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Australia takes backward step in fight against global poverty

A decision by the Abbott Government to cut all funding to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) including funds to major job-creation projects, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, demonstrates a lack of leadership on issues world leaders have identified as a priority.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said it appeared that all funding to the ILO's Better Work project, for example, had been cut.

"Better Work is an initiative that supports the payment of a living wage, secure employment and dignity for workers in developing countries," Ms Kearney said.

The program has supported the creation of over 160,000 new jobs and ensured factories pay correct wages in Cambodia.

"It's deeply disappointing that the Abbott Government would turn their back on this worthy program and it demonstrates a lack of leadership on issues world leaders have identified as a priority," she said.

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation added, "This is a scandal, to actually cut funding to one of the critical international agencies, whose responsibility is jobs and social protection is short-sighted. While Australia chairs the G20 the global crisis of unemployment, particularly for young people is a critical issue for leaders. We can only hope that the Prime Minister will step in and reverse this decision."

Unemployment and inequality are a pressing global issue. Data shows that over 202 million people were unemployed in 2013, an increase from 2012. And over a quarter of the world's workers are living on US\$2 a day or less.

"Supporting employment and stability in our region is in Australia's interest," Ms Kearney said.

"Lack of secure work that pays a living wage is not only a key contributor to poverty; it's also a major reason for unrest and conflict."

"Without access to income-generating opportunities, individuals and their families cannot lift themselves out of poverty.

"This is the focus of the ILO's work. The ILO projects ensure workers receive a living wage in secure employment where they are respected and treated with dignity.

"Economic growth that results in sweatshops, environmental destruction, deepening inequalities, and loss of community resources will not equal human development – protection of workers and communities is paramount.

"Workers in developing countries, in particular, have been abused by a system that encourages investment without ensuring fair pay and safe conditions.

"By withdrawing Australia's support for the important work of the ILO, the Abbott Government has once more turned their back on workers."

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