

## **Trade Negotiations and Decent Work: a Gender Perspective**

### **DG Trade, European Commission**

The EU believes that clear social conditions underpin sustainable productivity growth and promote the efficient production of high quality goods and services generating a net added value. Policies that mitigate the adverse effects of a changing economy on specific groups of people or regions, good social services and social protection accessible to all, social dialogue, the respect for fundamental social rights including core labour standards, minimum standards for working conditions and for ensuring workers' upstream involvement in managing change, all play a crucial role.

The ILO core conventions on labour standards cover the elimination of discrimination in the workplace, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, elimination of forced and compulsory labour and the abolition of child labour. ILO Convention 100 covers equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value. Convention 111 defines discrimination as including any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

In the World Trade Organisation (WTO) context, a reference to core labour standards was included in the Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference (Singapore 1996). Regrettably, WTO members have not agreed to include this issue as part of the Doha Development Agenda. Nevertheless, the Commission is committed to addressing trade and social development, core labour standards and commitment to meaningful dialogue between the WTO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), both in the EU's own Trade Policy Review and in the Trade Policy Reviews of other countries. As part of this process, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) reports on core labour standards are prepared ahead of each Trade Policy Review. EU trade policy also remains in favour of observer status for the ILO in the WTO.

The EC has also pursued social development objectives in regional, bi-regional and bilateral arrangements. All its most recent agreements recognise and promote social rights as part of the universal objective of decent work for all. The Commission has for example entered into dialogue and co-operation with countries such as Chile, South Africa and bi-regionally with the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, the Gulf Co-operation Council, Mercosur and other regions. Since 1998, the EC has also been granting further trade preferences under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) special incentive arrangements to those developing countries that assure the respect of the core labour rights as defined by the ILO or comply with internationally recognised standards on sustainable forest management. In the framework of the new GSP scheme adopted on 27 June 2005 by the Council, a new GSP incentive for sustainable development provides additional tariff preferences for countries which have signed and effectively implemented the core UN/ILO human/labour right international conventions.

The EC remains of the view that the discussion and pursuit of social issues should not be used for protectionist purposes, and it rejects any unilateral sanctions-based approach. The objective is to further

social progress with a view to promoting benefits for all.

The EC is currently developing a closer relationship with the ILO on trade-related matters aimed at promoting core labour standards through assessment, capacity building and enforcement in developing countries. In 2005/06, the Commission has been funding an ILO pilot project that aims to develop decent work indicators in developing countries for examining the relationship between decent work and trade liberalisation. Case studies have been undertaken in the Philippines and Uganda. The data gathered include disaggregated statistics on employment, wages and working hours for women and men. These data provide a more sophisticated picture of decent work than previously available. This programme can be used in future aid programmes with developing countries to help them manage social adjustment to further trade liberalisation.