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“Trade union rights are human rights”

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

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98th International Labour Conference

Faced with the prospect of a prolonged global increase in unemployment, poverty and inequality and the continuing collapse of enterprises, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a Global Jobs Pact designed to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery, generating jobs and providing protection to working people and their families. The Jobs Pact was elaborated during this year's International Labour Conference (3-19 June in Geneva) which included an ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis with the participation of a number of Heads of State and Governments. The ILO Global Jobs Pact has since then received support from the participants at the G8 summit meeting in June, and been the subject of a special resolution by the UN's Economic and Social Council at its Substantive session which ended on 31 July in Geneva. The Pact is widely expected to be a major item on the table of this September's G20 summit in Pittsburgh. Government, worker, and employer representatives from the ILO's 183 member States also discussed a new draft labour standard on HIV/AIDS, the state of gender equality in the context of globalization, and the ILO's Budget for 2010-11.

ILO's Global Jobs Pact offers sustainable response to the financial and economic crisis

Recovery requires a wage-led increase in aggregate demand.

This year's session of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which ended in Geneva on 31 July, did not only welcome the adoption of the Global Jobs

Pact by the International Labour Conference, it went further by encouraging member States to promote and make full use of it, by requesting UN agencies to take the Pact into account in carrying out their programmes, and by inviting international financial institutions to integrate its policy contents in their activities.

According to the ECOSOC, the ILO Global Jobs Pact offers a general framework within which each country can formulate a policy package specific to its situation and priorities in an effort to respond and promote a sustainable recovery from the crisis. A similar view was expressed by the leaders of the G8 who met in L'Aquila (Italy, 8-10 July 2009):

“Taking forward the ILO Decent Work Agenda, building on the ILO resolution on “Recovering from the crisis: A Global Jobs Pact”, is relevant to respond to the crisis at worldwide level and advance the social dimension of globalization. Governments and enterprises should not use the crisis as an excuse to diminish compliance with worker rights or to diminish worker protections” says the G8 Declaration on “Responsible leadership for a sustainable future”.

In the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Global Jobs Pact by the International Labour Conference, union leaders were particularly keen to ensure a coordinated global recovery plan, a decent work focus in stimulus packages; and make sure that the victims of the crisis did not have to pay for the cost of the stimulus packages.

They denounced the fact that the crisis had led to an increase of violations of workers' rights and had been used in some countries to undermine and reform labour laws.

Their voices were heard. “Strengthening respect for international labour standards” is a key component of the social pact. Respect for fundamental principles and rights at work is critical for human dignity. It is also critical to recovery and development, the adopted document says. Beyond respect for core labour standards such as freedom of association and collective bargaining, the Global Pact also stresses the relevance of other ILO Conventions concerning employment policy, wages, social security, employment relationship, termination of employment, labour inspection, protection of migrant workers, labour conditions on public contracts, working hours and safety and health provisions.

In May 2009 the ILO revised its unemployment projections upwards to levels ranging from 210 million to 239 million unemployed worldwide in 2009, corresponding to global unemployment rates of 6.5 and 7.4 per cent respectively.

The crisis is hitting youth hard. Youth unemployment is expected to increase by between 11 and 17 million from 2008 to 2009. The youth unemployment rate is projected to increase from around 12 per cent in 2008 to a range of 14 to 15 per cent in 2009. The ILO also said that in the 2009-2015 period, around 300 million new jobs will have to be created just to absorb the growth in the labour force

Among the ten proposed measures for jobs, the Pact calls for “boosting effective demand and helping maintain wages levels”. This is to be particularly welcomed as recovery requires a wage-led increase in aggregate demand”, Sir Roy Trotman, Chair of the ILO Workers' group, told delegates at the Conference. Social dialogue, collective bargaining, and minimum wages need to be strengthened and decisively applied to maintain wage levels and prevent wage deflation, labour leaders stress.

The trade unions consider that the next G20 Summit (taking place in Pittsburgh from 24-25 September 2009) should be a jobs summit – a “people first” summit – and the

ILO should have a seat alongside the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). They considered the Jobs Pact as a historic opportunity not only to address and tackle the present crisis but also to change the course of globalization by crafting in it a human and social dimension.

“Today the Jobs Pact is only a piece of paper. We governments, workers, and employers have to make it a reality. If we fail societies will lose. If we succeed, I am convinced future historians will say: the ILO lived up to its mandate” Mr. Trotman concluded.

The Global Jobs Pact was adopted following strong support voiced during a three-day ILO Global Jobs Summit by heads of state and government (including Ms. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, President of Argentina; Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil; Mr. Tertius Zongo, Prime Minister of Burkina Faso; Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland; Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France; Mr. Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica; Mr. Armando Guebuza, President of Mozambique; Mr. Lech Kaczyński, President of Poland; and Mr. Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, President of Togo) and Vice-Presidents and Ministers of Labour, worker and employer representatives and other leaders. At the same time, the summit also provided strong support for an enhanced involvement of the ILO in the G20.

This would not be a luxury. Mr. Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, cautioned that past experience suggested a considerable lag of four to five years on average in the recovery in labour markets after economic recovery. There was a risk of the global jobs crisis “persisting” for the next several years.

ACTRAV Helpdesk on the Financial and Economic Crisis

The ACTRAV Helpdesk offers advice and information and makes available workable tools and materials to assist trade unions regarding how they manage their responses to the financial and economic crisis, and uphold workers' rights.

The ACTRAV Helpdesk will be at the service of the International Trade Union Confederation, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, the Global Union Federations, and national trade union centres.

The Helpdesk will also constitute a depository centre of knowledge and materials relevant for the trade union response to the crisis. Through the ACTRAV Helpdesk trade unions would also be able to deepen their understanding of the failure of the free-market globalization phenomenon and call for a new sustainable – economic, social, and ideological – paradigm that favours working men and women throughout the world.

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Progress on new international labour standard on HIV/AIDS

But key elements still missing, says Workers' group. Discussion will continue next year.

The Conference held a first discussion on a new international labour standard on HIV/AIDS and the world of work against the backdrop of a growing epidemic and the impact of the economic crisis on health budgets, development assistance and treatment programmes. "We wanted a strong international standard in the form of a Convention and arguments for not having one have not really convinced us" Jan Sithole reminded participants at the Conference. "It would be irresponsible of us, on the one hand, to declare HIV/AIDS the worst enemy of mankind and, on the other hand, to be casual about the kind of responses and interventions we make to address the pandemic, leaving it to the discretion of the willing.", the union leader from Swaziland added addressing, as spokesperson of the workers' group, the tripartite committee dealing with the issue. We want an instrument to be monitorable and to provide the Office and all of us with the necessary reporting and supervisory mechanisms so that we can assess progress and hold governments accountable.

While delegates decided to propose the adoption of an autonomous Recommendation at next year's Conference, the draft content of the instrument, which is included in their conclusions provides for strong rights and protection clauses, which do cover some of the most challenging consequences of the pandemic for people at the workplace and their families. The proposed Recommendation would include provisions on prevention programmes and anti-discrimination measures at national and workplace levels, and strengthen the contribution of the world of work to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. "We made progress, including armed forces and uniformed personnel as specific categories that also fall under the scope of the proposed instrument". "We made good progress on the recognition of HIV as an occupational disease and its implications. We confirmed the prohibition of mandatory testing and the right to privacy and protection of data" Mr. Sithole summed up, "But, he stressed, we are still missing a lot of elements that will be crucial for us next year". Those, according to the workers' group, will have to make the difference; the difference between a real international standard and a rewritten code of practice. Particular emphasis will be placed at next year's discussion on the protection of migrant workers and the most vulnerable groups that we find at the crossroads of the world of HIV/AIDS and the world of work, the role of education, one of the major workplaces in the world, and its role in fighting the pandemic. "We will be more concrete and forthcoming on maternity protection and we have to find a way of ensuring some forms of reporting and supervisory mechanisms so that progress can be assessed and governments held accountable. We should be able to reinforce the instrument" concluded Mr. Sithole.

Gender equality: real progress, but major challenges remain

In times of crisis urgent measures are required to address accumulated and persisting disadvantages suffered by working women

The International Labour Conference held a general discussion on gender equality in the world of work, noting that despite real progress since the last general discussion in

Conference on the issue in 1985, major challenges remain. Delegates said the economic crisis was jeopardizing fragile gains in empowering women, but also presented opportunities to shape new gender equality policies.

Speaking on behalf of the Workers' group, Barbara Byers (Canada) stressed that "Our discussion showed that removing sex discrimination at work does not necessarily result in gender equality. Indeed, urgent measures are needed to address the accumulated and persisting disadvantages of working women, because they have the majority of precarious jobs, they have lower pay and low or no social security, and they have the greatest responsibility for care of children and dependent family members – they were already hit hard before the crisis. They are likely to be the first to suffer the impact of the crisis; yet they may be among the last to benefit from any recovery".

The ILO's future work – and responses to the jobs' crisis – should assist constituents in creating equal opportunities for women and men in education and skills training, sharing family responsibilities, remuneration of work, formal economy jobs and entrepreneurship development and in exercising their rights at work.

According to the conclusions adopted by the Conference, urgent measures are required in times of crisis to address accumulated and persisting disadvantages suffered by working women. Immediate measures should combine efforts to address the root causes of inequality and to meet the needs of working women. With respect to the crisis, the Committee considered that there was a need for a gender lens to help address the differential impact of the crisis on both women and men with a focus on the specific vulnerability of women.

In the effort to respond to the crisis, the messages from the Committee on Gender Equality were consistent with those of the Committee of the Crisis. There was a need for:

- a generation of decent jobs and providing greater public support for working women;
- investment in social infrastructure, including in care facilities for children and dependents which would create jobs and help women to sustain employment;
- establishment of a basic social security floor for all;
- introduction of minimum living wages;
- promotion of gender sensitive collective bargaining and social dialogue;
- promotion of stable employment relationships.

"Equality is an automatic stabilizer that would help boost demand through improved income for women" Ms. Byers said. "Freedom of association and collective bargaining provides for stability in employment. We all need stability and predictability. Governments want political stability, employers want stable environments for their businesses, and workers need stability for their work and families. The convergence of all three elements brings stability to societies and is fundamental for lasting peace", the Workers' spokesperson concluded.

International labour standards: in times of crisis

ILO standards provide essential tools for effective recovery.

The conclusions adopted by the Conference on the basis of the report by the tripartite Committee on the Application of Standards include a statement on the importance of international labour standards within the context of the global financial and economic crisis.

In the course of its work, the Committee reached a consensus on four main points. Firstly, there can be no sustainable economic recovery without equally sustainable and up-to-date labour standards. Secondly, international labour standards provide essential tools and useful guidance in developing effective policies for sustainable economic growth and recovery. Thirdly, labour standards, productivity, and job creation are essential to sustainable economies and to the protection of those who are most vulnerable. And fourthly, beyond the fundamental rights at work standards related to wage protection, employment promotion and social security safety nets also serve as indispensable baselines for the protection of workers.

Individual cases

The Conference Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations examined 25 individual cases covering the whole range of concerns addressed by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in its report submitted to the Conference. The Committee's conclusions on those individual cases constitute a useful compass to tackle the impact of the crisis, notably on social dialogue, employment and social security schemes, on irregular migration, and equality between migrant workers and nationals in the labour market.

The Committee drew the attention of the Conference to three cases of deep concern included in special paragraphs of its report. In the case of **the Islamic Republic of Iran** concerning the application of Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Committee remained concerned at the lack of evidence of any real progress made with respect to the situation of women in the labour market, and expressed continuing concern about the situation of religious and ethnic minorities with regard to their equal access to employment and occupation.

In the case of **Swaziland**, the Committee called upon the government to ensure the release of any persons being detained for having exercised their civil liberties, and regretted that, although the Government had benefited from ILO technical assistance for some time now, the amendments requested for many years now to bring national legislation in conformity with the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, Convention, 1948 (No. 87) have yet to be adopted. "In addition to that", Mr. Luc Cortebeek (Belgium), spokesperson for the Workers' group in the Application Committee denounced "a smear campaign being underway to attack the trade union movement in that country". Once again, Mr. Cortebeek added "our friend Jan Sithole faces threats of serious reprisals from the Government of Swaziland on his return. Our friend is in real jeopardy, and has sought protection from the ILO. We demand that the media across the world monitor his situation carefully".

Burma (Myanmar) was also listed as a special case, for continued failure to implement the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, Convention, 1948 (No. 87). The Committee recalled that the persistence of forced

labour could not be dissociated from the prevailing situation of a complete absence of freedom of association and the systematic persecution of those who try to organize.

During the now traditional special sitting on the application by Burma of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards, while acknowledging some limited steps on the part of the Government of Burma, including the further extension of a complaints mechanism on forced labour, considered that those steps were totally inadequate. It strongly urged the Government to fully implement without delay the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry and the comments and observations of the Committee of Experts. More particularly, it asked the Government to take necessary steps to bring the relevant legislative texts and the new Constitution into conformity with ILO Convention No. 29; ensure the total elimination of persistent and widespread forced labour practices, and that perpetrators of forced labour, whether civil or military, were prosecuted and punished under the Penal Code; issue an authoritative statement at the highest level clearly confirming to the people of Burma the Government's policy for the elimination of forced labour and its intention to prosecute perpetrators; approve a simply worded brochure in accessible languages on the functioning of the complaint mechanism on forced labour; and eliminate the continuing problems in the physical ability of victims of forced labour or their families to complain.

The Committee also noted with serious concern the continued human rights violations in Burma including the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi. The Committee called for her release and that of other political prisoners, as well as labour activists. It further called for the immediate release of those persons who were associated with the operation of the complaints mechanism and who were currently incarcerated.

Mr. Cortebeek, on behalf of the Workers' group also proposed to devote special paragraphs of the report to "the very serious cases of **Guatemala** and **Costa Rica**". In the case of Guatemala, the Committee expressed concern at the "important allegation of an anti-union climate in the country and the stigmatization of trade unions and observed that the situation in relation to violence and impunity appeared to be worsening." With regard to Costa Rica, The committee deplored the "continuing allegations relating to the threat which persisted in relation to any meaningful collective bargaining with trade unions and the anti-union climate in the country". The Workers' group also asked that a high-level mission be sent as a matter of urgency to **Peru**, but this proposal did not obtain tripartite agreement. "That remains a total mystery to us, since what is happening in Peru is a dramatic illustration of a problem that has become critical throughout Latin America: the exploitation of natural resources and environmental devastation for purely commercial purposes, with total disregard for indigenous peoples and for biodiversity", Mr. Cortebeek said addressing the plenary of the Conference.

While some changes have taken place in **Colombia**, the Workers' group said it was only "cautiously confident" for future progress in the country. ". . . while our Committee met, during the first week of the Conference, a trade union activist in Colombia was assassinated. In the course of the second week, two more trade union activists have been assassinated" Mr. Cortebeek denounced. This brings the number of trade union activists murdered as a result of their trade union activity in Colombia in 2009 to 20. "This case will certainly have to be discussed again to ensure follow-up monitoring of the effectiveness of the Government's commitments" the Workers' spokesperson said.

General Survey: safety and health standards are fundamental for social justice.

During its discussion on the General Survey concerning occupational safety and health, the Committee recalled that the ILO Constitution provided for the protection of workers against sickness, disease, and accidents at work as a fundamental element of social justice. There was common agreement that occupational safety and health was, and remained, a subject matter of fundamental importance for all parties, and was particularly highlighted in the present context of the financial and economic crisis. Investment in workplace safety was a key factor in productivity and competitiveness. On the other hand, the Committee regretted the lack of up-to-date data on occupational accidents and diseases, particularly in the light of their high human and economic costs. Given the importance of ILO instruments, the Committee adopted conclusions in which it invited the ILO to adopt an action plan on occupational safety and health, which should include, inter alia, the promotion of the ratification and the effective implementation of Convention No. 155 and its 2002 Protocol, and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and the examination of ways to address the challenges faced in implementing occupational safety and health measures by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and in the informal economy.

Report of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association

The Committee examined 26 cases. Altogether there are currently 134 cases before the Committee.

The Governing Body, which met at the end of the International Labour Conference, approved the 354th report of the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association. The Committee drew special attention to the cases of **Burma (Myanmar)**, **Cambodia** and the **Islamic Republic of Iran**.

In the case of **Cambodia**, the Committee regretted the repeated absence of information on any steps taken to investigate the murder of Chea Vichea and two other murdered trade union leaders – the cases dating back to 2004 and 2007 respectively. It urged the government to ensure that the investigations into the murders were full, independent, prompt and expeditiously carried out so as to ensure that all available information was brought before the courts with a view to determining the actual murderers and the instigators of the assassinations, punishing the guilty parties and thus bringing to an end the prevailing situation of impunity as regards violence against trade union leaders.

The Committee stressed the urgency for the government to take steps for capacity building of the judiciary and the institution of safeguards against corruption necessary for the independence and effectiveness of the judicial system. It strongly urged the government to ensure that trade unions were able to exercise their activities in a climate free of intimidation and risk to their personal security and their lives, and that of their families.

The Committee also examined three cases concerning the **Islamic Republic of Iran**. With respect to the grave situation relating to freedom of association in the country it welcomed the Government's statement that an ILO direct contacts mission would be viewed positively. The Committee expected that the mission would be able to visit the country shortly and that it would be in a position to assist the Government in

achieving significant results with respect to all the serious outstanding matters, including its recommendations in relation to trade unionists still in detention, and eliminating the use of excessive violence when controlling demonstrations. In particular, the Committee called for the immediate release of Mansour Osanloo and other detained trade unionists.

Noting with interest that the proposed amendments to the country's Labour Law would appear to permit trade union multiplicity, the Committee once again urged the Government to deploy all efforts so as to allow for trade union pluralism.

It also urged the Government to immediately take the necessary measures to register and recognize the Iran Confederation of Employers' Association (ICEA) constituted in March 2007 and to ensure that it could exercise its activities without hindrance.

The Committee also examined the effect given to its recommendations in two cases concerning **Burma** (Myanmar). In both cases, the Committee deplored that the Government had failed to implement its recommendations and urged it to immediately release six workers' activists (see also report on the Committee of Application of Standards).

Situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories

“A dismal human, economic, and social situation, overshadowed by stalled peace negotiations”.

During the plenary, delegates addressed the latest ILO report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories which depicts “a dismal human, economic and social situation in the occupied Arab territories, overshadowed by stalled peace negotiations”.

“In the aftermath of the devastating war at the turn of the year, the situation in Gaza has all the ingredients of a humanitarian catastrophe. The population is effectively sealed off from the rest of the world and lives on international assistance. With thousands of factories closed and people out of work, the modern economy has ground to a halt, replaced by informal makeshift activity and the *tunnel economy*”, the report says.

In contrast, the situation of workers and families in the West Bank appears to have benefited from a slight improvement in security and economic activity.

However, “this lull has not been able to halt, much less reverse, the decline in average incomes and the grim employment outlook. Closure measures, including the Separation Wall and intensified settlement activity in occupied territory, have kept a tight lid on any economic shoots that might appear”, the report says.

The findings of the report are based on missions sent to the occupied Arab territories and Israel and to the Syrian Arab Republic earlier this year to assess the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan. The ILO mission also consulted with the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) and the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The report evokes the concerns of the ILO mission about the fact that over half of those in the 15-29 age group are neither in education nor in employment. According to the report, this is not only “a waste of precious human resources ... but, in the context of the occupied territories, a dangerous mix”.

According to the report, important progress has been made in integrating ILO technical assistance into the programming and planning of the UN country team. The ILO participates in activities related to the promotion of women's social, economic, and political empowerment in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Palestinian Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza 2009-10 and the Palestinian Employment Programme.

The mission also highlighted the role of the social partners and the support they need and can expect from the ILO. "Their contribution to revitalizing battered enterprises and workplaces is essential under any circumstances", the report says.

The ILO report calls on the international community to engage more forcefully "to overcome the never-ending series of privations suffered by the Palestinians of the occupied Arab territories and allow them to exercise their legitimate right to statehood, in dignity and in peace with all of their neighbours".

ILC in brief

Officers: on the opening day of the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference, held from 3-19 June, elected as its President

Mr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Minister of Labour and Employment and Expatriates of Bangladesh. The Conference elected as Vice-Presidents

Mr. Samir Hassan Allam (Employers), and Mr. Jerald A. Zellhoefer (Workers).

Mr. Allam is the Chair of the Labour Affairs Committee, Federation of Egyptian Industries, and Mr. Zellhoefer is the European Representative of AFL-CIO, United States.

Global report on Forced labour: In a new study on the patterns of forced labour worldwide, the International Labour Office (ILO) says the "opportunity cost" of coercion to the workers affected reaches over USD 20 billion per year. The report, entitled *The Cost of Coercion*, was discussed during the ILO Conference as part of the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work. It details the growing number of unethical, fraudulent, and criminal practices that can lead people into situations of forced labour, and calls for increased efforts to eradicate the practices. The report charts the significant progress on the international and national levels in reducing and preventing forced labour, but warns of the possible impact of the global economic and jobs crisis. Global figures are not provided in this report but the previous ILO report on forced labour published in 2005 gave figures showing that some 12.3 million persons worldwide were in some form of forced labour or bondage. Of these, 9.8 million were exploited by private agents, including more than 2.4 million in forced labour as a result of human trafficking.

Child Labour: The global financial crisis could push an increasing number of children, particularly girls, into child labour, according to the report issued by the ILO on World Day Against Child Labour on 12 June. The report says the danger of girls being forced into child labour is linked to evidence that in many countries families give preference to boys when making decisions on education of children. It states that because of the increase in poverty as result of the economic and financial crisis, poor families with a number of children may have to make choices as to which children stay in school. In cultures in which a higher value is placed on education of male children, girls risk being taken out of school, and are then likely to enter the workforce at an early age. Other factors which could push up the numbers in child labour include cuts in national education budgets, and a decline in remittances of

migrant workers, as these remittances often help to keep children in school. This year's World Day against Child Labour also coincided with the tenth anniversary of ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. With 169 ratifications the Convention is now just 14 short of universal ratification by ILO member States.

Credentials: This year, the Credentials Committee received 13 objections. These related both to the credentials of delegates and their technical advisers in certain delegations and to the absence of worker or employer delegates from some delegations. The Committee was automatically seized with three cases of recurrent failures by governments to comply with their obligations under the ILO Constitution. Two of those related to irregularities in the nomination of workers delegates from **Burma** (Myanmar) and **Djibouti**. Other objections upheld by the Committee concerning the designation of worker delegates included the following countries: **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gabon, and Somalia**. It should be noted that this year, the Committee has been faced with a number of complaints and communications that expressly or implicitly raised the question of imbalanced delegations as regards the number of government, employers' and workers' advisers accredited in delegations. In this respect a number of countries used the crisis as a pretext to reduce the number of advisers but often did so at the expense of the workers' delegations. **Ireland and Italy**, for example, were singled out by the Committee, following trade union complaints. With regard to Italy, the workers' organizations were informed that, due to financial reasons the Government could accredit only one worker and one employer representative to this session of the Conference. Yet the government delegation consisted of a total of 16 persons, including nine advisers. A similar pattern was observed for the Irish delegation. The committee also noted that 4,944 persons were accredited to the Conference in various capacities. There were 151 workers' delegates and 470 workers' advisers. It emphasized that they included 172 Ministers or Deputy Ministers from member States.

New ILO member: The **Republic of Maldives** has become the 183rd member State of the International Labour Organization (ILO) following receipt in Geneva of a letter from the President of the Republic of Maldives stating, on behalf of the Government, that the Maldives had formally accepted the obligations of the ILO Constitution. Maldives' membership became effective on 15 May 2009. The country has been a member of the United Nations since 21 September 1965.

Programme and Budget: The 98th International Labour Conference also adopted a Programme and Budget for the 2010-2011 biennium of US \$726.7 million which maintains the same level of resources as 2008-2009.

China: ILO ACTRAV and China's ACFTU sign MOU Cooperation will be based on ILO values and the concept of decent work.

A first ever official visit to China by a Director of the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) took place earlier this year and concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACTRAV and the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The main purpose of the mission was to establish a strengthened working relationship between the ACFTU and ACTRAV and, in the process, improve cooperation between Chinese workers and the ILO. The mission took place against the background of contacts between the international trade

union movement and the ACFTU, and followed the recent election of an ACFTU official as member of the Workers' group of the ILO's Governing Body.

The mission included a one-day ACFTU/ILO-ACTRAV high-level national seminar on "Decent Work and Union Strategy in the Global Crisis", as well as visits to special economic zones. A wide range of issues was discussed between the ACFTU officials and the Director of ACTRAV, with the aim of strengthening cooperation between ACTRAV and ACFTU. Particular attention was paid to assistance in the areas of training on union organizing, collective bargaining, occupational safety and health, and skills development. The importance of workers' rights and international labour standards was also emphasised.

The MOU recalled that since China returned to the ILO in 1983 there has been an increase in the number of programmes between the ILO and ACFTU, and took note of the fact that cooperation is built around the concept of Decent Work and based on the ILO values as expressed in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. The MOU set out priorities based on the need of the ACFTU and the policies of the ILO and to establish a work programme to be carried out jointly between ACTRAV and the ACFTU for the period 2009-2011.

Unprecedented trade union agreements for the protection of migrant workers' rights

Sri Lankan migrant workers in Arab States should enjoy the full panoply of labour rights, says agreement based on a model developed by ACTRAV.

The protection of the rights of Sri Lankan migrant workers in Arab states was at the centre of major Cooperation Agreements signed in Colombo earlier this year by leaders of the Sri Lankan trade unions and their counterparts from **Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait**, three important destination countries for Sri Lankan migrant workers. The Agreements are aimed at granting Sri Lankan migrant workers "the full panoply of labour rights included in internationally-recognized standards".

The text of the Agreements, which is based on a model developed under the aegis of the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities, is the first of its kind covering Asian migrant workers active in Arab States. According to the ILO Colombo Office, there are over 300,000 Sri Lankan workers in **Kuwait**, over 75,000 in **Jordan** and 45,000 in **Bahrain**.

Based on the shared conviction that "that the benefits of labour migration for the above-mentioned countries, their national workers, and the migrant workers themselves, can best be maximized through the effective promotion and respect of workers' rights, including basic human rights, and fundamental principles and rights at work enshrined in UN and ILO Conventions, and through the promotion of decent work for all", the trade union agreements, signed in Colombo, go on to detail a number of joint activities to be developed by the trade union organisations both in the country of origin and in countries of destination of Sri Lankan migrant workers.

These include action to "ensure that labour legislation and collective agreements fully protect all migrant workers, including those involved in temporary labour migration programmes", the development of a model and unified employment contract for migrant workers, based on the provisions of international labour standards and

enforced through national legislation and labour inspection and support, for immediate action to denounce abusive practices and to find solutions to them through legal remedies or other available dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Efforts will also be made to encourage governments to ensure the strict supervision and control of activities by recruitment and employment agencies (in conformity with ILO Convention No. 181 on Private Employment Agencies), and subcontractors, as well as the elimination of abuse by so-called sponsorship schemes.

Follow-up mechanisms to the Agreement include annual evaluation meetings, the preparation of information material on migrant workers' rights to be made available to would-be migrant workers in Sri Lanka and access to trade unions in the countries of destination. As an immediate result of the Agreements, Sri Lankan trade union leaders have been invited by their counterparts in Bahrain, Jordan, and Kuwait to visit the three countries of destination and acquaint themselves of the situation. The four national trade unions in Sri Lanka and their counterparts in Bahrain, Jordan, and Kuwait all belong to the International Trade Union Confederation, the largest global trade union body.

The Colombo agreements have been facilitated by the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) with support by the ILO's International Migration Branch (MIGRANT) in Geneva as part of their global project on Effective Action for Labour Migration Policies and Practices funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and by support from the Government of Norway for the promotion of social dialogue.

- A similar partnership agreement on migrant labour, based on the ACTRAV model, was signed on 21 July 2009 between trade unions in Malaysia (MTUC) and in Indonesia (KSBSI). The ACTRAV model agreement exists in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish and is available on request from ACTRAV (actrav@ilo.org).

ACTRAV mission visits Central and Eastern Europe

Report suggests major problems for social dialogue in the region.

Trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe are faced with continuous challenges. After two decades of transition to a market economy and a rather demanding accession process to the European Union, they need today to respond to the looming economic crisis which is whipping out the modest progress which had been achieved in some countries since 2000. It was against this background, and in order to grasp the variety of trade union situations and policies vis-à-vis these developments, that a mission by the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities, led by its Director, visited selected countries in the region, namely **Bulgaria, Croatia, and Ukraine**.

The ACTRAV delegation met not only trade unions, but also Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs, and with most representative employers' organizations.

According to the mission, social dialogue is facing major problems in all countries, and the financial and economic crisis has added new challenges. The mission provided for strengthening trade union cooperation in the various countries and for facilitating dialogue between ILO constituents on the need for policy coherence in the face of the present crisis.

Master Programmes with Global Labour University

The Global Labour University is inviting trade unionists to apply for their Master Programmes on "Labour and Globalisation" in South Africa and in Brazil until **1 September 2009**.

The Global Labour University (GLU) is a network of universities, international and national trade unions, civil society organisations and ACTRAV to provide postgraduate qualification programmes for trade unionists, labour activists, and experts. This unique global cooperation offers students a wide range of academic and practical expertise. The global composition of students creates a genuine "one world" research and learning environment.

The courses start in January 2010 and are taught in English. More detailed information about the specific profiles of the programs and the application forms are available on the Internet <http://www.global-labour-university.org>

The Bureau for Workers' Activities and its project partners award 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.
