



**STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR
STANDARDISATION**

1.The ITUC General Council is concerned deeply by the declared intention of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) to enter into areas involving public policy including social issues. In 2008 the development of the ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility will enter a new stage. It will certainly be followed by other initiatives to develop standards that will affect workers and their trade unions. There is an urgent need for trade unions to support a coordinated international response requiring a concerted effort by national as well as international trade union organisations.

2.Standards concerning the world of work including occupational health and safety and the human rights of workers lie within the competence of the ILO and not that of the ISO. Although technical standards can be useful in the support of the application of public policy they must not become a way to shape public policy through decisions that should be made through democratic political processes. ISO processes developed for traditional standardisation are inadequate for social policy because they do not involve the right participants. This is the experience with the ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility despite the fact that, for the first time, the ISO sought to develop a standard through previously identified “stakeholder categories” including labour. Too many participants possess neither the expertise needed nor are they genuine representatives of the parties that should be involved. Unlike the ILO, the ISO cannot require its national member bodies to engage the most representative organisations nor to support their involvement on a proportionate basis. Thus there is a disproportionate influence by business and by parties seeking to profit from such standards by selling compliance certifications or consultancy services. Without significant change in ISO rules, workers will always remain underrepresented in ISO processes.

3.The international trade union decision to participate in the development of an ISO standard on social responsibility was not taken lightly. It reflected an appreciation of both opportunities and challenges. Objections in principle to the ISO working on social

issues were balanced against the dangerous potential consequences of not being present where decisions affecting workers' interests were being made. The conditions that continue to guide trade union participation in the development of ISO 26000 were set forth in a resolution adopted by the ICFTU Executive Board in December 2005. Although it is not inevitable that this standard will be finished or adopted, this is increasingly likely.

4. As a result of trade union engagement the draft ISO 26000 standard in its present form advances the interests of workers and protects the role of the ILO. In 2008 the process will enter into a new stage when the draft standard will be passed to the ISO national member bodies for comment. The influence of trade unions in protecting what has been achieved so far and in developing the standard further will become dependent on national trade union involvement in multi-stakeholder committees ("mirror committees"). These committees are established by national standards institutes in order to develop a national consensus on ISO 26000.

5. The ITUC General Council calls upon national trade unions to:

- (a) Protect trade unions' concerns and interests by getting involved with the "mirror committees" established by national standards bodies to develop a national consensus on the ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility;
- (b) Work in these "mirror committees" so as to ensure that the text achieved by trade unions at the international level is not lost or diluted;
- (c) Coordinate with the ITUC to achieve the basic objectives of the international trade union movement; and
- (d) Support the ITUC in defending international labour standards, their interpretation and their supervision through the tripartite International Labour Organisation especially in situations where the ISO or other private standards setting initiatives go beyond their competence to the detriment of workers and their trade unions; and
- (e) Support the referencing in ISO 26000 of authoritative universally applicable intergovernmental instruments that address the behaviour of organisations such as the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises but oppose referencing of private initiatives that may, or may not, be based on such authoritative instruments.