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Ratification of ILO conventions sends important message about workers' rights: unions

Australia's ratification of three International Labour Organisation Conventions is a significant achievement which sends an important message to about the value and respect for workers' rights, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said unions welcomed the Government's commitment to upholding the ILO standards for Australian workers.

The three conventions to be ratified include the Convention Concerning Safety in the Use of Asbestos, the Protocol to the Occupational Health and Safety Convention 1981 (No. 155) and the Part-Time Work Convention.

"All of these standards provide important safeguards for workers' rights and their ratification is an additional protection," Ms Kearney said. "The ratification also means Australia's compliance with these important standards will be regularly reviewed by the ILO supervisory bodies."

Ms Kearney said the ratification would also send a strong message within our wider region about the importance of respect for international labour standards.

The Part Time Work Convention focuses on ensuring part-time workers have the same rights as their full-time counterparts, including in areas of occupational health and safety, discrimination, rights to organise and bargain collectively and leave entitlements. It also requires part-time workers receive a basic wage that, proportionately, is no lower than the basic wage of a full-time worker.

"Ratification of this convention is an important step towards ensuring quality part-time work in Australia so that people can afford to meet their living costs, however it is important to remember that over half of all Australian part-time workers are employed on a casual basis and are not protected under this convention," Ms Kearney said.

"Unions are adamant that Australia needs to do more to ensure that all part-time work in Australia – including that done by casual employees – is decent quality work. We will be campaigning over coming years to improve the rights of all insecure workers, including part-time casuals."

Ms Kearney said the Asbestos Convention (No. 162) required all states to implement laws and regulations to protect workers against health hazards from exposure in the workplace to asbestos.

"Ratification of this convention is an important step in the ongoing efforts for an asbestos-free Australia," Ms Kearney said. "Australia had the highest per capita use of asbestos in the world from the 1950s until the 1980s, but after years of concerted campaigning by unions and other interested groups, the importation, production and use of asbestos was completely banned in Australia in 2003.

"But there is still much work to be done in ensuring adequate compensation to those affected by the deadly material and to eradicate asbestos in Australia."

Ms Kearney said unions also welcomed the Government's ratification of the Protocol to the Occupational Health and Safety Convention, which focuses on ensuring employers record and notify relevant authorities of accidents and diseases at work. It also requires states to establish and periodically review requirements and procedures for this reporting.

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