

Media Release – For immediate use

EU Trade Strategy Needs Major Overhaul to Ensure Decent Work and Sustainable Development In and Outside the EU

Brussels, 17 November 2009

As the European institutions gear up to revise the Lisbon Jobs and Growth Strategy and the European Parliament prepares to take on new powers in trade policy making, labour leaders and activists from around the world will meet EU representatives in Brussels to discuss how trading rules can be changed to put a stop to jobless and unsustainable growth and instead ensure decent work and decent lives for all.

The labour movement and civil society organisations, as well as governments in developing countries, will raise serious concerns about the impact of the European Union's *Global Europe*' trade strategy on decent work – presenting evidence of consequences such as unemployment, harmful impacts on the level and quality of social protection and public services as well as conditions and labour rights more generally.

The conference, to be held on the 18th and 19th of November, will hear evidence of labour rights abuses from workers in countries such as Colombia and Sri Lanka, both of which currently enjoy preferential market access to EU markets under the GSP+ system which explicitly conditions market access on governments upholding labour and human rights. The conference will also address key issues relating to the ongoing Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations and the controversy over labour clauses in the proposed EU-India Free Trade Agreement.

“In the context of the financial crisis these concerns have become even graver, given the impact lowering tariffs would have on public revenue and looser public procurement regulations would have on the ability of domestic firms to compete and hence create employment. The crisis has also shown that we need a major re-think of the global trading system, moving from a system based on export-led growth to a system which creates global public goods that can be enjoyed by all”, said Conny Reuter, SOLIDAR Secretary General.

Guillermo Correa, from Colombia's Escuela Nacional Sindical commented that, “whether it's in Colombia, India or other countries around the world, it's always the workers who bear the brunt. In Colombia the European Union continues to negotiate trade agreements with us despite strong protest from human rights organisations and trade unions against the government's abuses of labour rights. With some 70 trade unionists killed each year the EU's lack of political will to hold the government accountable makes a mockery of its pride in “soft power”.

/...

“With workers from throughout the world bearing the brunt of a crisis they did not cause, we need to ensure that all trade instruments ensure decent work, for workers in and outside of Europe. The adoption of the Lisbon Treaty means that the European Parliament will get more power to ensure that the EU’s trade agreements take into account the impact on people’s lives and are not just based on the promotion of the EU’s defensive and offensive interests”, concluded Kader Arif, coordinator of the Socialist & Democrat Group in the European Parliament’s International trade committee.

NOTES

¹Global Europe: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/trade-topics/european-competitiveness/global-europe/>

- [Conference programme](#)
- [Background information](#)
- [Background documents](#)

ENDS

Contact: Abigail Goundry, SOLIDAR Communications Officer

00 32 472 607 449 or abigail.goundry@solidar.org

SOLIDAR is a European network of 53 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs (more social Europe), international cooperation (development cooperation) and education (lifelong learning for all). For more info www.solidar.org