

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

**INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED CORE
LABOUR STANDARDS IN THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

**REPORT FOR THE WTO GENERAL COUNCIL REVIEW OF THE
TRADE POLICIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
(Geneva, 24 and 26 November, 2010)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Democratic Republic of Congo has ratified all eight core ILO labour Conventions. In view of restrictions on the trade union rights of workers, discrimination, child labour, and forced labour, determined measures are needed to comply with the commitments the Democratic Republic of Congo accepted at Geneva and Doha in the WTO Ministerial Declarations over 1998-2001, and in the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its 2008 Social Justice Declaration.

The law recognises the rights to form and join a union, collectively bargain and strike. In practice, many trade unions are organised by employers and there are many cases of unionists being arrested, prosecuted and punished illegally.

Women face discrimination in employment and remuneration and most women are employed in low-skilled jobs. Women need their husbands' authorisation in order to perform salaried work. Certain ethnicities are subjected to marginalisation and discrimination and they lack control over their lands and assets. There is no provision of employment opportunities, access to buildings and social services for disabled persons.

Child labour is regulated by the law and children are not allowed to perform hazardous work. In practice, many children perform the worst forms of child labour in mines, quarries or as forced prostitutes. The recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups and certain units of the national forces is an alarming problem.

Forced labour and certain forms of human trafficking are illegal. In practice, trafficking in human beings and forced labour are problems and particularly afflict children. Armed groups are still involved in human trafficking and forced labour. There has been no conviction on human trafficking, although some cases have been prosecuted.

INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED CORE LABOUR STANDARDS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Introduction

This report on the respect of internationally recognised core labour standards in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the series the ITUC is producing in accordance with the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the first Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Singapore, 9-13 December 1996) in which Ministers stated: "We renew our commitment to the observance of internationally recognised core labour standards." The fourth Ministerial Conference (Doha, 9-14 November 2001) reaffirmed this commitment. These standards were further upheld in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted by the 174 member countries of the ILO at the International Labour Conference in June 1998 and in the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation adopted unanimously by the ILO in 2008.

The ITUC affiliates in the Democratic Republic of Congo are the Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT), the Confédération Syndicale du Congo (CSC) and the Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Congo (UNTC), which have 490,000 members covering various areas of employment.

I. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

In 2001, the Democratic Republic of Congo ratified ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise. In 1969 it had ratified Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining.

The 2006 Constitution allows workers, except government officials and security forces, to form and join unions. However, the unionisation rate is low because 90 per cent of the economy consists of informal activities like subsistence agriculture. Foreigners have no right to hold trade union office if they do not reside for at least 20 years in Democratic Republic of Congo, a requirement that the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) has found to be excessive. The law protects unions' activities from employers' interference but it is reported that many employers register unions that they organise in order to discourage independent unions from being organised, especially in the extraction industries. The unionisation rate in the private sector is extremely low. The law prohibits anti-union discrimination but it occurs in practice and remained unpunished. The law establishes the right of a worker that has been fired for union activity to be reinstated; however there is no information on the application of this provision.

Workers, except local government staff, enjoy the right to collectively bargain and strike. Unions negotiate with the government and employers in the National

Employment Council, but in the public sector, the government refuses to negotiate and sets wages by decree. The right to strike is recognised; nonetheless unions must adhere to lengthy compulsory arbitration and appeal procedures. The Labour Code provides for a fine and penal servitude for a maximum of six months if a worker on strike contravenes the arrangements for exercising the right to strike or lockout established by an Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. The law provides for strikers' protection against employers' retaliation.

In practice, the private sector is dominated by bogus unions with inactive members that have been created by employers in order to impede real organising. For example since 2007 the employees of the Catholic Schools of Idiofa are obliged to join only one union which is established by the employers. On the other hand, reports show that free trade unions are harassed. For instance, the management of Siforco, a wood company which belongs to the German group Danzer, ordered the suspension of the union president and the dismissal of the trade union representatives at the facility.

Another problem is that the government favours some foreign investors, like the China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) that impede labour inspections, and discourages local authorities from enforcing trade union and other labour rights. Working conditions and safety regulations are often not respected in such companies, whose management relies on the government's favouritism in order to lower wages or abuse other labour rights. Furthermore, the authorities suppress attempts to report such abuses. On 29 September, a member of an African Human Rights NGO was given a one year suspended sentence for reporting abuses of power and negligence by the local authorities in the uranium mines.

There have been numerous allegations against the independence and efficiency of the courts of justice. In September 2009, the Congo Labour Centre (CCT) had to lodge a complaint with the ILO because, following a serious case of interference by the Director of Congo Customs dating back to 2005, the court did not call the Director to answer the charges. It has also been reported that the police and the security authorities arrest persons arbitrarily. On 19 January 2009, the president of the CCT, Nginamau Malaba, and two other trade union leaders were arrested by agents of the National Intelligence Agency after signing a memorandum denouncing the misappropriation of public funds by the Ministry of the National Economy and Trade. The three unionists were held captives for a month and tortured. They were released on 23 March for 150 dollars bail each but the magistrate refused to examine the unionists' complaint on torture.

In another case, in March 2009, Mulumba Kapepula, an employee of the National Railway Company of Congo (SNCC) was arrested by agents of the National Intelligence Agency for "insulting members of the government" because he had addressed a demonstration of the SNCC workers protesting because the employees' wages were in arrears for 36 months. Mulumba Kapepula was savagely tortured and then charged with offences against the Head of State and finally acquitted, on June 5, for lack of evidence. In other cases police used excessive force to disperse demonstrations. In March 2008 in

Katanga, the police fired into a crowd and killed a boy during a miners' strike and demonstration.

Freedom of assembly is not always respected. On 4 September 2009, a meeting of members of the Education Unions' Synergy was banned and interrupted by police. In December 2009, two more teachers' union meetings were also banned.

There are no export processing zones.

Summary

The law recognises the rights to form and join a union, collectively bargain and strike. In practice, there are few independent unions, and there are many cases of unionists being arrested, prosecuted and punished illegally.

II. Discrimination and Equal Remuneration

The Democratic Republic of Congo ratified Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration in 1969 and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) in 2001.

The law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnic origin and others. However, as the Labour Code does not apply in state public services, the employees of this sector do not enjoy the law's protection from discrimination. Moreover the Labour Code does not establish equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value, and remuneration is defined narrowly as salary. The Labour Code provides that women may not be maintained in jobs acknowledged to be beyond their strength, which reproduces stereotypical conceptions about women's abilities.

Women are discriminated against by the labour law which requires that women obtain the authorisation of their husbands to take up salaried employment, or to become a career member of the public service or appointed magistrates.

Reports show that women received 57 per cent of the remuneration men enjoy and that women are considerably underrepresented in managerial and highly paid positions. The literacy gap between men and women stands close to 40 per cent partly because societal norms dictate that it is more productive to send boys to school rather than girls.

The government is implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy aiming at promoting women's access to decision-making positions.

A 2005 Order prohibits sexual harassment at the workplace. The Order does not cover conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the recipient and the regulation providing for sanctions presupposes registered

enterprise rules or a collective agreement. There is no information regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Racial discrimination has geographic patterns; in certain areas members of certain ethnic groups face discrimination in accessing employment. Persons with albinism also face discrimination in obtaining employment. According to the CEACR, “pygmies (Twa, Mbuti, Bambuti, Batwa, Bacwa and others) are subjected to marginalization and discrimination with regard to the enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights, in particular their access to education, health and the labour market” and “the rights of pygmies to own, exploit, control and use their lands, their resources and communal territories - which are the basis for the exercise of their traditional occupations and livelihood activities - are not guaranteed”.

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities but the government has not made progress in guaranteeing their access to employment, public services and buildings.

There were no reports of discrimination in employment against homosexual persons.

A 2008 law prohibits discrimination against persons who live with HIV/AIDS and there were no reports of discrimination in employment. The Congolese Business Coalition against HIV/AIDS undertakes awareness campaigns and, along with trade unions, facilitates the implementation of effective workplace programmes against HIV/AIDS. The UNTC is presently focusing on prevention: 45 trained UNTC employees work as peer educators raising awareness about HIV, modes of transmission and means of prevention and encourage workers to undertake voluntary testing. The UNTC has trained 400 union members to act as peer educators within their workplaces during lunch breaks. They also inform informal workers about the centres for testing or treatment and provide them with condoms and antiretroviral drugs (ARV).

Summary

Women face discrimination in employment and remuneration and most women are employed in low-skilled jobs with few women in management positions. Women need their husbands' authorisation in order to perform salaried work. Certain ethnicities are subjected to marginalisation and discrimination and lack control over their lands and assets.

III. Child Labour

The Democratic Republic of Congo has ratified Convention No. 138, the Minimum Age Convention and Convention No. 182, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, both in 2001.

The law sets the minimum age for admission to work at the age of 15 after the employer has obtained the consent of the parents or guardians of the child. Children younger than 16 years of age are not allowed to work for more than 4 hours per day and all children are barred from working in hazardous job positions, which are included in a list compiled by the government. A list of light work authorised for persons between the ages of 14 and 16 years was decided in 1975 and the government has now promised to revise it.

However the authorities lack financial and human resources to perform controls and prosecute offenders who make use of illegal child labour. There is no dedicated inspectorate charged with carrying out child labour controls. In 2009, the police reported one company using illegal child labour.

Most rural child labour is found in mines, stone quarries and subsistence agriculture. In the cities, children work as water sellers and street vendors as well as in bars, hotels and domestic servitude. There are reports that many children, particularly girls, are engaged in prostitution, sometimes encouraged by their families. UNICEF's report "The state of the world's children" reveals that 29 per cent of boys and 34 per cent of girls between 5 and 14 years of age perform child labour. The ILO estimated in 2000 that 1,895,000 children aged between 10 and 14 years were economically active. Of this number, 1,003,000 were boys and 892,000 were girls.

Many children perform the worst forms of child labour in mines and quarries where they comprise on average about one third of quarries' and mines' workforce. According to reports by NGOs and news agencies the problem is prevalent in mining regions in Democratic Republic of Congo such as Katanga, Kasai and Kivu which are rich in cobalt, uranium, gold, diamonds, copper and other ores. Children reportedly work in order to contribute to their family's income or to cover the education costs of other members of their family. In 2009, the ILO called the government, trade unions and employers to discuss the issue of child miners in Katanga and design appropriate policies to withdraw children from mines.

It is reported that families which cannot support a child often send it to relatives or family benefactors where children might be subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

Many children are forced into military recruitment primarily by armed groups. Although child soldiers used to join armed forces in order to escape domestic violence or poverty, reports show that recently recruitment of minors is increasingly becoming involuntary. Armed groups such as the Rwandan "Forces démocratiques de liberation" (FDLR) and the Ugandan "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA) operate in Democratic Republic of Congo along with Mai-Mai and other local armed groups and recruit children with the intention of coercing them into becoming fighters or undertaking forced labour in mines under their control. The law punishes recruiters of child soldiers with 20 years in prison; however the enforcement of this law is poor.

Due to efforts of the UN, NGOs, and the government under the national programme for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration more than 36,000 children in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been rescued from armed forces and groups since 2004. Nonetheless, it is reported to be rarer that girls are rescued because the groups' chiefs would not allow them to be rescued as they play the multiple roles of scouts, porters, sexual slaves and soldiers. In the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where recruitment and coercion of children into soldiers is frequent, only 20 per cent of rescued children cared for by UNICEF and partners are girls. The country's long standing internal conflicts and the prevalent impunity have given space for numerous rapes and acts of sexual violence particularly against women and children, usually from combating parties. Although the Congolese National Forces (FARDC) do not systematically recruit children, there are some children still in the ranks, usually child-soldiers of armed groups that have been incorporated in FARDC and never demobilised. Moreover, former rebel commanders that have been incorporated into the FARDC have been reported to recruit children, even if the FARDC's leadership has clearly denounced and forbidden this practice.

According to Human Rights Watch the LRA has been raiding schools to force children into armed groups. Reportedly, this is partly the reason of low school attendance rates. Another reason is the lack of schools and the disorganisation of those which exist, especially in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Many families cannot afford sending their children to school because it is costly.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have assisted in the reconstruction of damaged schools and over 12,000 displaced children have benefited from emergency support programmes for education. The government has been implementing projects to improve attendance rates, including the Support Project for the Recovery of the Educational Sector (PARSEC) and the Support Project for the Educational Sector (PASE).

Summary

Child labour is regulated by the law and children are not allowed to perform hazardous work. In practice, many children perform the worst forms of child labour in mines, quarries or as forced prostitutes. The recruitment of child soldiers by several armed groups is an alarming problem.

IV. Forced Labour

The Democratic Republic of Congo has ratified Convention No. 29, the Forced Labour Convention in 1960 and Convention No. 105, the Abolition of Forced Labour, in 2001.

Forced labour is illegal under several laws, such as the 2006 law on sexual violence, as well as under constitutional provisions on involuntary recruitment in armed

forces. Several laws and provisions prohibit different forms of trafficking in human beings. However, the country's law fails to clearly prohibit all forms of human trafficking and particularly trafficking of children. The law provides penalties of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment for child and forced prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The law establishes penal servitude inside or outside jails for a series of political actions like insulting members of the National Assembly or the Government, the circulation of bulletins or flyers of foreign origin or inspiration which could harm the national interest, and displaying in public places any object or image that might cause a breach of the peace. The CEACR considers that these provisions of the Penal Code establish penal servitude as a penalty for expressing political opinions, which is contrary to the core ILO conventions on forced labour. As mentioned above, these provisions were used in order to justify the arrest of Mulumba Kapepula in March 2009, even if finally he was not convicted or legally incarcerated for insulting the government. The law also prescribes forced labour for those convicted of vagrancy or begging.

In practice, forced labour is widespread. Many persons, including children, are forced to work in mines, quarries and subsistent agriculture either by individuals or armed groups. Unlicensed miners often pay dealers an excessive price for food, tools and other goods and must sell their ore below market prices, frequently resulting in debt bondage. Many children, particularly girls, are forced into prostitution in places close to mines. There are reports that policemen arbitrarily arrest individuals in order to extort money and subsequently force them into labour if they cannot pay in cash.

Most human trafficking is internal and takes place for the purposes of forced prostitution and forced labour, usually in the extraction industry. Several armed groups abduct individuals in order to operate mines, carry supplies and build camps or for the purposes of domestic servitude and prostitution. In the past years this practice was used as well by members of the FARDC, usually by branches of armed groups which were incorporated and still used practices from their guerrilla past. There has been no official investigation, prosecution or punishment for these actions of the FARDC.

The government has not taken any measures to limit, prevent and prosecute human trafficking, primarily because it lacks capacity. Many consider that the government is not in full control of its security forces and has failed to adequately and effectively control its territory and protect its people from unconstitutional and foreign armed groups.

Corruption among judges, law enforcers and prison officers is rife and the work of these institutions is poor. Corrupt officials usurp state resources making the function of the institutions more difficult. Some offenders of the legal provisions on forced labour and trafficking have been arrested; however, none of them has been convicted although in some cases there is no information on the outcome of the prosecution.

Moreover, there are reports that many pygmies and other indigenous persons face traditional forms of slavery by local chiefs and wealthy individuals. For enslaved pygmies the slavery status is ascribed at birth and slavery is reproduced through generations.

The government has not offered significant help to victims of trafficking, and NGOs which run their own shelters and provide rehabilitation services have to look for victims themselves. On the other hand, the National Demobilization Agency and the UN forces in Democratic Republic of Congo have played an important role in identifying and demobilising child soldiers. Provincial authorities have provided some assistance in rehabilitating child miners into the schooling system.

The government has implemented some campaigns to raise awareness on human rights abuses and the army headquarters of Goma in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo issued one order to remind the armed forces that it has “zero tolerance” for human rights abuses.

Summary

Forced labour and certain forms of human trafficking are illegal. In practice, trafficking in human beings and forced labour are problems and particularly afflict children. Armed groups are still involved in human trafficking and forced labour. There has been no conviction on human trafficking, even if some cases were prosecuted.

Recommendations

1. The government should enable government officials and members of the police to form and join unions. The right to collectively bargain should be enabled for local government staff, and the government should negotiate with public sector unions and conclude collective agreements and set wages.
2. The government should allow foreigners to hold trade union office and leadership positions without excessive requirements in terms of length of residency.
3. The authorities need to urgently take measures against employers who register unions that they organise.
4. The authorities should stop harassing free trade unions and protect them from employers' harassment. Law enforcers should start punishing anti-union discrimination cases and facilitate the complaints procedures.
5. The provision of the Labour Code which provides for a fine and penal servitude for a maximum of six months when a worker on strike contravenes the provisions of the Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, should be abolished.
6. The government should start fighting corruption especially among judges, public servants, law enforcers and prison officers, so to achieve effective law enforcement. It needs to take strong action against public servants who conceal the labour rights violations of foreign companies.
7. The police and the security authorities must be subject to the rule of law and must not be allowed to arrest persons arbitrarily or commit any other unlawful act. The National Intelligence Agency should not be used against strikers or citizens assemblies.
8. Freedom of assembly should be guaranteed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The police should not interrupt gatherings or arrest participants of assemblies.
9. The coverage of the Labour Code should be extended to apply in state public services so that discrimination is made illegal in that sector.
10. The Labour Code should be amended in order to establish equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value and remuneration should be defined broadly.
11. The Labour Code should be amended in order not to require from women to get their husband's authorisation in order to become employed.
12. The Labour Code should be amended in order not to discriminate against women or reproduce stereotypes about the female abilities.
13. The government should take measures to improve women's participation in the workforce and women's access to high skilled and high paid jobs and to close the wage gap.

14. The 2005 Order on sexual harassment at the workplace should prescribe penalties for this crime and sufficient compensation for the victims.
15. The state should take educational measures and inform the public with a view to changing the societal norms on ethnic groups which give space for ethnic discrimination. In particular, the state should protect pygmies and respect their land rights, which are deemed necessary so that pygmies can sustain their economic activity based on traditional occupations. The government should protect persons with albinism and should inform the public with a view to changing the current societal norms which give space for discrimination against them.
16. The authorities should guarantee disabled persons' access to employment, public services and buildings.
17. The government should actively encourage companies to adopt workplace HIV/AIDS programmes.
18. The government should take urgent measures to improve school enrolment and attendance rates, with an emphasis on improving female literacy rates.
19. The authorities must do more in order to rescue more girls who are now forced by armed groups.
20. The government should take urgent measures in order to punish those who recruit or force children into armed groups. The government should also start punishing commanders of FARDC who still use unconstitutional and abusive methods to force citizens into labour, recruit soldiers, often child soldiers, and those who refuse to demobilise child soldiers from their units.
21. The government needs to urgently address the issue of child prostitution by more controls, immediate prosecution and finally conviction of those who force children into prostitution, starting in the areas where information shows that the problem is the most prevalent.
22. The country's law should be amended in order to prohibit all forms of human trafficking and particularly trafficking of children. The government should prosecute and convict traffickers and build up capacity to offer assistance and services to victims, adopt rehabilitation and repatriation policies, and take preventive measures with a view to eliminating trafficking.
23. The Penal Code's articles which establish penal servitude as a penalty for expressing political opinions should be abolished.
24. Reports of traditional forms of slavery should be investigated and those who commit this crime should be punished. Law enforcers should investigate and rescue unlicensed miners who are debt peons of middlemen and dealers of ore.
25. The government should build up its law enforcement and judicial capacity in order to monitor and enforce all labour laws, including legislation on violations of trade union rights, child labour, forced labour and trafficking, and start punishing those who commit these crimes, especially in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and in the extracting industry.

26. The Labour Inspectorates need to be adequately funded and manned and the inspectors to be properly trained.
27. In line with the commitments accepted by Democratic Republic of Congo at the Singapore and Doha WTO Ministerial Conferences and their obligations as members of the ILO, the government of Democratic Republic of Congo should provide regular reports to the WTO and the ILO on their legislative changes and implementation of all the core labour standards.
28. The WTO should draw to the attention of the authorities of Democratic Republic of Congo to the commitments they undertook to observe core labour standards at the Singapore and Doha Ministerial Conferences. The WTO should request the ILO to intensify its work with the government of Democratic Republic of Congo in these areas and provide a report to the WTO General Council on the occasion of the next trade policy review.

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