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World Day for Decent Work 2012: new report shows insecure work phenomenon rising across globe

A new report highlighting the growth of insecure work across the globe, released in time for World Day for Decent Work, is disturbing evidence that employers around the world are joining forces to erode workers' rights and conditions through labour hire, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the report, *The Triangular Trap*, showed insecure work had exploded rapidly in recent years, and was a global phenomenon that unions around the world were united in fighting against.

The report, completed by IndustriALL, a new international organisation made up by unions representing 50 million workers in 140 countries across the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors, showed between 1996 and 2009, the number of workers in labour hire and contract work had doubled. Labour hire agencies' revenue has increased from \$105 billion to \$257 billion in the same period.

The Productivity Commission has estimated that a quarter of a million Australian workers are employed through labour hire.

"This new report exposes how private employment agencies are lobbying governments around the world to cut workers' rights and make it even easier to create more and more insecure work," Ms Kearney said. "By its very definition, insecure work gives workers little control over their jobs and careers, with disastrous flow-on effects into the rest of their lives.

"As the report finds, the growth of insecure work has been strategically orchestrated by employers who have sought to reduce the permanent workforce in the name of 'flexibility'. The result is a shift of the risks of employment from companies onto workers.

"Unions around the world are united in our opposition to further expansion of insecure work and the violations of their rights that arise from 'triangular' employment relationships, where an employee is hired by an agency on behalf of the organisation that needs the worker."

Australia's workplace laws need to be improved so no company can avoid responsibility for its workers by shifting their employment to a third party, Ms Kearney said. Changes to the Fair Work Act should be considered to recognise that both the labour hire provider and the host employer have a role in observing workers' rights and entitlements.

"In Australia, we have the second highest rate of insecure work in the developed world, at 40% of the workforce, which is appalling considering there is no economic justification for it," she said

"But even for countries where the economy is not as strong, employing people under labour hire, contract or casual arrangements is hardly the way to build a strong economy.

"The growth of insecure work has promoted a "use and throw away" mentality that has actually inhibited productivity growth in Australia. So around the world, where we have economies in far worse shape than Australia, the expansion of insecure work is only likely to further eat away at confidence in the economy. That's why unions are fighting back against the phenomenon with our Secure Jobs. Better Future campaign."

The *Triangular Trap* report is available for download at www.actu.org.au

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