroy Trotman emphasized that the number of domestic workers is much higher than the document implies. Recalling that the question of a standard to protect these workers is by no means new, he referred to an ILO experts' group meeting way back in 1951, which had already drawn attention to the vulnerability of these workers. In 1965, an International Labour Conference resolution called for the adoption of international standards to protect them.

Domestic workers "lack protection under both international and national laws," says the document presented to the Governing Body. "Yet, they represent an important and growing segment of the labour force and their work is enabling others to improve their living standards." Performing essential tasks in millions of homes, domestic workers are a vital link in the economic chain everywhere.

Domestic work is often not recognized by national legislation. So domestic workers are excluded from the protection provided by the labour rights enshrined in these laws. This leaves them open to all kinds of abuse.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has asked its affiliates worldwide to seek governmental support for the elaboration of an ILO Convention to protect domestic workers.

"Domestic workers must have protection just like others workers" said Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary. "We strongly urge the ILO Governing Body to take the right decision in this matter," he added. The decision will be taken at the March 2008 session.

The right to collective bargaining – a core ILO value

A high-level tripartite meeting on this topic will be held in 2008.

"The right to collective bargaining is a core value of the ILO. It is inextricably linked with freedom of association, and is an important tool of labour market governance. As a foundational element of the broader concept of social dialogue, collective bargaining continues to contribute to strengthening democracy all over the world".

The document submitted for discussion and guidance to the Committee on Employment and Social Policy emphasizes the importance of collective bargaining as a key ILO value, and its contribution to the implementation and promotion of decent work. It examines the impact of globalization on bargaining and shows how, in a changing world, bargaining is adapting and innovating.

From the discussion, a broad consensus emerged about the advantages of collective bargaining, as well as the need for the International Labour Office to intensify its work on the trends and innovations in this field.

For the Workers' Group, Ebrahim Patel (South Africa) stressed the contribution that collective bargaining makes to the distribution of wealth, the reduction of inequalities, the fight against poverty, and democracy. He regretted the fact that the Office document makes no mention of the anti-union company policies and strategies which are apparently becoming commonplace. He also insisted on the need to strengthen capacities and to focus these efforts on those groups who are insufficiently covered by collective bargaining agreements, notably migrant workers, workers in small and medium-size enterprises and workers in atypical employment relationships.

The Committee agreed to give absolute priority to promoting the ratification and application of international labour standards on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Apart from Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining, six other instruments were cited, concerning the employment relationship (Recommendation 198), workers' representatives (Convention 135), rural workers' organizations (Convention 141), collective bargaining in the public sector (Conventions 151 and 154) and private employment agencies (Convention 181).

The Committee approved a proposal to hold a high-level tripartite meeting in 2008-2009 on collective bargaining and its role and future impact in the context of globalization. (The next international workers' Symposium organized by the Bureau for Workers' Activities will be on the subject of collective bargaining in the 21st century. The Symposium will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of Convention 98. It will be held in the spring of 2009 – Ed.).

Burma – repression and forced labour

In the absence of any progress, the Workers' Group may ask for the issue to be brought before the International Court of Justice.

After Myanmar's ambassador claimed that all measures had been taken to end forced labour, defended the arrest of opposition activists, and called the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma a terrorist group, the Workers' Group expressed its deep disappointment over the position taken by the Burmese authorities. Workers' Group spokesperson Leroy Trotman called it "an attitude of flagrant disrespect" towards the ILO. He cited the repression of peaceful demonstrations in September, when 11 people were killed and 1,500 arrested. And he pointed to the continued existence of forced labour and the military's attempts to hush up some cases, the threats made against those who denounce this practice, and the heavy prison sentences imposed on activists who demonstrated on May Day.

Following the discussion, the Governing Body adopted conclusions in which it expresses its deep concern over the repression conducted by the government in response to the recent peaceful protests and deplores the imprisonment of persons exercising their fundamental right to freedom of association and the freedom of expression it entails. The Governing Body called on the government to comply fully with its responsibilities in accordance with Convention No. 87, which it has ratified. The long prison sentences given on 7 September 2007 to six activists should be reviewed and the persons concerned released. The Governing Body also noted with concern the detention of persons associated with the facilitation of forced labour complaints under the Understanding signed with the ILO.

Recognizing that the situation in Myanmar is unstable, the Governing Body urged the government to continue the dialogue process, in a balanced and results-orientated manner, towards domestic reconciliation and forward-looking solutions to the current difficulties.

The Governing Body called on the government of Myanmar to make at the highest level an unambiguous public statement that all forms of forced labour are prohibited throughout the country and will be duly punished. The government should ensure that the mechanism provided by the Understanding remains fully operational, with no further detention or harassment of complainants, facilitators or others, and that it fully applies to the military authorities. Full attention should be

given to preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.

The Governing Body further called for the putting into place of an appropriate network towards ensuring nationwide application of the Understanding, including in the combat zones, and to ensure that forced labour victims are able to easily access the complaints mechanism. It instructed the International Labour Office to undertake a full review of the operation of the Understanding, for submission to the Governing Body at its March 2008 session together with recommendations for both the Understanding's future and the ILO's ongoing role in Myanmar.

The Workers' Group reserved the right to ask that the International Court of Justice be seized of this matter if no progress has been noted by next March. Back in November 2006, the Governing Body had already brandished this threat when it raised the possibility of seeking an "advisory opinion" from the International Court of Justice. This advisory opinion, interpreting Convention 29, would be binding on the ILO and the States Parties to the Convention concerned. The matter can then be brought before the UN Security Council in order to have the court's ruling applied.

Change of attitude in Belarus?

The Governing Body will return to the case of Belarus at its March session, so that it can check if the government's commitments have been put into practice.

On trade union rights in Belarus, the Governing Body considered for the fourth time the measures taken to implement the recommendations of the 2004 Commission of Inquiry and of an ILO mission to the country in June 2007.

Taking note of the information given by the Minister of Labour of Belarus, the Governing Body welcomed the government's stated intention to reach an agreement between all parties concerned on the question of trade union legislation. It underlined that solutions based on consensus and dialogue have to be aimed at the full implementation of the recommendations of the 2004 Commission of Inquiry. All trade unions and employers' organizations should be able to function freely and obtain recognition in law and practice. But on behalf of the Workers' Group, its spokesperson Leroy Trotman expressed doubts about the concrete effect given to any change of attitude by the Belarus government: "If we can be assured that there is no longer any persecution of independent trade unions, if we can be satisfied that there would be no longer restriction in the activities of independent trade unions, then we will be able to say that there has been a real change of attitude". So he asked the Governing Body to reexamine this case at its March 2008 session.

The representative of the European Union, which has taken measures against Belarus because of the violations of freedom of association, recalled that the draft law on trade unions, if adopted in its present form, will not enable Belarus to comply with the recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry. While expecting that significant progress towards satisfactory solutions will be made in Belarus, the Governing Body decided to review developments in the country with respect to freedom of association at its March 2008 session.

Urgent cases before the Committee on Freedom of Association

The Committee drew attention to urgent situations in Colombia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guatemala and Indonesia.

Five countries, Colombia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guatemala and Indonesia, are among the urgent cases highlighted by the Committee on Freedom of Association. It currently has 142 cases before it.

In the case of **Colombia**, concerning allegations of murders and other acts of violence committed against trade union leaders, the Committee deplored “the persistence of acts of violence of which trade union leaders and members are the victims” and emphasized the gravity of the situation. Addressing the Governing Body on behalf of the Workers’ Group, Ursula Engelen-Kefer recalled that, between 21 September 2006 and 13 August 2007, 16 further assassinations were recorded and many cases of threats, harassment and detention were reported. She also expressed concern over the suspected links between government agencies and the paramilitary groups involved in these murders, and over the climate of impunity in the country in relation to acts of violence committed against trade unionists.

The Committee asked the government to provide, without delay, its comments on allegations concerning the existence of a plan called “Operation Dragon”, reportedly aimed at eliminating certain trade union leaders. But the Committee also noted some encouraging steps, such as the creation of a sub-unit for trade union matters in the office of the Prosecutor-General. It expects that the measures adopted will lead to positive outcomes in a greater number of investigations, including all the unresolved cases, and will put an end to the intolerable situation of impunity.

Noting that it had not replied to an earlier request, the Committee urged the Government of **Djibouti** to provide its observations without delay concerning a number of very serious allegations, including the repeated harassment of trade unionists, the arrest and dismissal of trade union officials, the lack of response by the courts to trade union complaints, the dismissal of Hassan Cher Hared following his participation in an ILO training course in Turin and the barring from entry of an international trade union solidarity mission. The Workers’ Group spokesperson drew attention to the arrest and interrogation of the representative of the Bureau for Workers’ Activities who took part in the mission.

The Committee also noted that the Djibouti government had accepted an invitation for a direct contacts mission and requested the government to keep it informed of further developments in this regard, as well as measures taken to give effect to its recommendations concerning the above allegations.

Involving the arrest and incarceration of three senior trade union leaders, who have been held incommunicado since 2005, the case of **Ethiopia** concerns the violation of the right to organize for teachers in the public sector. Ursula Engelen-Kefer backed the Freedom of Association Committee’s call to the Ethiopian government to ensure that the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA) may carry out its activities without any government repression, and that any ETA members

detained on the basis of their trade union activities or membership are immediately released and granted adequate compensation for any damage suffered.

The Committee asked the government to provide information on the situation of almost 80 trade unionists who have been arrested, imprisoned or reported missing and to conduct an inquiry into reports that two imprisoned trade unionists have been tortured. It also asked the government to accept a direct contacts mission to examine the matters raised in this complaint.

In two cases concerning **Guatemala**, the Committee examined allegations of murders and other acts of violence against trade unionists, as well as anti-union dismissals, non-payment of wages and benefits ordered by the judicial authorities in cases of anti-union discrimination, and obstacles to collective bargaining.

In particular, the Committee requested the government to inform it, as a matter of urgency, of the developments in the inquiries and proceedings under way with respect to the murders of Rolando Raquec and Luis Quinteros Chincilla, the failed assassinations of Marcos Alvarez Toq and Imelda Lopez de Sandoval, and measures to safeguard the lives of the late Mr. Raquec's wife and children. In a second case concerning Guatemala, the Committee urged the government to do everything in its power to step up the current investigation into the murder of the port workers' trade union official Pedro Zamora and the wounding of his son.

The case of **Indonesia** concerns allegations of anti-union discrimination and harassment, including repeated police interrogations of the union President and two union members following a strike. They were finally charged with "unpleasant acts" against the company. The Committee demanded that the government institute an independent inquiry into this matter and, if it is found that the charges were brought on the basis of the organization of or participation in a peaceful strike, to ensure that they are immediately dropped.

To address the problems of anti-union discrimination, the Committee urged the government to take steps, in full consultation with the social partners concerned, to provide for swift recourse to mechanisms permitting the imposition of sufficiently dissuasive sanctions against such acts. It recalled that ILO technical assistance was available in this regard.

In her address to the Governing Body, Ursula Engelen-Kefer also drew attention to other important cases before the Committee on Freedom of Association – namely, **Cambodia** (cases of unfair dismissal of trade unionists, involving several textile firms) and **Costa Rica** (anti-union practices in the banana plantation sector, involving major multinationals).

Also noteworthy is the Committee's request to the **United States** to do what may be necessary to ensure that undocumented migrant workers receive effective protection against dismissals motivated by anti-unionism. After a file was submitted to it, the Committee once again noted that existing "remedies do not however sanction the act of anti-union discrimination already committed, but only act as possible deterrents for future acts, an approach which is likely to afford little protection to undocumented workers who can be indiscriminately dismissed for exercising freedom of association rights without any direct penalty aimed at dissuading such action. In light of this, the Committee requested the Government to take steps, within the context of the ongoing debate in this regard, to consult the social partners concerned on possible solutions aimed at ensuring effective protection for undocumented workers against anti-union dismissals.

During the Governing Body's discussion of the Committee's report, the worker members also expressed their concern over the situation in **Pakistan**, in connection with a case concerning that country. They expressed the hope that it will return to democracy and the state of emergency will be lifted.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation, three Pakistani trade union leaders and activists detained the day after Gen. Pervez Musharraf imposed the state of emergency were released on bail on 23 November, after spending 18 days behind bars. The three trade unionists were jailed on 5 November when their union joined other civil society organizations in demanding the immediate restoration of the rule of law, the constitution and basic civil rights.

In all, the Committee on Freedom of Association examined 36 cases during this session.

France in the dock over New Employment Contract

The French government's "Contract for New Employment" was ruled to be incompatible with the ILO Convention on dismissals.

The Governing Body adopted a report of the committee set up to examine the representation alleging non-observance by France of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158). The representation was made under Article 24 of the ILO Constitution by the French trade union Confédération générale du travail - Force ouvrière.

The Governing Body invited the French government, in consultation with the social partners, to take such measures as may be necessary to ensure that the exclusions from the protection provided by the laws and regulations implementing the Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158), are in full conformity with its provisions; and to give effect to Article 4 of the Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158), by ensuring, in accordance with that Convention, that "contracts for new employment" (CNE) can in no case be terminated in the absence of a valid reason.

Created in August 2005 despite opposition from the unions, the CNE is an employment contract of indefinite duration for use in enterprises with less than 20 employees. It starts with a two-year period, known as the "consolidation period", during which the employer can dismiss the employee without having to show grounds. In its report, the committee set up to examine the representation made by the Force Ouvrière union (FO) declared itself "unable to conclude (...) that a period as long as two years was reasonable". Moreover, an employment contract cannot be terminated "in the absence of a valid reason," the ILO committee ruled. The Employers' Group at the ILO deplored this "rigid interpretation" of the ILO Conventions "in response to a policy aimed at improving employment". During a plenary session of the Governing Body, the Employers' Group spokesperson said that it was "not in agreement with Convention 158 and the extensive interpretation given to it here and in certain countries". To which the Workers' Group spokesperson replied that this Convention simply requires that a worker should not be dismissed without valid grounds being given or without a reasonable period of notice. The Workers' Group

side points out that this Convention, ratified by 34 Member States, is among those most used by domestic jurisdictions when settling unfair dismissal cases.

Other Governing Body news

Heribert Maier: The Governing Body paid a moving tribute to Heribert Maier, former Worker Member of the Governing Body and Deputy Director-General of the ILO, who passed away on 6 November 2007 at the age of 75. Right from the end of his studies, he dedicated his life to the trade union movement, first in his native Austria, then at the international level. During his long career, he was Deputy General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and General Secretary of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET, now UNI). In a tribute on behalf of the Workers' Group, Marc Blondel recalled that Heribert Maier "played an active part in the struggle for trade union rights and freedom of association at the world level. He fought against all dictatorships, whether in the East or the West. His interventions were decisive in Greece at the time of the colonels and in Czechoslovakia, where he supported the action of his friend Vaclav Havel."

Multinationals: The Subcommittee on Multinational Enterprises updated the Governing Body members on corporate social responsibility related activities worldwide and the participation of ILO constituents in the UN Global Compact's local networks.

UN Reform: The Committee on Technical Cooperation reviewed the implementation of the ILO's Decent Work Country Programmes, technical cooperation priorities with respect to UN reforms, including UN agencies "delivering as one" in eight pilot countries, and the ILO/United Nations Development Programme partnership. The Worker spokesperson in the Committee, Ms Halimah Yacob, observed that the implementation of the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) and the UN reform process, particularly with respect to the involvement of the social partners, had been reported in an optimistic fashion. Citing information she had received from the field, she highlighted the weak involvement of the social partners in the processes. DWCPs did not address the four dimensions of decent work in an integrated way, with unequal treatment of certain dimensions of decent work. International labour standards and a rights-based approach to development, for instance, were not included in the programmes. Observing that most of the standards-related programmes were to do with child labour, she pointed out other serious problems that existed. She found no mention, for example, of any programme for the ratification of Conventions Nos 87 and 98 in the DWCPs of China and India. On this issue, she pointed out that the Declaration programme had requested countries which had not ratified the core Conventions to show what steps they were taking to promote those Conventions – this aspect was missing in the DWCPs. She also pointed out that DWCPs did not reflect the decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association and the Committee on the Application of Standards.

Export processing zones: The question of decent work, including collective bargaining, in export processing zones will be on the agenda of the Committee on Employment and Social Policy during the next session of the ILO Governing Body (March 2008).

New orientation for sectoral activities: Regrouping the sectors to better reflect changes in the world of work, strengthening the process of consultation with the social partners (with a consultative body for each sector), and interaction with the country programmes to promote decent work – the Governing Body pressed forward with the new orientations for the ILO's sectoral programmes, as adopted in March, when it approved a series of sectoral activities for 2008 and 2009.

They include the preparation of a revised code of practice on safety and health in agriculture (a meeting of experts will be held in September 2009); a tripartite meeting on promoting social dialogue in the oil and gas sector (May 2009); a global dialogue forum on decent work in local government procurement for infrastructure provision (late 2008); and a global dialogue forum on vocational education and skills development for commerce workers (November 2008). Two meetings of experts are also planned as part of the follow-up to the Maritime Labour Convention adopted in 2006.

Fisheries sector: The Governing Body requested the ILO Director-General to take all necessary steps to promote the Work in Fishing Convention adopted in June 2007.

Election of the Director-General: As the mandate of the current Director-General expires on 3 March 2009, the question of the steps to be taken to designate the Director-General, and the date of the election, will be placed on the agenda of the Governing Body's session in March 2008. The election should take place at the November 2008 session.

Strengthening the ILO's capacity: The Governing Body decided to place on the agenda of the 97th Session (2008) of the International Labour Conference an item on "Strengthening the ILO's capacity to assist its Members' efforts to reach its objectives in the context of globalization". It also considered the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2008-09 and the ILO's support for gender equality in the world of work .

Europe: The eighth European Regional Conference of the ILO will be held in Lisbon (Portugal) in 2009.

Union education in the twenty-first century

From 8-12 October 2007, more than 150 trade union representatives from 45 countries met at ILO headquarters in Geneva to discuss ways to strengthen the capacity of trade unions to influence socio-economic policies and development strategies. Workers' education activities are at the heart of these efforts to cope with the rapid changes in the world of work brought by globalization.

The International Workers' Symposium on the Role of Trade Unions in Workers' Education aimed at evaluating workers' education activities and identifying workers' education needs at national, regional, and international levels. Besides experiences, lessons learned, and the way forward, delegates also examined the role of labour education in implementing the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

The meeting developed strategies to build and strengthen trade union capacity, including a review of the role that workers' education centres can play, as well as new methods and techniques in delivering labour education.

Every year around the world, labour education trains hundreds of thousands of trade unionists in the basics and the techniques of collective bargaining, trade union recruitment and organizing methods, occupational health and safety issues, rights at work, equality and so on. In many countries, it goes beyond workplace-level concerns and deals with the role of trade union organization in society, the strengthening of democracy and the fight for social justice and the environment. Trade union education is at the heart of the promotion of decent work. Participants at the Symposium called on governments to "Fully respect and promote fundamental workers' rights

and, in particular, freedom of association and collective bargaining, as a means of ensuring union education and their fundamental role for the development of Decent Work Country Programmes”.

Today, trade union organizations and their training programmes have to take account of the effects of economic globalization, the demand for Decent Work, the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS and against any discrimination towards HIV-positive people, climate change, migration, and the expansion of the informal economy. They have to prepare the workers’ representatives to take responsibility for complex negotiations: economic integration processes, strategic poverty reduction programmes, flexicurity and multinational company councils.

Constantly evolving, labour education has broadened its own scope over the last years and has established crossover points with all levels of the education system, including the universities. The workers’ activities programme of the ILO International Training Centre in Turin has not lagged behind. Each year, it trains several hundred trade union leaders, confirming the high importance that the ILO assigns to strengthening the capacities of workers’ organizations through labour education.

For further information, the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities has produced a background paper, which provides an overview of the state of labour education in the world: The Role of Trade Unions in Workers’ Education: The Key to Trade Union Capacity Building, International Workers’ Symposium, Geneva, 8-12 October 2007, International Labour Office, 2007.

Unions and globalization – trends, challenges and responses

A new publication from the Global Union Research Network shows how unions are responding to the challenges of globalization.

Globalization has turned out to be a complex, multi-faceted process for workers and their trade unions across the world. No less complex are the strategies that they are having to develop in order to meet the challenges. A new study by the ILO and the Global Union Research Network (GURN), coordinated by the Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV), reviews some of these challenges.

Trade Union Responses to Globalization shows how the trade union movement is coming up with innovative solutions to the complex effects of globalization and to the challenges it poses. More and more unions are broadening out their action to take in issues such as getting closer to the international organizations in order to influence their policies. Also, given the growing power of the multinational enterprises (MNEs), unions are getting involved in international social dialogue, through the negotiation of international framework agreements (IFAs), the organization of global campaigns, and the broadening and deepening of cooperation at the world level. The main trade union responses to globalization are about the need to broaden out trade union programmes, the building of networks and alliances, and, last but not least, the contribution of the ILO and its labour standards to a fairer globalization.

*To order a copy of *Trade Union Responses to Globalization: A review by the Global Union Research Network*, 2007, ISBN 978-92-2-119860-4, please go to: www.ilo.org/publns

**For the executive summary and an interview with the author, see www.gurn.info