

## **Tsunami disaster: International union movement mobilizes solidarity**

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### **ICFTU ONLINE . . .**

Brussels, 30 December 2004 (ICFTU OnLine). In the wake of the massive tsunami disaster which has hit South and Southeast Asian countries on 26 December, the ICFTU has written to its affiliated and friendly organisations in the countries concerned, expressing its condolences, support and solidarity to trade unions, their members, families and communities.

While admitting it could clearly not itself "meet the formidable challenge of providing the necessary humanitarian assistance", the ICFTU said it wanted to "concentrate its own relief efforts on losses brought upon the union movement itself, such as loss to union infrastructure" and "support, within the limits of available means, the unions' own humanitarian initiatives". The ICFTU has requested unions concerned, in cooperation with its Regional organisation, ICFTU-APRO, to inform it about the extent of losses suffered by their structures and members. For its part, ICFTU-APRO said it had made initial financial contributions to its affiliated organisations for their operations in the devastated areas.

Initial reports from union sources in Thailand said 200,000 people were likely to be "economically struck" in Southern Thailand's tourism industry where, in Phuket alone, 50,000 workers are employed in the island's hotels. Officials estimate that 10,000 might lose their jobs as a result of the tidal wave disaster. Concerns were also expressed about the fate of up to 50,000 migrant workers from Burma employed in Southern Thailand, many of them illegally. Across the region, great concern was also expressed for the fate of plantation workers in Indonesia, tourism workers in Malaysia, as well as various categories of workers and their relatives in Sri Lanka and India.

Meanwhile, various national union centers and Global Union Federations (GUFs) have already announced that they are taking action to bring assistance to workers in the countries hit by the tsunami. ICFTU affiliates in Norway (LO), Sweden (LO) and Austria (OeGB) have made financial contributions to relief efforts; in Vienna, the OeGB also issued a joint call with Austria's employers' organisation

for the public to contribute generously to the nation's relief funds. In Italy, the ICFTU's three national centers, CISL, CGIL and UIL, have requested the country's Foreign and Interior Ministers to establish an information center for migrant workers originating from countries affected by the disaster, in order to assist them in obtaining information about their relatives. In France, the ICFTU-affiliated CFDT called on its members to support relief efforts through contributions to humanitarian organisations.

In Geneva, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF), which organizes workers in the hotel and tourism industry, has started collecting information from its affiliates in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka and sent several of its regional representatives to investigate on the spot. In London, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) said it was expecting news from its member organisations in the region; it noted workers in port areas would be particularly affected. Other GUFs were believed to take similar action.

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