

Major change proposed by ICFTU at its World Congress

Miyazaki, Japan, 5 December 2004: The international labour movement is unveiling its plans for major change to effectively confront the forces of capital and conservatism and ensure that the fundamental rights denied to millions of workers across the world are properly respected.

At the opening ceremony of the ICFTU World Congress (<http://congress.icftu.org>) which begins on Sunday 5 December 2004 in Miyazaki, Japan, ICFTU President Fackson Shamenda is expected to raise the issue of globalisation and its impact on labour markets and highlight the need to work for those suffering the negative effects of the global trading system.

“Today’s model of globalization is unbalanced and unsustainable” according to Shamenda. “It is not favourable to workers’ interests and is generating greater inequality and insecurity.”

Joined on Sunday by dignitaries including the United Nations Under Secretary-General Kim Hak Su, over 900 representatives of trade unions worldwide are voicing concerns that the winners and losers of globalisation are all too often taken for granted and called on workers to challenge the accepted view of their place as they “losers”.

The ICFTU is concerned by the trend of jobs migrating to countries where workers are forcibly deprived of the benefits of trade union representation. On the occasion of its 18th World Congress, the ICFTU is due to set out its vision on how to more effectively deal with such issues, especially in view of imminent major changes in the international trading regime. Foremost of these is the ending of textile quotas on 1 January 2005 which is expected to further boost China’s role as the “world’s union- free workshop” at the expense of other developing countries.

In a resolution on globalisation to be presented at Congress, the ICFTU, as the world’s largest trade union body, is expected to reaffirm its pledge to work for “decent employment, workers’ rights, equality for women and for sustainable development to be promoted effectively by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank”.

As part of a planned programme of restructuring and revitalisation, in the coming 5 days, representatives of the 234 national trade union affiliates of the ICFTU will debate and ultimately decide on a proposal for unification with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and others to create a new international trade union body. This has the potential of creating an even stronger trade union international organisation which will speak with a single voice for the world’s working people.

“The world of work is being transformed around us” commented ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. “It is an illusion that the union movement can just stand still whilst the lives of millions of workers undergo dramatic change”.

From 5 - 10 December, the ICFTU World Congress will welcome speakers such as Finnish President Tarja Halonen and the President of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa, co-chairs of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, and the

Director General of the International Labour Organisation Juan Somavia. The speeches by the co-chairs will coincide with the launch of trade union involvement in a new and wide-ranging anti-poverty alliance - the "Global Call to Action Against Poverty", to be run in conjunction with other civil society organizations across the world throughout 2005. The ICFTU will also launch a new study on the working conditions in export processing zones (EPZs) where millions of workers receive poverty wages in abusive and exploitative working conditions, producing goods for global markets.