

# TRADE: WTO Talks Overshadow Labour Concerns

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**BRUSSELS, Jul 28 (IPS) - International trade negotiators are ignoring the plight of millions of workers, according to leading trade union groups.**

As trade officials started a four-day general council session at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva Tuesday (Jul. 27), a group of trade unions led by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) criticised the WTO trade negotiations for ignoring the "worsening impact" of trade on peoples' lives and working conditions.

The WTO session aims to produce a framework for the final stretch of the trade talks, and has been called to keep negotiations on track for the Dec. 31 deadline for a new international trade agreement.

But ICFTU says that by putting all their efforts into the Doha Development Round (DDR), trade officials are forgetting other important trade issues.

"Unfortunately, while WTO trade negotiators pore over the fine print of their schedule for completing their Doha Round negotiations, the very basis of support for a multilateral trading system is being cut away from under their feet," Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ICFTU warned.

Ryder is urging governments to "raise their sights and tackle the basic social and development questions" which he says are "at the heart of the inequity and injustice that characterise world trade today."

He says governments will otherwise "fail to mobilise support among their own populations for completing, ratifying and implementing whatever trade deal may ultimately be concluded."

The Doha round was launched in the Qatar capital in 2001. The talks were scheduled to conclude this year, but are months behind schedule.

Negotiators have urged more political will in restarting the Doha trade round since the WTO meeting collapsed in Cancun last September mainly over the billions of dollars a year rich countries spend on farm subsidies.

Trade negotiators are now hoping that a negotiating framework is agreed by the end of July, or else the Doha round risks being sidelined by a new structure in the enlarged European Commission and by the U.S. presidential elections in November.

But ICFTU says that in the meantime other workers' rights are being compromised - particularly in the textile sector. It adds that the position will only get worse when the textile quota system ends next year.

Quantitative restrictions on import of garments and textiles are due to end from January next year with the expiry of the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC).

This would give all WTO members unrestricted access to European, U.S. and Canadian markets.

