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Conclusions of the IMF Asia-Pacific Regional Auto Conference October 25-27, 2005 Jakarta, Indonesia

Strengthening unions in the face of challenges from globalization, employers' expanding use of irregular workers, and threats to trade union rights were top priorities addressed at the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) Asia-Pacific Regional Auto Conference.

Delegates agreed that national unity is a foundation for effective international solidarity. Unifying national trade union structures are critical for effective action. So too is the need for workers to engage TNCs through effective solidarity support and coordination of trade union strategies at both the sector and company levels. Delegates also addressed engaging TNCs and advancing the Action Programme by negotiating and implementing international framework agreements (IFAs) and building networks.

Discussions on changing employment conditions highlighted how auto TNCs exploit the use of irregular workers, outsourcing and subcontracting to increase flexibility, weaken unions and to create downward pressure on wages and working conditions for all workers. Responses discussed included stronger links between workers at assembly and supplier operations, collective bargaining provisions and legislation to increase permanent jobs and protect all workers. Regarding legislation, delegates described how some governments, for example in Australia, are doing just the opposite via legislative attacks on fundamental work and trade union rights.

The more than fifty trade unionists representing workers from major automotive transnational companies (TNCs) in seven countries, meeting in Jakarta from October 25 to 27, to further joint efforts on sharing information, develop common strategies and implement the Action Programme, agreed on the following:

- National unity is the foundation for effective international solidarity and so affiliates should commit to concrete efforts to build and strengthen national unions or national trade union structures that are free from government and/or employer interference. Although the IMF cannot proscribe which structures are most appropriate, the IMF will assist affiliates to achieve national structures that effectively unify metalworkers in ways that enterprise-based unions cannot.
- Delegates identified the following responses to employers' use and exploitation of irregular and atypical workers, including via sub-contracting, outsourcing, and hiring through labour brokers:
 - ◆ Trade unions need to strengthen the links and coordination of action between workers at auto assembly and supplier operations. Unifying trade unions structures would facilitate such efforts as would union representation of irregular workers, which is an internal challenge facing some affiliates.
 - ◆ Among collective bargaining provisions on irregular workers discussed were outright bans or lowering the allowable share of jobs held by irregular workers; eliminating or narrowing differentials on wages, benefits and working conditions; and reducing allowable time periods before irregular workers must be made permanent.

- ◆ Employers must respect and governments must be held accountable to enforce all laws, regulations and court decisions protecting against abuses of irregular work. Delegates identified cases of workers illegally employed in jobs as irregulars when permanent workers must fill such jobs. Delegates also addressed the importance of resisting changes in laws that have the effect of undermining labour protections and increasing irregular work in the name of flexibility and competitiveness. This includes government attempts to alter legal definitions of industries and sectors with the effect of fragmenting union representation and weakening worker unity due to outsourcing, sub-contacting and use of labour brokers.
- On international framework agreements, the IMF will contact during the subsequent six months affiliates in the Asia-Pacific region where major auto TNCs are based to discuss and agree upon possible next steps. This could include identifying for further action, in close consultation with the respective national affiliates, two or three automotive TNCs based in the region. Results of these discussions can be brought to the IMF World Conference on IFAs planned for 2006. Delegates also highlighted the need for further steps to effectively implement existing IFAs at operations of signatory companies and their supply chains throughout the Asia-Pacific region. For TNCs that have not negotiated and signed IFAs, the IMF will continue, as it historically has, to work with affiliates to use all means available to advance and protect worker and trade union rights across the region and globally.
- The Howard government in Australia has embarked on a right-wing assault to undermine legal and regulatory protections for workers and their communities. If successful, this attack would eliminate fundamental worker and trade union rights and basic protections for workers and families across the country. Delegates agreed that it was critical for the IMF and its affiliates to fully support campaigns and mobilizations by Australian trade unions and civil society allies to resist and counter the Howard government's attack.
- The IMF in cooperation with participating affiliates will further develop and utilize a regional communications network with a corresponding contact list maintained by the IMF. The network will aim to facilitate affiliate-to-affiliate communication and information exchange for the mutual support of union building and organizing efforts, collective bargaining, and international solidarity actions to protect and advance worker and trade union rights. Meeting documents, including conclusions, will be distributed via the network. A planned IMF auto sector web page should include among its objectives, provision of regional industry information within a global context.
- Delegates supported a follow-up IMF Asia-Pacific regional auto conference in 2007. Delegates called for renewed and concerted efforts by affiliates to improve upon the participation of women delegates at future meetings. There was general agreement that future regional auto conferences should once again utilize both plenary sessions and company/alliance-based workshops, as had been done in prior meetings. Such workshops help to exchange information and build contacts and solidarity at the company level and so help engage TNCs in manners called for in the IMF Action Programme. Company-level workshops importantly complement sector-level interaction in plenary sessions.