**Improving employment prospects of disabled people in Ethiopia**

TUC Aid – development arm of the British trade movement – is continuing its support for the promotion of human and employment rights of disabled people in East Africa. It has made a three-year grant for the implementation of the Employment Support Programme for Trade Union Workers with Disabilities in Ethiopia Project in collaboration with the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU). The current programme builds on the successes of similar programmes in Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda carried out by Disability Aid Abroad (DAA), a Northern Ireland charity, with financial support from the international trade union movement including TUC Aid.

The project will provide specialised training in disability rights for trade union officials in the CETU and those of its affiliates with a view to enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the rights of disabled people in the most populous country in East Africa. It seeks to improve employment prospects of disabled workers through awareness-raising of their rights and entitlements among disabled people, trade unions, employers, government agencies and the general public. The current initiative modelled on the concept of “disability champions” developed by British trade unions will focus on:

* The creation of a **‘**disability champions’ employment support program by CETU and its affiliates;
* The development of a disability and equality program for public and private sector employees and employers so as to create a climate of opinion conducive to the employment of disabled workers; and,
* The improvement of advocacy skills among workers with disabilities, particularly disabled women, aimed at influencing government, local authorities and decision makers on disability-related legislation and issues.

The technical expertise of a disability awareness and employment support advisor from Disability Action, Northern Ireland, will be made available for CETU and local disability rights groups to develop a disability awareness and employment support programme for workers with disabilities and produce information and education material on disability rights for disability rights groups, CETU and its affiliates. In addition, the project will take into account the particular needs of disabled women and find ways and means of addressing them. Women with disabilities in Ethiopia are particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse and face additional barriers to full equality and advancement, often, due to their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability.The persistence of cultural, legal and institutional barriers makes women and girls with disabilities the victims of two-fold discrimination: as women and as persons with disabilities.

The present initiative follows a disability employment support seminar held in November 2013 in Adama, Ethiopia, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which paved the way for the development of a trade union programme to support disabled people in their search for gainful employment opportunities. Sean McGovern, co-chair, TUC Disabled Workers’ Committee, who addressed the seminar, played a key role in providing technical expertise for the seminar.