

**Tuesday October 11, 2011**

## **Update on the current situation of labor movement in Haiti**

As you may already be aware by now, a new trade union, SOTA, was created on September 15 by a group of textile workers in Haiti, with the support of Batay Ouvriye. Batay Ouvriye has already been supporting its enterprise-level affiliate SOKOWA at CODEVI, which until recently has been the only unionized garment factory in Haiti. SOTA was recognized by the Haitian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs on September 19, 2011. During the week of September 26, six trade union Executive Secretariat members of SOTA, who are also full-time workers, were fired in three different factories in Port-au-Prince.

Better Work is very concerned about the situation and the potential deterioration in industrial relations. Since becoming aware of these developments, Better Work Haiti's immediate focus has been to follow up closely on the events via emails sent by Batay Ouvriye and discussions with the factory managers involved, ADIH (employers' organization), AFL-CIO and Solidarity Center, as well as with national trade unions. A meeting was also held with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to share information and talk about potential actions.

Apart from Alterpresse, a web-based alternative news source in Haiti, there has been very little media coverage of the situation in the local newspapers.

According to the most recent information available to us, there have been no additional dismissals of SOTA officers or members last week. The situation seems normal in the factories since Saturday October 1st, with no new incidents reported. However, we have been informed that a sit-in organized by a coalition of four trade unions, and involving Batay Ouvriye and one Haitian NGO, has taken place on Friday October 7 in front of the SONAPI industrial park on the occasion of World Day for Decent Work.

Better Work is strongly aware of the need to keep an open door for dialogue with all our constituents. The recent developments have been a significant challenge for the country's efforts to work towards improving compliance with international labor standards and forging industrial relations.

Consequently, Better Work Haiti will conduct a fact-finding mission in the factories involved to better understand what happened. Given the importance of the garment sector for the country's economy as a whole, it is in the interest of all stakeholders that these conflicts are resolved quickly and justly, and that national law and international standards, including freedom of association, are respected by all parties in the future.

Better Work Haiti feels it is a critical time to work with the national stakeholders on key programme issues related to social dialogue, such as forming Performance Improvement Consultative Committees (PICCs) at factory level and for the international trade union movement to lend support in union capacity-development measures. Moreover, we believe that there is a strong will in Government and between social partners to resolve current conflicts and are confident that industrial relations can begin to improve in Haiti. We will keep you updated on the situation, as well as how you may be able to contribute to successful implementation of these activities.