

International development matters

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Dead and injured workers remembered on 10th commemoration day

Brussels, 28th April 2005: The General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Guy Ryder, says that at least 6 million people will participate today in activities throughout the world to commemorate workers who have died or been injured in the last 12 months by unsustainable forms of work and production.

28 April marks the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers and figures from the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) show that more than 2 million workers die each year as a result of occupational accidents and work-related diseases, with some 160 million new cases of work-related illness annually

ICFTU General Secretary Ryder said governments and employers should observe the more than 10,000 28th April activities which are being organized by the ICFTU and Global Unions in nearly 110 countries or regions across the world. Ryder joined Belgian trade union leaders in one such activity, a massive leaflet campaign aimed at workers commuting to their workplaces this morning. The activities underline that authorities cannot afford to ignore the serious toll that globalization is taking on the world's workers.

The summary of activities can be reviewed at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_1a.EN.pdf

Several activities will focus on occupational health and safety problems and solutions with 'Prevention through Employer Accountability' appearing as a main theme. In many countries, governments and employers will participate in activities and will commit themselves to better addressing workplace problems.

The International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers will be an occasion for trade unions to examine the impacts of asbestos, ergonomics, HIV/AIDS, chemicals, psycho-social issues, violence at work and work in construction or by young workers, as issues that reflect poor workplace management and uncaring employers. It will also be an opportunity to evaluate the responses of governments, small business and multinational enterprises to these problems.

"It is clear that authorities and employers in several countries have adopted a passive, half-hearted attitude to the respect of workers' health", Ryder emphasised. "Workers continue to die by the millions as governments remain lax in adopting legislation or ratifying ILO instruments that could solve the problem".

Ryder said that the situation has now become so serious that the ILO and 12 countries had already recognized 28 April as their own formal occupational health and safety observance day. The international trade union movement is supporting moves which could result in the United Nations recognising 28 April as an international day.

"Every day, around 5,000 workers die because of poor health and safety at work. We cannot allow this situation to continue" said the ICFTU General Secretary, warning that the existing

fatality and injury statistics are probably only one-half or even one-third of the real figures.

This year the ILO announced it would review the inadequacy of national reporting as underlined the extent of the suffering which lies hidden behind poor employer and government management of the facts.

Each year, 12,000 children are killed on the job and hazardous substances kill 340,000 workers annually, while asbestos alone claims about 100,000 lives.

Conservative estimates show that each year, US\$1.25 trillion, equivalent to four percent of the world's gross domestic product, is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits. According to the ILO, the loss in GDP resulting from the cost of death and illness in the work force is 20 times greater than the total of official development assistance to developing countries.

Ryder emphasised that a huge factor in workers' health and safety in the world is whether or not their basic core labour rights were recognised. In over 40 countries the plight of workers is uncertain because their rights to organise into trade unions and their access to simple workplace democratic processes either did not exist or were severely curtailed. Citing the recent collapse of a 9 story building in Bangladesh where over 30 workers were killed, Ryder stated that the sad fact is that workers were all too often not in a position to engage in prevention activities at their own workplace, let alone report on unsanitary, unsafe and indecent working conditions and accidents.

28 April became an 'International Day' when in 1996 at the United Nations in New York, a Global Union delegation lit a commemoration candle and incense to highlight the plight of workers who die, are injured or become ill due to unsustainable forms of work and production and to promote the concept of decent work.

Mozambique unions concentrate on HIV/Aids for May Day

Mozambique's main trade union federation, the OTM, on Monday launched a week of activities that will culminate in the traditional march on International Workers Day, 1 May, this year under the theme "Mozambican workers in the fight against HIV/AIDS."

The OTM general secretary, Joaquim Fanheiro, said at a Maputo press conference that this theme was chosen taking into account the realisation that workers should be in the forefront of this fight, because it is workers who fall ill and die of AIDS, it is their children who become orphans, and it is their families who suffer. The disease also threatened a major setback to the development of the country and to the people's living conditions.

Fanheiro called for a fight against HIV/AIDS and against discrimination against HIV-positive workers. He noted that this calls for an open dialogue between workers and employers.

He pointed out that over a million people in Mozambique are living with the virus, and recalled the health authorities' estimate that

about 500 Mozambicans become infected with HIV every day.

Speaking of the effects of the government's policies towards privatisation, Fanheiro said "last year alone, 11,955 workers lost their jobs", as companies closed down or were "restructured".

The major concern for workers at the moment is this year's increase in the statutory minimum wage. Fanheiro had earlier promised that there would be an announcement on the minimum wage by May Day but now he said "unfortunately this will not be possible".

He blamed the delay in announcing the new minimum wage on the late start of the tripartite negotiations between the trade unions, the employers, and the government. He gave no date for the announcement, but said that all depended on the second round of the tripartite talks - which has yet to be scheduled. At the first round, the question of the minimum wage was not even raised.

Fanheiro would also not say anything about the proposals of the trade unions for this year's increase, explaining that the negotiations depend on many factors, including the government's performance in 2004, the level of inflation, and the approval of the 2005 State Budget by parliament - which will not happen until the first week in May.

Fanheiro said that the trade unions' concern is to reduce the gap between wages and the real needs of the workers. "The current minimum wage does not cover even 40 per cent of the workers' needs", he said.

The current minimum wage for industry and services, set a year ago, is 1,120,297 meticaís (about 55 US dollars) a month.

For agriculture, the minimum wage is much lower, at 805,361 meticaís a month.

Asked about the employers' failure to channel their workers' contributions to the National Social Security Institute (INSS), Fanheiro said that a majority (about 51 per cent) of companies have been stealing from their work force in this way. He stressed that the INSS itself and the Labour Ministry have been pressing these employers to pay up.

As for the long-awaited Labour Tribunals, Fanheiro said that "this is an issue that has been approved by the Assembly of the Republic (the Mozambican parliament), but there is still no effective implementation".

ILO/WHO agree to joint guidelines on health services and HIV/AIDS

GENEVA (ILO News) – In a move to protect the safety and health of workers involved in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, experts brought together by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have agreed to joint guidelines designed to help ensure a functioning and healthy medical workforce.

The new joint guidelines were developed during a three-day tripartite meeting involving experts in the field of HIV/AIDS and health care and representing workers, employers and

governments. They provide wide-ranging and practical approaches to protection, training, screening, treatment, confidentiality, prevention, the minimizing of occupational risk and the care and support of health care workers.

The joint guidelines also address the essential role of social dialogue among governments, employers and workers in meeting the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the sector.

“We have massaged and polished a very good draft into a set of guidelines that we can all live with so that others may indeed live,” said Lester N. Wright, MD, MPH, Deputy Commissioner/Chief Medical Officer of the New York State Department of Correctional Services who chaired the Tripartite Meeting of Experts. “These guidelines are intended help to lessen barriers to prevention and care, whether these barriers are attitudes, gender or race or unsafe working conditions or practices.”

“We must be sure that health care workers with HIV infection have access to the best possible guidance and care in their setting both for their own sake and so that they can continue to provide care to others,” he said.

The critical issues of avoiding discrimination and stigma – by health workers towards other health workers and towards patients – are given particular emphasis in the joint guidelines, as are the special needs and concerns of women working in the sector.

Key principles of the joint guidelines:

- Prevention and containment of transmission risks: measures should be taken for hazard identification, risk assessment and risk

control as well as provisions for post-exposure management.

- Social dialogue, which includes all types of negotiation, consultation and information sharing among governments, employers and workers, should be a key mechanism for the introduction of HIV/AIDS policies and programmes that build a safer and healthier working environment.
- Information, education and training should be offered to sensitize the healthcare workplace to issues related to HIV/AIDS and the rights and needs of patients as well as workers. Mandatory HIV screening, for the purpose of exclusion from employment, should not be required and employment of workers living with HIV/AIDS should continue while they are medically fit.
- Gender focus: as the health services sector is a major employer of women, special emphasis should be placed on the particular challenges faced by them in the health care working environment. Programmes, education, and training initiatives should ensure both men and women understand their rights within the workplace and outside it.

The joint guidelines will be presented to the 293rd session of the ILO Governing Body in June 2005 for approval.

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Activists fear free trade act will restrict access to AIDS drugs in Central America

As the U.S. Congress prepares to debate passage of the Central America Free Trade Act, some activists in the region are hoping lawmakers in Washington will vote it down. Peasant organizations and trade unions, worried about the effects of competition with U.S. companies, are not the only ones taking to the streets. Catherine Elton is in Guatemala City, and, in this VOA report, explains why HIV-positive Guatemalans are also opposed to the accord.

Rigoberto, a 55-year-old taxi driver, has been coming to this Guatemala City AIDS clinic for his retroviral medicine for more than a year. But since the government ratified CAFTA, he says he has been worried about getting the drugs he needs in the future. Activists say the accord's provisions on intellectual property rights put serious restrictions on generic drugs in countries that are too poor to pay for brand-name products. "We can not buy expensive medicines," he says, adding that if he cannot get medicine, he will die.

With the exception of the Caribbean, the Central American nations of Honduras and Guatemala have the highest per-capita HIV-rates in the hemisphere. During the past decade, activists have sued Central American governments to force them to provide AIDS medicines in public- and social-security-run hospitals. In recent years, activists like Costa Rican Guillermo Murillo have fought to get governments to extend coverage to more patients. While it is great that governments now give medicine, he says, more than half the population in the region needing it is still not

getting it. Under CAFTA, he says, it will be impossible to extend coverage.

Currently, generic retroviral treatments here cost about 400-dollars per year per patient. In coming years, patients may need to switch to new medicines, which under CAFTA would only be available in brand-name form. These can cost as much as 10-thousand dollars per year per person.

Late last year in Guatemala, AIDS activists scored a big victory when a new law was passed that further opened the country's market to generic drugs. But the U.S. Embassy and Trade Representative put stern and open pressure on the government to change the law, saying it contradicted the already negotiated CAFTA.

In March, weeks before ratifying the free trade accord, the government changed the law to bring it in line with CAFTA. Rodolfo Lambour, who represents multi-national pharmaceutical companies in Guatemala, agreed with the U.S. government's actions. "For many years, there has been no intellectual property rights protection in Central America, and now, we feel the time has come to respect a little bit the intellectual property rights - which are legitimate and fair - of companies that invest more than any other sector in industry, in research and development of new products. It is our companies that help discover new and innovative products that have given cures to many incurable diseases in the past. We are not the enemy; we are friends of the people," Mr. Lambour says.

Mr. Lambour says there are mechanisms by which governments can still get affordable medicine for AIDS programs, without hurting the companies that develop them. Some analysts

note there is a side letter to CAFTA that says intellectual property rights provisions should not affect government AIDS programs.

But people like Alain Kergoat, of the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders, says the only sure-fire way for Central Americans to ensure continued access to generic drugs is for the U.S. Congress to vote against CAFTA. "I hope there is enough time to explain to people in the United States the effect this accord will have on health systems in these countries, he says."

At a recent protest outside Guatemala's Health Ministry, HIV-positive demonstrators wearing paper bags over their heads shout, "We want health." They say they are planning to stage protests like this one in front of U.S. Embassies across the region, and they are also working with AIDS activists in the United States to lobby Congress.

Nigeria federal Government approves workplace policy on HIV/Aids

The Federal Government yesterday (20 April) gave reprieve to people living with the dreaded virus HIV/AIDS, by approving a national policy that protects them from any form of discrimination and stigmatization in the country. Known as "The National work place policy on HIV/AIDS", the policy sets to protect the victims of the virus thus guaranteeing for them rights for normal interaction and association in employment and workplaces. The Federal

Executive Council (FEC), which met yesterday, approved the policy.

Addressing State House correspondents on the policy, Minister of Health, Professor Eyitayo Lambo and the chairman of the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA), Professor Babatunde Oshotimehin said that the minister of labour and productivity, Dr. Hassan Lawal has been mandated to carry out the policy in the work place.

"Within the framework of multi-sectoral approach, the ministry of Labour and Productivity was assigned the responsibility of combating HIV/AIDS pandemic in work places through prevention, care, solidarity and support to persons affected by the virus, and also through protection of their rights and dignity", Lambo said.

The policy he continued, "spells out general rights and responsibilities of government, employers and their organizations, workers and their organizations.

"The policy thrust includes protection from stigma, discrimination and exclusion of patients; to ensure continuation of employment relationship; protection of the right of job seekers and employment prospects, (ie, where employers ask would be employees to undergo certain tests including that of HIV/AIDS without getting their consent.

"The policy that we had before us which was presented for review and adoption by council has four goals:

- to promote and protect rights and dignity of affected workers;

- provide workers with access to HIV/AIDS information and services to enable them take appropriate action
- manage and integrate impact of HIV/AIDS within the workplace;
- eliminate and reduce stigma and discrimination based on real or perceived status of the worker.

"Within the context of the HIV/AIDS emergency action plan (HEAP) which lifespan terminates in two years and we are in the process of developing a new one".

Top African union leader to light HIV/AIDS candle on 28 April

For the second year running, the General Secretary of the ICFTU African Regional Organisation (AFRO) Mr. Andrew Kailembo has called upon trade union leaders throughout the continent to make 28 April a day to remember those who have died and to highlight the plight of those suffering because of HIV/AIDS. He said ICFTU-AFRO would light a candle of hope in its office on behalf of its 15 million members from the whole of the African region.

Kailembo urged all trade union leaders from all countries in Africa to light a candle in their offices as well on April 28. He also strongly urged workers and employers to jointly implement the agreements that they have signed internationally and in Africa in order to effectively tackle HIV/AIDS in the world of work.

Kailembo emphasized on corporate social responsibility and said that it is the responsibility

of the governments and employers to safeguard the workers and the population as a whole from getting infected with HIV by providing prevention programmes. He demanded that all employers should provide care, support and treatment to all those workers and their families who are living with HIV and AIDS.

He appealed to employers, workers and their organizations to continue to:

- scale up their joint efforts to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS, and to implement comprehensive workplace programmes that include prevention, measures to combat stigma and discrimination, and the provision of care and support;
- eliminate HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination at the workplace;
- work in partnership with governments and international agencies to extend access to anti-retroviral treatment at the workplace and in the community, especially through opportunities afforded by the "3 x 5" initiative which was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2003 and of which the ILO is a partner.

The day must be commemorated every year by trade unions in all the African countries until the scourge is eliminated, Kailembo said.

ICFTU calls for action on debt in global coalition against poverty alliance

Jointly with its Global Unions partners (Global Union Federations and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD), the

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has released a statement which calls on finance ministers in Washington, at the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to use the opportunity of the meetings to adopt an expanded debt relief initiative for low-income indebted countries and other measures that would provide additional resources to developing countries for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as part of the ICFTU's participation in the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP).

The statement

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221401&Language=EN>) expresses

opposition to the institutions' promotion of contracting out of public services and proposes that the IMF and the Bank carry through on commitments to give the same attention to improvement and modernization of services under public as well as private control. The statement objects to the simplistic approach of certain World Bank policy analyses suggesting that many forms of labour regulation should be dismantled, and calls on the Bank to take measures to ensure that its own operations are consistent with the core labour standards.

The statement calls on the IMF and World Bank to live up to their rhetoric in favour of “country ownership” by ensuring that development plans such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and subsequent lending agreements are based on civil society consultation and approved by national parliaments. Finally, the statement calls on the IMF and the World Bank to completely overhaul their outdated governance structures, starting with the secretive and undemocratic manner in which the heads of the

institutions are chosen, and to increase the representation of developing country governments in their executive boards.

World Bank releases Global Monitoring Report on MDG progress

The World Bank has released its second Global Monitoring Report on progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the first one of which is to reduce extreme poverty by half by 2015. The report reckons that, because of progress accomplished in reducing the number of poor in East Asia, the goal will likely be met at a global level, "but not in Sub-Saharan Africa unless progress there is accelerated quickly".

The 2005 Global Monitoring Report on the MDGs concludes that overall, "progress has been slower than envisaged", and that several other goals will not be met at the current rate of progress, even on a global level, unless substantial additional resources are made available. The predicted shortfalls concern most notably the goals of universal primary education, gender equality in education, improved basic health care, control of major diseases including HIV/AIDS, and improved access to water and sanitation.

The Bank's report supports a point that EI, PSI, ICFTU and other union organizations have been making over the past five years, namely that the attainment of the MDGs will require substantial new investments to train qualified public service workers and maintain stable financial support for service delivery: "Critical to effective scaling

up [of services to achieve the MDGs] are rapidly increasing the supply of skilled service providers (health workers, teachers) [and] providing increased, flexible and predictable financing for these recurrent cost-intensive services."

The report calls for a doubling of official development assistance over the next five years and a decisive move in 2005 by donor countries and the IFIs to increase the amount of debt relief for poor countries with heavy debt burdens. The report stipulates that additional debt relief should not cut into the provision of needed new financing to attain the MDGs.

The full 280-page 2005 Global Monitoring Report on the MDGs is available, in English only, on the World Bank's web site, along with summary material in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish [http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/ TOPICS/GLOBALMONITORINGEXT/0,,pagePK:64022007~theSitePK:278515.00.html](http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/GLOBALMONITORINGEXT/0,,pagePK:64022007~theSitePK:278515.00.html)

Developing country ministers criticise democratic deficit at the IFIs

The IFI-related G24 "Inter-Governmental Group of 24 on International Monetary Affairs and Development", which represents developing country ministers participating at the IFIs' meetings, was highly critical of the lack of action to remedy the "democratic deficit" at the IFIs and of the overall failure of the IMF to develop policies that respond to the needs of developing countries. The G24, which held a meeting on

Friday 15 April, expressed the following concerns among others, at a subsequent press conference:

- Developing countries were not consulted on the candidacy of Paul Wolfowitz as new president of the World Bank.
- No action has been taken to reduce the democratic deficit and enhance the voice and participation of developing countries in decision making at the IMF and World Bank, as called for in the "Monterrey Consensus" in 2002.
- Most IMF executive directors supported the creation of a revised and more accessible contingency credit line (CCL) for developing countries experiencing massive capital outflows, but instead the earlier version of the CCL was allowed to expire in late 2003 because of the opposition of some industrialized countries.
- Similarly, because of opposition from some industrialized countries, work was halted at the IMF towards establishing a much-needed international debt restructuring mechanism for countries in default situations.
- Because Asian countries were dissatisfied by the role played by the IMF in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, many of these countries have accumulated large currency reserves so as not to have to go back to the Fund, and their strategy of avoiding IMF lending because of intrusive Fund conditionality is being imitated by several other countries, except for the very low-income countries that have no choice.

The G24 statement and transcript of the press conference are available through the following web links:

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/cm/2005/041505.htm>

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/tr/2005/tr050415a.htm>

Multilateral debt: little progress at spring meetings

Ministers at the 2005 World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings in Washington failed to agree a deal on debt relief. There were mixed signals on whether a deal moved closer or further away, with some arguing that the positions of G7 Ministers were becoming increasingly entrenched, while others hinted that a possible path to a compromise was becoming visible.

At the heart of the debate is whether rich governments should put in extra cash to ensure that poor countries can have debt cancellation AND continued aid flows. The United States is pushing for a deal which would reduce the amount that the World Bank, IMF and African Development Fund could make available to poorer countries. The US government, and a number of US civil society groups, argue that this is the only deal that the US government can offer - partly because of its ideological vision and partly because it is Congress, not the Administration which can make aid pledges. Debt relief is much more popular and easy to achieve on Capitol Hill than aid increases.

European governments and many NGOs and other governments - including in Africa - would prefer a debt relief approach which involves additional financing. Otherwise, they argue, poor countries will be penalised with reduced aid in exchange for getting debt relief. The G7 Finance Ministers' statement last weekend stated: "*We made progress in preparation for the [G8]*

Gleneagles Summit, including on a case-by-case analysis of HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) countries, based on our willingness to provide as much as 100 percent reduction of HIPC countries' International Development Association and African Fund debt without reducing the resources available to the poorest countries through these institutions".

One way people had been hoping to break this deadlock was to agree financing options that would have no impact on existing pots of money that are set aside for low-income countries. The most promising one, urged by Eurodad and many other NGOs, is the unused and massively undervalued IMF gold reserves.

In a March IMF report, the British government and others support the sale of the gold. Last weekend we learned that the United States government is opposed. Treasury Secretary John Snow said "*we are not persuaded by arguments for IMF debt relief, and we do not believe market or "off-market" gold sales are necessary or warranted.*" In addition, an influential Republican Congressman has been arguing that IMF gold was originally a donation and should therefore not be used to cancel developing country debt but should instead be returned to the countries that donated it.

Snow said the United States was not currently focusing on debts owed to the IMF, but only on those owed to the World Bank and the African Development Fund which, he argues, hold most of the poor nations' debt. This means that the US appears to have stopped pushing to use resources from the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, and potentially to wind down that facility entirely.

Another way to view the question of additionality is that the volume of money in the aid system - including in the multilaterals - is anyway increasing substantially at the moment and so dollar transfers will continue to grow even after a debt relief deal which takes some resources from these countries. Yet a further option is to secure additional resources for developing countries through some kind of global taxation - for example on air fuel as the French government and others have proposed. No progress was made on this in the last week.

One set of positions is certainly clear: that of senior figures in the World Bank and IMF. As in any bureaucracy they are not keen to see their budget diminish. Outgoing World Bank President James Wolfensohn reiterated his opposition to the US approach, "*as managers, you have to expect us to fight tooth and nail.*"

There was speculation in some civil society circles in the last few days that the US may be playing a hard bargaining line and that if other G7 countries show some flexibility in their current demands for pure additionality, then a deal may be able to be struck by the Gleneagles G7 Summit in early July.

Trade unionists must pay attention to IFI policies says Ghana TUC

Mr. David Dorkenoo, Head of International Relations Department of the Ghana Trade Unions Congress (GTUC) has said it is necessary for Trade Unions to have an interest in the International Financial Institutions policy recommendations adopted by government on

privatization, especially those which have a negative effect on union members and the workers as a whole.

Speaking on the Trade Union Congress and Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), at a workshop organized by International Labour Organization (ILO) and Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) for GTUC, he noted that unions represent the interest of workers and thus should participate in the GPRS to safeguard their interests. He held the view that, unions can request for respect for fundamental labour rights, core labour standards decent work and environmental standards which are of paramount concerns to the trade unions.

Again, he said, the GPRS is the government's medium term policy document for the nation's workers and citizens, since decision-making programmes and decisions have a telling effect on its members.

According to Mr. Dorkenoo, the GPRS document does not address the concerns of women, meaning women are not directly targeted in the planning of job creation and other measures aimed at reducing poverty.

He mentioned labour standards and equity as the core of poverty reduction and promotion of social well being which ought to be in place to ensure that decent work and fair remuneration prevail as prerequisite for material well being.

He also raised concerns over the government's inability to put the issue of paying living wage to workers on its agenda after over 15 years of the Structural Adjustment Programme.

Mr. Dorkenoo further emphasized on the need to bring the centrality of collective bargaining for determining fair salaries and wages to the public sector workers.

He further urged government to undertake a fundamental review of economic policies to promote the well-being and security of women and men by ensuring a reversal of past economic policy failures.

He stated that government must ensure that budgets and appropriations take cognizance of unequal impacts and benefits to women and men in different social groups and occupations since these steps would reverse economic policies which discriminate against women and ensure their active involvement in decision making at all levels.

He said government should strengthen its agricultural policies particularly in the food crop sector to reverse of bias in favour of cash crop production calling on the trade union leaders to avail themselves with the content of the GPRS.

Burma: International trade unions urge stronger EU measures

Brussels, 20 April 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): The ICFTU and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) today urged the European Union (EU) to take stronger measures against the Burmese military regime, when it reviews its "Common Position" on Burma in the coming days.

Citing continued use of forced labour and a range of other major human rights violations by the junta, the trade union bodies wrote today to EU External Relations' Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. In their letter, the trade union bodies called on the EU to order an end to investment and other business involvement in Burma by EU-registered companies, including financial transfers and transactions, and to ensure that arms produced in EU Member States are not sold to Burma by third countries.

The union move follows stringent criticism of the Burmese regime by the UN Commission on Human Rights last week, as well as a strong statement last March by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office (ILO), which confirmed that measures adopted by the ILO Conference in 2000 remained fully in place and that the "wait and see" attitude of many ILO Members had "lost its raison d'être".

While international trade union organisations are concerned that current EU measures against the Burmese junta are themselves inadequate, the ICFTU understands that certain EU Member States are opposed to a strengthening of these measures.

Cambodia: mounting tension following removal of export quotas

Brussels, 20 April 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): "Tensions are rising in the factories, and mounting trade union repression will tarnish foreign investors' image of the country if it is allowed to persist," says an ICFTU report published today. This report

(<http://www.icftu.org/www/PDF/LMSrapportCambodiaEN.pdf>) entitled "Cambodia: increasing pressure on trade union rights" provides an update on the situation of the country's workers since the lifting of the textile and garment quotas on 1 January 2005.

The new report explains that there has not yet been a significant deterioration in working conditions inside Cambodia's garment factories since the end of the quota system. But although salaries remain slightly higher than those paid in some competitor countries, they still do not afford workers a decent standard of living.

Outside the factories, the situation has seriously deteriorated over recent months. The Cambodian authorities, bent on pleasing the employers, are violently repressing strikes and protests. It is becoming extremely dangerous to carry out independent trade union activities in Cambodia, as shown by the assassination of two trade union leaders in 2004. The ICFTU also condemns the countless number of cases in which trade unionists and workers holding peaceful protests have been savagely beaten by the police or hired gangsters.

The report published today explains that employers have recently deployed a new tool to repress trade union activities: the filing of legal proceedings against factory union leaders, to make them serve prison sentences or pay extortionate fines. Employers are disregarding labour laws and using criminal law to prosecute workers whose only "offence" is taking part in a peaceful strike. Such actions contravene internationally recognised principles on the right to strike.

One of the reasons behind the mounting tension in Cambodia is the pressure resulting from China's unfair trade practices. Indeed, the outright repression of any form of independent trade union activity in China means that its suppliers are able to offer much better prices and delivery deadlines than their competitors. Yet nothing can excuse the mounting repression of independent trade unionists in Cambodia. "By violently repressing the workers' right to organise unions, to hold peace protests or take strike action, the Cambodian authorities are undermining the foundation on which the country's economy rests: better respect for workers' rights inside the factories is the only significant comparative advantage Cambodia has to offer in relation to its competitors," underlines the ICFTU report. "If the Cambodian authorities really want to help garment sector employers to survive in a quota-free trade environment, they would do better to attack the main obstacles to business for which they are directly responsible, such as the very high level of corruption among public employees and the excessive red tape hampering import-export operations".

The ICFTU has urged the WTO, the international organisation responsible for world trade, to study the consequences of liberalising trade in textiles and garments through the ending of the quota system and to draw up recommendations for future policies. "The WTO must urgently find an effective way of preventing the use of workers' repression as an illegitimate tool to promote higher exports, as is the case in China and export processing zones around the world," concludes the new report.

China and Hong Kong violate workers' rights, says ICFTU in report to UN

By reserving the monopoly of trade union organizing to the state-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), by sending independent union activists to prison and by denying its workers the right to strike, China is blatantly in breach of a major international human rights' treaty, which it freely ratified in March 2001, the ICFTU said today in Geneva. The charges came in a report presented on 25 April to the International Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in charge of verifying State Parties' compliance with the Covenant of the same name. The Committee monitors ratifying states' compliance with the Covenant on behalf of the UN's Economic and Social Council. Its Members have just started examining China's first Report on the Covenant's implementation.

In its 36-page report, the ICFTU also accused China of violating an essential principle of international law by entering a "reservation" on art.8 of the Covenant. The article guarantees "the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice". According to the ICFTU, art. 8 is an essential part of the Covenant and, as such, entering a reservation about it constitutes a breach of customary international law, as codified in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

The ICFTU stresses that the country's only legal trade union, the ACFTU, is under an obligation to ... promote economic development and uphold the leadership of the Communist Party". "These obligations are incompatible with the nature and

role of a free and democratic trade union" says the ICFTU, which adds that "in actual fact, workers frequently dismiss the official trade union as unhelpful or ineffective at best during social unrest".

Organisers of workers' groups and protests are often arrested and sentenced to terms of imprisonment, "reform through labour" or "re-education through labour", says the ICFTU report which includes, for example, the cases of two individuals sentenced to 12 and 15 years imprisonment for posting articles on the internet in favour of creating independent trade unions. The report includes a list of 40 labour activists who currently remain in detention, some since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing.

Many of them have landed in jail for taking part in or leading strike action. The report recalls in that context that China removed the right to strike from its Constitution in 1982, on the grounds that the political system in place had "eradicated problems between the proletariat and enterprise owners". In practice, strikers and especially strike leaders, are often arrested and charged with offences that vary from traffic violations to holding illegal demonstrations, and even, where extensive organisation can be demonstrated, subverting state power, which is an extremely serious charge under the country's penal code. Strike organisers and independent labour activists also face the threat of "re-education through labour", a form of administrative detention that in practice can be extended at the authorities' will. The plight of many workers detained during labour protests remains unclear.

The ICFTU report concludes that China "does not respect core workers' rights, as embodied in

the Covenant and other sources of international law, including the relevant Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)".

"China is in clear and unequivocal breach of article 8 of the Covenant and, to that extent, its report to your Committee is misleading", an ICFTU representative told the Committee.

In a related development, the ICFTU-affiliated Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) submitted its own report about the implementation of the same Covenant in China's Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. In its report, the HKCTU refers to several limitations of workers' rights, which it sees as infringements of the Covenant, including: unequal access to vocational training; the absence of legislation regulating working hours; lack of respect of weekly rest periods (23% of employees work over 60 hours/week); differences in pay affecting women, who earn less than men for work of equal value; a prohibition for unions to use their financial resources for political work, and the lack of legislation to protect collective bargaining, which the HKCTU says violates the Covenant's provision guaranteeing workers' rights to establish unions "for the promotion and protection" of their rights.

Nepal: trade unions welcome UN action

Brussels, 12 April 2005 (ICFTU Online). At a meeting with senior United Nations officials in New York yesterday, Laxman Basnet, President of the Nepal Trade Union Congress, welcomed the UN's efforts in support of human rights in Nepal. Basnet and ICFTU UN Representative Gemma Adaba met Danilo Turk, Assistant

Secretary General for Political Affairs, and Tamrat Samuel, Senior Political Affairs Officer for Asia and the Pacific, in the Department of Political Affairs.

Turk said that the UN was following developments in Nepal very closely, and that Secretary General Kofi Annan was briefed on a regular basis on the situation with respect to the break down in democracy and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. Annan has expressed concern at these developments, and affirms his readiness to support all efforts geared towards defining a peace process and the full restoration of democracy.

The UN's Department of Political Affairs was keenly aware of the critical situation concerning human rights violations and growing humanitarian needs. Turk said that two support mechanisms that were now put in place were aimed at mitigating the crisis and contributing to efforts for a lasting peace. The first was a monitoring mechanism on human rights which came into being on 11 April with an agreement signed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, and the foreign affairs representative of Nepal's King Gyanendra. The monitoring operation which will include field offices at regional level will help to establish accountability for human rights abuses, and allow for quick responses to reports of abuses, helping prevent gross violations of human rights.

The second intervention from the UN was a humanitarian needs assessment mission which left New York on Monday for Nepal. The mission will include an expert on internally displaced persons and will try to gauge the scale of the humanitarian crisis. It will assess first-hand reports that there are thousands of internally

displaced persons, and increasingly impoverished, insecure and terrorized local communities.

While this burgeoning humanitarian crisis was not attracting media attention, it was nonetheless real, and the UN was keenly aware of this, according to Samuel. The Department of Political Affairs appreciated getting first-hand information from Basnet on the situation on the ground in different regions, and the situation with respect to trade union detentions and other trade union rights violations. Turk confirmed that such information would be useful for the UN's current mission to Nepal.

Trade unions from some 50 countries around the world joined in an International Trade Union Day of Action on Nepal on 22 March, protesting at the coup mounted by King Gyanendra, and the associated violations of trade union rights, including detention of trade union representatives and disruption of union gatherings by security forces.

Union report on Paraguay notes failings in the application of labour standards

As the World Trade Organisation launches a review of trade policy in Paraguay, the ICFTU Today, 27 April, publishes a report underlining a series of shortcomings in the application and enforcement of core labour standards in the Latin American country. The report, submitted to the WTO for consideration alongside their trade review, highlights absence of respect for

trade union rights, discrimination and child labour as particularly problematic in the country.

A significant number of restrictions on trade union rights still exist today in Paraguay. In particular, the minimum requirement of 300 workers to form a trade union, coupled with excessive demands on potential trade union officers and difficult registration procedures heavily impinge on trade union activity in Paraguay. In addition, authorities fail to apply effective sanctions to prevent trade union discrimination, and harassment and unfair dismissals continue.

Discrimination in employment and wages is another failing of the country's system. The few available statistical indicators show a large wage gap between men and woman, and that less than 10% of women are employed in public sector posts, professional and technical positions. Segregation in the workplace continues and unemployment among women is higher than among men.

Child labour is prevalent in Paraguay, and some 14% of all children between the ages of 5 and 17 years are employed, mainly working in the agricultural sector on family farms, as vendors or as domestic workers. Child prostitution is also a serious problem. More than a third (34.9%) of all working children between 5 and 17 years do not attend school.

To read the full report:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221542&Language=EN>

Wolfensohn backs Wolfowitz as World Bank successor

Washington (Reuters) - With his decade-long World Bank presidency nearing an end and a new role as Middle East special envoy before him, James Wolfensohn on Thursday sought to ease fears successor Paul Wolfowitz would force a U.S. agenda on the developing world.

Wolfowitz, the deputy U.S. defense secretary chosen by President Bush to take over the World Bank, won unanimous backing from its board despite misgivings among some member nations about his role as architect of the Iraq war.

Wolfensohn gave his successor a firm endorsement, saying he would be an able leader as the bank seeks to boost aid budgets, forgive poor country debt and rethink lending to mid-sized emerging countries with access to other funds. "I think Paul Wolfowitz is going to do a very good job. I do not believe he is coming in with an agenda that is unilateral. I think he wants to do this job well," he told a news briefing ahead of the World Bank spring meetings, one of his last public appearances as bank president. "He'd be crazy if he took this job with anything but good motives, and I believe he has those motives, and I think he has the capacity to learn."

Wolfensohn said he was pleased with his achievements at the bank, saying efforts to bolster field offices by moving staff and resources from Washington had helped the bank improve programs and tackle once-overlooked issues like corruption. "I think the bank now listens a lot more and recognizes the development process is not owned by the bank, it's owned by the

countries," he said. "Ten years ago we were not talking about corruption, and we were not talking about effectiveness," he said.

On Thursday, the White House announced Wolfensohn's new job -- international special envoy. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said he would be responsible for reviving the Palestinian economy and issues like the fate of Israeli housing blocks if Israel evacuates all Gaza settlements and four of 120 settlements in the West Bank.

Asked if he had any regrets over his tenure at the bank, the 71-year-old former investment banker said he wished he could have prompted faster action on issues like access to primary education and poor country debt relief. "I regret I couldn't do it quicker, and I probably could have been nicer at some times," he said, poking fun at his reputation as an occasionally volatile leader. "There were a few frustrations in the job, but in the broad I think it has been an extraordinary experience," he added.

In a Reuters interview earlier this week, Wolfensohn said his last five years at the bank were marred by a "difficult" relationship with the Bush administration, which kept him at arm's length. The World Bank was targeted heavily in the late 1990s by anti-globalization protesters who accused the institution of imposing crippling debts on poor countries in order to control their policy decisions. Demonstrations have since waned in intensity, in part because of a drive by Wolfensohn to work more closely with activist and nongovernmental groups on poverty issues.

"Civil society will always criticize the bank, and I think it probably should," he said. "So long as

I'm not being burned in effigy or someone throwing a pie in my face, I think it's okay -- and I have had all those things happen to me," he said. "I think now we have a civilized dialogue. We don't always agree, but we need civil society and frankly they need us."

Global development group Oxfam said it believed Wolfensohn's legacy was best characterized as mixed, citing continued concerns that conditions attached to World Bank loans undermined poor governments' decision-making powers. Still, Oxfam advocacy director Bernice Romero said Wolfensohn's approach to nongovernmental groups was a good one, adding: "We hope that this openness and dialogue will continue under the new bank president."

By convention, the head of the World Bank is American while the International Monetary Fund is led by a European. Australian-born Wolfensohn, a Clinton appointee who became an American citizen to take the job, asked World Bank staff and member governments to give Wolfowitz a chance. "It is true that there are fears, but I'd give him six months and I'd listen to him and I'd work with him. I think he will be an excellent leader for the World Bank," Wolfensohn said.

ETUC's reaction on the appointment of Paul Wolfowitz as President of the World Bank

It is more important than ever that Europe speaks with one voice in the International

Financial Institutions, ETUC demands, following the appointment of Paul Wolfowitz as President of the World Bank. The Constitutional Treaty shows the way forward.

Commenting on the decision by the World Bank's board of directors to confirm Paul Wolfowitz, deputy US defence secretary, to become the Bank's next president starting on 1 June, ETUC General Secretary John Monks said:

"The Constitutional Treaty in Article III-196 opens the way to a united representation of the eurozone in international financial institutions and conferences such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The EU should now presage the enactment of the Constitution by moving in a united way to ensure that the activities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ensure fair and equitable sustainable development world wide. Acting as a bloc, the eurozone countries hold 19.51 per cent of the votes in the International Bank for Reconstructions and Development (IBRD) compared to 16.39 held by the United States. They should now face their responsibilities and use that power as a force for good."

Amos fails to secure top UN job

House of Lords leader Baroness Amos has failed in her bid to head the United Nations development programme. The Labour peer was nominated for the job by Tony Blair and was considered "a very strong candidate". But United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has named Kemal Dervis, a Turkish former World

Bank executive, to take on the top role. Mr Annan said 56-year-old Mr Dervis had been chosen "from an outstanding array of global candidates". His nomination now goes before the 191-member General Assembly for approval.

Mr Dervis, Turkey's finance minister between March 2001 and August 2002, was credited with leading his country out of a major economic crisis. If approved, he will take over from Briton Mark Malloch Brown, who has been appointed Mr Annan's chief of staff. Mr Annan said he believed Mr Dervis, who held positions at the World Bank for 22 years, would "make an outstanding administrator" of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). "I chose him from an outstanding array of global candidates," he said.

He praised Mr Dervis' practical and intellectual track records in development and international finance, together "with a passionate commitment to addressing the scourge of poverty" and managerial skills. The head of UNDP would be expected to champion the UN's Millennium Development goals to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

Lady Amos, 51, was created a life peer in August 1997. Her rapid rise through government ranks began a year later when she was appointed a Government whip in the House of Lords. At the time of her UK nomination for the UNDP post, a Downing Street spokesman said: "Valerie Amos has an excellent blend of political, diplomatic and leadership skills and an impressive track record in government. "From her time as Secretary of State for International Development, she has great experience of development issues and is well-known and respected throughout the international community."

'BAN ASBESTOS" UN Commission on Sustainable Development governments urged: trade unions call for stop to century-long carnage

Trade unions at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) have called for governments to join efforts for a world-wide ban of asbestos so as to end the century-long pattern of destruction that to this day kills more than 100,000 people every year and inflicts long term suffering upon millions more.

Speaking for Global Unions about how workplace occupational health and safety provisions can help the CSD to implement solutions for human settlement problems Bjorn Erikson of LO-Norway told governments that "it was time for governments to become involved" by joining a global campaign that trade unions will launch at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Switzerland this June.

"The issue is relevant to CSD discussions about human settlements because Asbestos is still used throughout the world in the construction of buildings and in manufacturing." He said that the occupational health and safety activists had been at the forefront of world efforts to have the substance banned and he asked the sustainable development community at the UN to join the effort. "Asbestos is a threat to everyone, from children in schools, to young and old in private and public buildings where asbestos is present

and to whole communities where it exists as a pollutant".

At the CSD Erikson was arguing for the acceptance of wording that recognized the experience of workers' organizations in promoting occupational health and sustainable development, including through worker education and awareness-raising. He said asbestos was an example which proved that occupational health and safety systems and the involvement of workers and trade unions can make a real difference to sustainable development.

"It has become an urgent necessity to stop all production & trade of asbestos". He identified the countries that still produce or engage in trade of the substance and where trade unions will seek national bans: Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, China, Columbia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Korea (North & South), Indonesia, Iran, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Rep, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe".

Sadly, Erikson said: "While the use and imports of asbestos is declining in industrialized countries, imports and consumption is on the rise in developing countries where little or not protection is available for those exposed to it".

Trade unions at the CSD also released a set of Country-by-Country profiles on Asbestos, indicating the production, trade and asbestos fatality figures for each country and what

governments have done or not done to address the problem. Erikson said that the asbestos profiles pointed to positive pathways that countries could take to help end the unconscionable scourge of death and destruction that asbestos has left in its wake.

The ASBESTOS profiles are available at the following: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.EN.pdf

Government destabilises Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions ahead of ILO conference

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) President, Lovemore Matombo, on Wednesday 20 April accused government of working in cahoots with four of the labour body's affiliates to destabilise the ZCTU ahead of the ILO conference in June.

"They want to destabilise the ZCTU so that the Labour minister can proscribe our participation at the labour convention and deny the union an opportunity to present its dossier on issues that could embarrass the government," Matombo said.

Discussions of Convention 87 and 98 that deal with human rights, freedom of assembly and freedom to organise will be high on the ILO agenda during the June meeting and Zimbabwe, as a signatory to these conventions, fears embarrassment over its recent record.

Convention 87 accords trade unions freedom of assembly and the right to organise. It gives labour bodies in member countries a right to assembly without hindrance. Convention 98 deals with the right to organise a trade union without state intervention.

“We have a dossier of all the incidents when our meetings were either disrupted by the police or the CIO which we are going to present at the conference,” Matombo said. “Government fears embarrassment, hence the attempt to get the current leadership removed and replaced by a docile leadership.

“Government is sponsoring a minority among the 34 affiliates to cause confusion and resentment among other trade unions against the current leadership,” Matombo said.

“We are looking at two unions which are vocal about operations in the ZCTU and another two affiliates who are undecided whether to take part in attacks against the ZCTU leadership. Two of the most vocal affiliates are not fully paid up members yet they are in the forefront of accusing the leadership of all sorts of misconduct,” Matombo said.

He said most members suspected the belligerent affiliates, the Construction Workers and Leather Workers unions, were being orchestrated to cause disturbances after the government-sponsored Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU) failed to dislodge the ZCTU executive.

The state media has been conducting a crusade against the ZCTU leadership comprising Matombo, Wellington Chibebe, Lucia

Matibenga, and Tabitha Khumalo saying it awarded itself salaries without consultation.

But Matombo said Langton Mugeji, a member of the labour body’s general council, actually proposed that the ZCTU pay him to cushion his family. Matombo was last year suspended by his employers for attending an Organisation of African Trade Unions conference in Khartoum without permission and his case is still pending.

“The whole thing is a storm in a teacup,” Matombo said. “There are wild allegations that we are conniving with employers to create shortages and that accusation seems to suggest that these affiliates are being driven by forces other than their union members,” Matombo said.

Trade unionists arrested in Zimbabwe

From ZCTU - The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) deplors the action by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) who disrupted a ZCTU meeting and arrested six members of the Eastern Region.

The ZRP stormed into a ZCTU May Day preparatory meeting on 27 April 2005 at the Hellenic Club in Mutare and called off the meeting before arresting five Regional Council members and one member of the ZCTU General Council. The police were alleging that the meeting contravenes the provisions of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) which gives the police the powers to sanction public meetings. Trade unions are exempted from seeking clearance from the police.

The ZCTU leaders were arrested at around 5:30 pm and later released at 8:00pm but were later invited back to the police station this morning. They are still at the police station awaiting further interrogation about the meeting. Their names are Eliah Mwandipe Regional Chairperson, Tambaoga Nyazika Regional Officer, Hilarious Ruyi General; Council member, Steven Chandakapata, Medicine Muringisi, Superior Boka who are all activists.

Meanwhile another six ZCTU activists including Nathan Banda, the ZCTU Health and Safety Coordinator were also arrested this morning (Thursday 28) for taking part in an international Health and Safety day march which was organised by the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) to commemorate international health and safety day.

As social partners, the ZCTU was invited to take part in the procession but the police are questioning the involvement of the labour body in the procession. At this moment in time the ZCTU activists are still under arrest while the NSSA officials are negotiating with the police. The police also proceeded to stop the procession because of the ZCTU's participation.

The six are Elijah Mutemeri, Vimbai Mushongera, Nathan Banda, Nyikadzino Madzonga, and two activists from Bindura Nickel Mine who are Health and Safety Shopstewards.

The ZCTU strongly deplores this action by the police and views it as a violation of human and trade union rights especially the infringement of the freedom of association and assembly.

Note - 29 April: The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) informs you that the six activists who were arrested by the police yesterday for taking part in an International Health and Safety day march were released yesterday after the police insisted that the procession could not go on as long as the ZCTU was taking part. The organisers of the event, The National Social Security Authority (NSSA) then decided to call off the commemoration, as they could not carry on without an important stakeholder.

Meanwhile the six activists who were also arrested in Mutare were also released after interrogations yesterday and were not charged. The ZCTU had to seek the services of a lawyer.

The ZCTU condemns this action of trying to criminalise the labour organisation in everything it does and views this as a gross violation of human and trade union rights. However the ZCTU will carry on with its business undeterred.

Iran: labour activists to celebrate May Day

Independent labour activists in Iran are planning once again to hold May Day celebrations, despite fears of a repetition of last year's arrests by the authorities for taking part in a similar event. Seven activists from the city of Saquez, Jalal Hosseini, Mohamad Abdipoor, Borhan Divangar, Hadi Tanoomand, Esmail Khodkam, Mahmoud Salehi and Mohsen Hakimi, were arrested by security police and subjected to 11 days of interrogation for participating in a peaceful May Day event in 2004. Court proceedings against those arrested have

continued since that time, with the authorities refusing to allow ICFTU representatives to enter the country to observe the proceedings. Two of them have been told to attend further court hearings on May Day this year.

One of those charged, Mahmoud Salehi, is accused of having made contact with the ICFTU, and with preparing a chart containing information on the cost of living in Iran. Further charges, denied by Mr Salehi, include writing, possessing and distributing political literature. Similar charges have been made against the other accused. The ICFTU has protested to the Iranian authorities against the proceedings, along with other serious trade union rights violations in recent months.

The ICFTU supports the right of all working people to participate in May Day celebrations, and believes that the attitude of the Iranian authorities to the planned 2005 celebrations will be an important indicator of the extent to which fundamental labour rights will be respected in the country in future. The global trade union confederation will continue to monitor developments concerning labour rights in Iran, and will pay particular attention to events on May Day this year.

Unions gear up to take on Wal-Mart

In the last week, LabourStart has run no fewer than 18 stories about Wal-Mart, the world's largest private employer. Those stories included one on Wal-Mart's secret fund to stop union organizing, and one on its efforts to block a union from putting up a billboard advertisement

criticizing the company. We covered the chilling effect of the closure of the first unionized Wal-Mart in North America and we reported on a union win against the company in Maryland. In fact, over the course of the first half of April, we've reported on Wal-Mart and its workers in the USA, Canada, and Germany. As unions gear up for what promises to be one of the great struggles of the first decade of this new century, we've created what we think is the most comprehensive coverage of that battle, here: <http://www.labourstart.org/wal-mart/>

May Day is buy-a-labour-book day

Sunday is May Day, the international workers' holiday. Many of you will be celebrating by taking to the streets, participating in marches and demonstrations. That's a May Day tradition stretching back 115 years. This year we'd like to start a new tradition -- let's turn May Day into Buy-a-Labour-Book Day.

Imagine if every trade union activist were to go out a buy a book about organizing, or a history of a strike, or -- even better -- a book for their kids showing why unions are necessary. Sales of such books would soar, they'd become best-sellers, and we'd have a much better educated trade union movement.

The problem is, you can't just walk into your local neighbourhood bookshop in most places and find a selection of labour books. That doesn't mean these books don't exist -- they do!

Labour's Online Bookstore, a LabourStart project, now has just under 100 books in its

online catalog. For the first time, you can see these titles broken down by category. We have 9 children's books, for example. We have no fewer than 32 books on U.S. labour history. We've even got a special section with books about Wal-Mart.

Please take a moment this weekend and visit Labour's Online Bookstore at:

<http://www.labourstart.org/books.shtml>

"How internet radio can change the world: an activist's handbook"

Nine years ago I wrote a book called "The Labour Movement and the Internet: The New Internationalism." I wrote it at a time when unions -- some unions -- were just beginning to use email and the web. The website which all of you know, LabourStart, grew out of one which I built to accompany publication of that book.

Today I'm pleased to let you know about my new book, "How Internet Radio Can Change the World: An Activist's Handbook".

This book introduces the subject of internet radio, goes into the brief history of the technology (created by social change activists, originally), and then gives several brief reports from the front lines, including the Workers Independent News Service and Air America in the USA, Radio B92 in Yugoslavia, and FreeNK internet radio, created by North Korean dissidents. There's a full chapter on the experience of Radio LabourStart, as well as

appendices spelling out to listen to -- and broadcast -- Internet Radio.

For more details about the book, and to order your copy securely online, please go to: <http://www.labourstart.org/radio/book.shtml>.

Every copy of the book that is sold supports LabourStart's news and campaigning activities.

Please spread the word. Thanks. Eric Lee

Events

25 May at 7.00 pm

Venezuela: an example for the rest of Latin America

Mander Hall, NUT Headquarters,
Mabledon Place, London WC1

Speakers:

Richard Gott, writer and author of forthcoming "Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution"

Julia Buxton, Department of Peace Studies,
University of Bradford

Steve Ellner, Universidad del oriente, Venezuela

Keith Sonnet, Deputy General Secretary,
UNISON

Organised by Venezuela Information Centre
info@vicuk.org; www.vicuk.org

27 May at Congress House from 9.30 - 1.30pm
2005 Mobilisation Assembly **Make Poverty History**

Make Poverty History is made up of trade unions, charities, campaigning groups, faith communities and celebrities who are mobilising around key opportunities in 2005 to drive forward the struggle against poverty and injustice. The TUC is hosting the May Assembly in the run up to the mobilisation rally ahead of the G8 Heads of State meeting in Scotland in July.

Useful websites

Worldwide trade union news (updated daily):

www.labourstart.org

TUC: www.tuc.org.uk

www.tuc.org.uk/globalisation

www.tuc.org.uk/international

Commonwealth trade union group at the ICFTU

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221139&Language=EN>

ICFTU: www.icftu.org

Action for Southern Africa: www.actsa.org

Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org

War on Want: www.waronwant.org

Global Workplace: www.globalworkplace.org

(War on Want website for trade union activists)

TUAC: www.tuac.org

ILO: www.ilo.org

Ethical Trading Initiative: www.ethicaltrade.org

Congress of South African Trade Unions

(COSATU): www.cosatu.org.za

Child Labour News Service (CLNS), managed by the Global March Against Child Labour, is produced as a non-commercial public service.

Archives available at www.childlabournews.info

New Internationalist: reporting on issues of

world poverty and inequality: www.newint.org

China Labour Bulletin www.china-labour.org.hk

World Development Movement

www.wdm.org.uk

Landmine action website:

www.landmineaction.org

International Crisis Group website:

www.crisisweb.org

Health and Safety/Hazards website:

www.hazards.org

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- News about trade and globalisation
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- Information on events and publications

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International Development Matters (IDM) is produced by Annie Watson, adviser to the TUC on international development and Commonwealth issues. All items for inclusion in the newsletter or ideas about the content should be sent by email to awatson@tuc.org.uk.

If you would prefer to send in your items or comments by post, please address them to:

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