



Press release on the occasion of the International Labour Day

Human Rights for Flower Workers - Politicians and trade need to take their responsibilities

Austria/ Belgium/ Czech Republic/ Germany, April 29, 2009. On the occasion of the International Labour Day, the new European Campaign “Flowers for Human Rights” demands public authorities, flower traders and consumers to take their responsibility regarding decent working conditions in the cut flower industry. Workers on flower farms in developing countries suffer from violations of internationally recognized labour rights. Since the EU-directive 2004/18/EC on public procurement demands all EU member states to allow the inclusion of social and environmental criteria into their laws on public procurement, its time for national governments to implement this in their national agenda.

Approximately 200,000 flower workers are employed in flower production in developing countries. The sector there has created a number of needed jobs. “During the last 30 years, the cut flower industry moved from Europe to Sub-saharan Africa,” explains Gertrud Falk from the human rights organisation FIAN Germany. “But most of the farm owners ignore international labour conventions when operating in developing countries.”

Public procurement should play a crucial role in demonstrating that labour rights violations are not tolerated by governments of EU countries. “Public procurement has a share of 16 percent on the Gross Domestic Product of the EU”, explains Barbara Janssens from the Belgium Consumer Organisation Netwerk Bewust Verbruiken. “Hence, if all EU members implement the EU directive it will have a positive impact on working conditions.”

The Governments of Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic and Germany have included the EU-directive into law. However, it lacks instruments to enforce it. Even if the Belgian government announced a progressive attitude transferring the EU directive into national law, social and ethical criteria are difficult to implement. “The legislation is vague and gives room for interpretation”, explicates Florence Kroff from FIAN Belgium. .

Sophie Vessel from FIAN Austria demands public institutions in Austria also to act exemplarily and use fair flowers. “The government and their institutions at national, regional and local level should take responsibility and include social and environmental criteria when buying flowers. All together, they can strongly influence working conditions in the flower farms.”

While in Germany, Austria and Belgium sound labelled flowers are available on the market, traders in Czech Republic have not yet included them into their trading patterns. “We call on Czech flower traders to take their responsibilities in the trade chain”, requests Marketa Novotna from the Ecumenical Academy Prague.

Besides the necessary activities of institutions or organisations it is the consumers themselves who can help to change the system through their purchase behaviour. “With each single flower you buy”, says Judith Brendel from Vamos e.V. in Germany, “you can have an impact on the flower market. If you specifically ask for flowers with the Flower Label Program- or Fair Trade-certificate you support the process of establishing internationally accepted social and environmental standards”.

Contact:

Gertrud Falk, FIAN Germany, g.falk@fian.de Tel. +49-221-7020072

www.flowers-for-human-rights.org