

General observation

In its recognition of the 60th anniversary of the freedom of association Convention, the Committee observes with concern that there are significant lacunae in the application of the Convention with respect to specific categories of workers. In light of the discussion in March 2008 in the Governing Body's Committee on Employment and Social Policy in relation to export processing zones (EPZs), the Committee would refer in particular to its past consideration of the application of Conventions in EPZs. In 1999, the Committee had taken note of the report of the Tripartite Meeting of Export Processing Zones-Operating Countries, which had highlighted the disparity between *de jure* and *de facto* application of labour standards in EPZs and between EPZ workers and those not working in EPZs, particularly as regards the right to organize and to bargain collectively. This information is all the more alarming in light of the estimates made in this year's report from the ILO InFocus Initiative on EPZs to the Governing Body (www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/themes/epz.htm) that there are around 3,500 EPZs throughout the world, operating in 120 countries and territories and employing around 66 million people. The Committee further finds it of particular concern when considering the importance of fundamental human rights, in particular equality of treatment, that there is often an extremely high proportion of women among EPZ workers deprived of their rights. A perusal of the Committee's comments this year on the application of Convention No. 87 by ratifying countries lends weight to the importance of the obstacles faced by many EPZ workers and, in some cases, illustrates the dramatic impact this has had on society overall.

The Committee wishes also to raise the particular challenges faced by workers in the informal economy in relation to organizational rights. In many countries around the world, the informal economy represents between half and three-quarters of the overall workforce. The Committee, in reaffirming that Convention No. 87 is applicable to all workers and employers without distinction whatsoever, is heartened by innovative approaches taken by governments, workers' and employers' organizations over recent years to organize those in the informal economy, but observes that these are few and far between and that the full benefits of the Convention rarely reach the informal economy.

In follow up to discussions in the Governing Body in relation to EPZs and the conclusions of the 2002 Conference Committee concerning decent work and the informal economy, the Committee wishes to request governments to provide information with their next reports due on:

Export processing zones:

- the nature and extent of the workforce in any EPZs in the country (number of workers, percentage of women, percentage of migrants);
- the legislation applicable to EPZs and the manner in which the rights under the Convention are assured to EPZ workers;

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- the number of trade unions in existing EPZs and the percentage of the workforce in the EPZs that is represented by unions;
- the bodies, institutions or other means available for trade unions to represent the interests of the EPZ workers they represent.

Informal economy:

- the nature and extent of the informal economy in the country, including percentage of women, percentage of migrants;
- any initiatives taken to ensure either in law or in practice the realization of the rights under the Convention to those in the informal economy.