

Caption



## Ireland twins with... Lesotho!

It's official! As we announced in the Autumn 2006 issue of the GS Newsletter, Congress has agreed to develop a full partnership agreement with our counterpart in Lesotho, the Lesotho Confederation of Democratic Unions (LECODU).

In early 2006, we received a request for co-operation from LECODU, and earlier this year GS

Project Manager David Joyce went on a fact-finding tour of Lesotho with Joe O'Flynn, Congress Treasurer and President of SIPTU. They met all the senior officials from LECODU as well as Ministry of Labour senior staff and Irish Aid officials in Maseru, the capital.

Lesotho is a small country of just over 30,370 square kilometres (compared to Ireland's 70,000 kms<sup>2</sup>) entirely within the borders of South Africa. It has a population of only 1.8 million, a life expectancy of less than 40 years, and an annual average income of only £500 (€720). The trade union movement in

Lesotho has encountered huge problems in recent years – particularly the loss of thousands of textile jobs and the enormous impact of HIV/AIDS on workers and their families across this small, mountainous and beautiful country perched high in the mountains of Southern Africa.

Ireland is Lesotho's biggest donor and the trade unions there are hoping that we will be able to influence Irish Aid to channel some of the Irish development funds towards the unions' main priorities – which are capacity-building in general, support for the public servants' union (LEPSSA) and training in





areas such as leadership, negotiations, HIV/AIDS and IT (information technology).

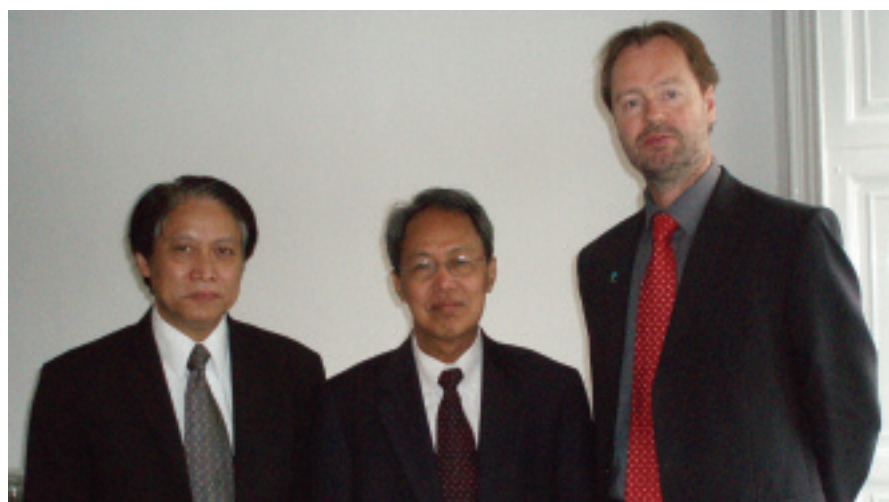
Congress hopes to develop the relationship with LECODU over the coming years and would encourage trade union affiliates to consider what they might be able to do to help comrades in Lesotho.

This long-term relationship should give all affiliates and their members the opportunity to engage at first hand in developing the kind of links and understanding of international poverty and global solidarity on which the trade union movement in Ireland has been successfully built over the last 100 years and more. It is an opportunity and a

challenge: Global Solidarity will be able to move from a development education project to a real, practical example of partnership and solidarity.

For more information, please follow developments on [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)

## Burma: Continuous pressure on the military regime is needed



Continuous pressure on the Burmese military regime, support for ILO efforts to end forced labour in the country and renewed trade union action against investments in and trade with Burma are the key decisions of an international trade union Conference on Democracy for Burma, held in

Kathmandu (Nepal) on 3-4 April 2007. The meeting, the fourth of its kind, was organised by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and brought together over 70 delegates from 20 countries in Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America. It was hosted by the ITUC's three affiliates in the

country, NTUC, GEFONT and DECONT, with the support of the ITUC's Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation, APRO.

In a five-page statement adopted by the Conference and containing over 30 items for action, participants called on the regime to engage in genuine dialogue with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic nationalities' and to implement all the recommendations of an ILO Commission of Inquiry which in 1998 had demanded the junta immediately end the use of forced labour and prosecute those responsible for this crime against humanity. The Conference also called for the release of NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political and trade union prisoners, including FTUB leader Myo Aung Thant.

**Read the Conference statement here:**

[http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Final\\_Declaration\\_-\\_ITUC\\_Burma\\_Conference\\_-\\_Kathmandu\\_3-4\\_April\\_2007\\_.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Final_Declaration_-_ITUC_Burma_Conference_-_Kathmandu_3-4_April_2007_.pdf)



# Zimbabwe: all news is bad news

Trade unionists will have heard that inflation in Zimbabwe hit an unbelievable 3,700% per year in April this year. This means that a basket of groceries that cost £10 or €10 in January would cost £370 or €370 in December of the same year! Nobody can survive in those kinds of horrific economic circumstances. Only one adult in five is in paid employment, which means there is no income going into the vast majority of households in Zimbabwe. Traders cannot get hold of goods from overseas so stores and shops stock less and less of the necessities of life: most people are forced back to a primitive, subsistence lifestyle outside the formal economy.

But trade unionists have even more difficulties to contend with: the brutal Mugabe dictatorship has resorted to arrests, beatings and intimidation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change over the last few years. Food aid from abroad has been provided through Government channels only to people swearing loyalty and support to Mugabe's ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African national Union - Patriotic Front) party.

Slums have been cleared by Government decision with no consultation, often involving the brutal demolition of thousands of poor people's homes – and many of them have been opposition supporters in the townships. And land has been taken away from white farmers, only to be given to Mugabe's cronies rather than the millions of landless black farmers desperate to work.

South Africa has been reluctantly forced to take a more active interest in pushing for reforms but there appear to be divisions within the Government of Zimbabwe as well as within the opposition. Dialogue and agreement appear to be further away than ever, and the prospects for peaceful settlement of all these disagreements are very bleak. The collapse of the government is quite likely, which would lead to even more difficulties for ordinary men and women.

Congress General Secretary David Begg has written to the Taoiseach to express our concern and outrage at the events in Zimbabwe and we have been assured by the Prime Minister that the Government shares our anger and is working hard within Europe to push for democratic, peaceful change.

Keep up to date with events in that sad country by logging on to

[www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)



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## Solidarity in Action: NIPSA supports Indonesian Unions

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), the largest trade union in NI, has announced that its Executive approved a grant enabling the Indonesian trade union movement to translate into Indonesian Bahasa the Global Solidarity report on Corporate Social Responsibility.

NIPSA's Global Solidarity Committee is increasingly focussing on practical examples of solidarity action that can bring maximum benefit to trade unionists in poor countries.

Chair person Janette McNulty said that NIPSA were happy to be able to add their support to colleagues in Indonesia where harsh conditions exist for trade unionists and where years of near-totalitarian rule have left democracy in tatters and the people still extremely poor. The Asian debt crisis in the late 1990s caused untold misery for millions of people, including in Indonesia.

Congress' report on Corporate Social Responsibility has been very warmly welcomed in many different countries and this support from NIPSA for an Indonesian translation can only help spread the message that voluntary codes – written by business for business – can never replace the legal frameworks that workers need for their health, protection, safety and dignity.

## Kids in the Classroom – or as Factory Fodder?

A year ago, Global Solidarity produced a report called Ending Child Labour: the role of trade unions (see [www.ictuglobal solidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobal solidarity.org) to read or download a copy). We examined the problem across the world and what trade unionists can do to combat it.

In June 2007, there are still cases coming to light of child labour. In a raid on brick kilns in Shanxi and Henan Provinces in China, almost 500 people were free from salve conditions – including well over 100 children. The slaves had been beaten, burnt, starved and kept on the site by the use of savage guard dogs.

The ITUC (International Confederation of Trade Unions) has long argued that high profile investigations by officials only scratch the surface of the problem of child labour, trafficking and slavery.

In China, there are no independent courts, no free press and no opposition parties so it is all too easy for corrupt local officials to ignore labour laws and agreements.

This is, unfortunately, a perfect example of the lack of proper regulation of labour conditions and of the need to enforce much more thoroughly the Core Labour Standards of the ILO.

Last year, Global Solidarity produced a report on Corporate Social Responsibility – which is a voluntary way for employers to promise to improve conditions within their factories, shops, warehouses and offices – and we showed how reliance on a purely voluntary arrangement would never work.

As long as bosses only seek the 'bottom line' of ever-greater profits, there will be evils such as child labour, forced labour and discrimination in the work place. And as long as those evils exist, there will always be trade unions fighting for social justice and a world where children have the right to go to school and to enjoy the rights and privileges of a real childhood.



# Trade Justice!

Activists from the Trade Matters Campaign gathered at the German Embassy in Dublin. Germany currently holds the presidency of the EU. The stunt was part of a worldwide mobilisation on April 19, in which thousands of campaigners, workers, farmers and activists across Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific took part in coordinated campaigns outside German embassies to call for a stop to unfair trade deals (Economic Partnership Agreements) between Europe and the developing world.

At the moment the EU is using an unfair advantage over developing countries.

*"The proposed agreements will not help development – they will make people poorer. Europe is being a bully by insisting on a 2007 deadline. As they stand, these deals threaten to undermine poverty reduction and destroy lives across continents"* said Temwa Gondwe from the Malawi Economic Justice Network, who travelled to Dublin to participate in the action.

The Irish coalition on trade insists that current free trade deals along the lines proposed by Europe will destroy livelihoods and undermine future economic growth.

## **So what are Economic Partnership Agreements?**

The EU is negotiating new trade deals with 75 poor countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, known as the ACP. Many of the world's poorest countries are in this group, including 39 out of 46 of the world's Least Developed Countries. Most of these countries are former colonies.



The new deals are called Economic Partnership Agreements, or EPAs. These agreements are supposed to be good for poor countries and help them develop. But the proposals on the table look set to have the opposite effect. They go beyond any of the most damaging proposals that have been under discussion at world trade talks. At the same time, the ACP countries' wishes for the deals to focus on development are being ignored.

## **How would they hurt poorer countries?**

EPAs will force developing countries to open their markets to competition with EU industries and agricultural products. In return those countries would continue to have access to EU markets. Vulnerable farmers, producers and businesses in some of the world's poorest countries will be pitted against those in the richest EU countries. Developing countries have much to lose, and little to gain. The result of the deals could be devastating:

- massive job losses
- deteriorating working conditions
- reduced spending on health and education as revenues slump for developing countries' governments

## **Why should Trade Unionists care?**

For trade unionists, the threats raised by these trade agreements go to the heart of the global

struggle for social and economic justice. Workers' livelihoods and hard won rights are at risk as their countries' economies are opened to EU competition. Standards and working conditions look set to be lowered in a 'race to the bottom'.

Trade unions across the ACP are mobilising to counter this threat and they need your help. We urgently need to demand that EU governments stop the deals going ahead in their current form. Alternative trade deals should be developed to enable developing countries and poor people to benefit from trade, without threatening jobs and livelihoods.

The deals will push 'liberalisation' and free trade on poor countries. Translated, that means developing countries governments could be forced to open their markets to imports from the EU, and to privatise essential public services, such as water, health and education. This could undermine their ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The ICTU is part of the Trade Matters Coalition which is demanding expanded and fairer trade deals with developing countries. Trade Matters Coalition includes ICTU, OXFAM, Trocaire and Christian Aid. If you want more information on the campaign for Trade Matters contact Gareth Keogh, International Development Officer [gareth.keogh@ictu.ie](mailto:gareth.keogh@ictu.ie).



*caption*

## INTO put in that extra mile for the GCE!

An INTO team ran the Belfast Marathon on May Bank Holiday Monday June 4th. The team was made up of Frank Bunting, INTO Northern Secretary; Deirdre O'Connor, INTO Senior Official; Orla Walsh, INTO Official; Laura Gartside, INTO Clerical Officer and Alison Gilliland, INTO Senior Official. The race started at 9am

with 26 miles 385 yards looming ahead. Frank got off to a blistering start and ran 6 miles before handing over to Orla. After completing 3.5 miles Orla handed over to Alison who just about survived a 7.1 mile stretch to hand over to Deirdre. Deirdre took over and raced the 5.3 miles along Belfast Lough. Laura then completed the final 4.3 miles back home to the finish line. The team officially completed the race in 4:02:03 hrs, coming 665th out of 1632 marathon teams. The team was raising funds to support the work of the **Global Campaign for Education**. Anyone wishing to donate to the fund can send their contributions to INTO, 35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

## Congress Campaign to Champion Fair Trade in Ireland

July sees the launch of another campaign to highlight the injustices of the trade system – and to show what we can do as individuals to change things.

The postcard campaign is being launched at the BDC in Bundoran, Co Donegal, and involves the distribution of thousands of postcards asking trade unionists to lobby their favourite shops and report back to Congress on exactly what retailers are doing to promote ethical sourcing of goods in poor countries.

The post cards are being collected at Congress HQ in Dublin and will be used to impress upon the major retail chains just how important is the problem of sweatshop conditions in the fashion and clothing industries. So it's really important that you get as many cards as you can from the Dublin or Belfast offices – or directly through your union – and send them in to Congress. We want thousands of you to put your weight behind this campaign.



Have a look at the postcard at [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org) and order as many as you think you can distribute to friends, family and branch members. Remember, the cards are free – and your small effort now could help people escape terrible working conditions in places like China, Vietnam and Burma.



# So what are our governments doing about development?

The Global Solidarity Newsletter has been helping to keep trade unionists up to date with what the Irish and British Government have been doing to honour the commitments and promises they made at Gleneagles in July 2005. As we have reported in earlier editions, the Irish Government has re-committed to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas co-operation by 2012 and the British Government will do the same by 2013.

So good progress has been promised. But in the two years since the G8 agreement, an astounding 220 million children have died of wholly preventable diseases. We have all known, since the Make Poverty History campaign, that 30,000 children a day die of simple illnesses that could be cured or avoided for next to nothing.

While politicians negotiate, ordinary children, women and men have been dying. While bankers and investors worry about their pensions and their dividends, poverty in poor countries has got worse: the UN estimates that the Millennium Development Goals will not be met by the agreed deadline of 2015 unless major changes are made in the way aid is provided.

As regards debt, a lot of unpayable debt has been cancelled and a total of 22 countries have benefited from a full cancellation of all their debts to the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. But that still leaves developing countries owing an amazing \$3.5 trillion (\$3,500,000,000,000!) of debt to public and private creditors. We still have an awful long way to go if we want to get our governments to make further progress on cancelling the unpayable debt of the world's poorest peoples.

And the huge efforts made last year to cancel debt went essentially to Iraq, Afghanistan and Nigeria for mainly political reasons: dozens of poor countries were passed over as political leaders in the West decided to use their debt relief for what they saw were their priority countries rather than the world's poorest people.

On trade, readers of the newsletter will be aware that very little progress has been made. Neither the EU nor the US have been willing to make any significant changes in their subsidies to domestic farmers, and developing countries have become bolder in insisting that they will not allow rich countries to make inroads into their own domestic service economies before the richer countries make changes to their own domestic agricultural subsidies or manufacturing protective tariffs.



In July, the US President will not be able to negotiate on behalf of the USA through what is called Fast Track Authority (FTA). This means that, in future, every single trade issue will have to be negotiated line-by-line through Congress – the House of Representatives and the Senate. Inevitably, the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations, which has made almost no progress in the last 6 years, will be doomed to further failure as selfish interests in the richer countries win out – again.

Congress is campaigning as energetically as ever to convince Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs that “more and better aid, debt cancellation and trade justice” remain the priorities of our Global Solidarity agenda, as they remain the priorities of the world's activists on behalf of the poor.

Internationally, Congress is co-ordinating with the ITUC and the trade union movement worldwide to endorse the Montevideo Declaration. This is a statement urging unions and NGOs to concentrate on priority areas of action to advance the development agenda. In particular, October 17th this year is designated as a Global White Band Day of mobilisation. It is also the 20th anniversary of the UN-recognised International Day for the Elimination of Poverty. Watch this space or check with [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org) for further details of how your branch or union can get involved in this mass campaign.



## Global Campaign for Education – Congress pushes Bertie for Better Aid

The Irish Coalition of the Global Campaign for Education is an ongoing campaign that unites trade unions and NGOs working to improve children's chances of having a decent education anywhere in the world.

The Coalition is chaired by David Joyce, Global Solidarity's Project Manager and Congress Equality Officer. Says David, "The Global Campaign for Education was set up to make sure that the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 would be followed by appropriate and well-resourced policies and action programmes so that the goal of Education for All would be achieved by 2015, with intermediate goals – such as gender equity in all schools by 2005.



*"Since we have already missed the gender equity goal, and we appear to be missing out on the timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals that everyone felt were vital only 7 short years ago, it is absolutely essential that we get the Irish and British Governments on track to commit resources – both financially and diplomatically – to getting all kids a free, high quality, public education as soon as possible".*

### Solidarity Committees

The Solidarity Committees (NI and ROI) continue to be the vital link between Congress and affiliates on solidarity issues. These Committees work closely with the Global Solidarity Project to ensure that it reaches affiliated unions of Congress and meet regularly during the year. They continue to act as a link between the project, their individual unions, and the membership.

These Committees encourage affiliates to engage with the project and looks to embed solidarity linking within trade union structure.

Some affiliates (NIPSA, IMPACT, PSEU and ESBOA) have formed their own structures to engage with international solidarity issues.

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Northern Ireland Committee



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