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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

Information Technology Agreement – countries are warned on consequences

Brussels, 22 October 2013 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC together with 163 other trade union and civil society organisations and trade unions are raising concerns over a proposed expansion of the Information Technology Agreement (“ITA II”) being negotiated at the World Trade Organisation. A joint letter to WTO member points to the damage the proposals would do to the development of IT industry in developing countries.

The Agreement has been in force since 1997, and several WTO Members are now negotiating its expansion to cover information technology (IT) goods created since then. The Agreement covers IT goods that comprise about ten per cent of the global merchandise, more than the agricultural merchandise.

The letter warns the participating countries that the Agreement could further harm workers and restrict the prospect of industrialisation for participating developing countries. “The necessary diffusion of technology and the need to overcome the digital divide within and across countries require policy space for governments in order to implement industrial policies that enable them to develop their own industries or to increase the ownership of production of ICTs (information and communication technologies) in supply chains in which they operate,” it says.

As the negotiations on the ITA-II resume in Geneva this week, trade unions and civil society are calling for the negotiations to focus on expanding the potential for decent jobs. They also warn that an expanded ITA will likely benefit mainly multinational enterprises that control patent monopolies and impede technology transfer.

“Governments negotiating the ITA-II must guarantee a fair level of transparency and accessibility, and they must conduct impact assessments that take into account financial instability, the persisting jobs crisis and other major challenges so as to be able to engage in informed negotiations,” ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow said.

The letter also calls on developing countries, and particularly LDCs (least developed countries), to think twice before they take binding commitments under the Agreement in light of the market access benefits they can enjoy on a non-reciprocal basis even if they stay out of the Agreement. The ITA-II is negotiated on a Most-Favoured-Nation basis.

Find here the letter to the ITA negotiating Parties: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/letter-to-the-ita-negotiating>

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