



Report

# Toward Guiding Principles on Worker Rights and Toxics

23 to 24 May 2017

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This workshop served as a follow-up to a first informal meeting of civil society actors held in March 2017 in Geneva where the need for a more robust, comprehensive and rights-based approach to address the severe damages caused by occupational exposures to toxics became apparent. Thus, the current UN Special Rapporteur on toxics, Baskut Tuncak, aims to develop guiding principles on worker rights and toxics to overcome divergent and often weak compliance with standards. This workshop provided an opportunity to gather information and to exchange views with trade unions, NGOs and other experts in the field.

Following the opening remarks of Yvonne Theemann, Senior Project Officer at the FES Geneva Office, the Special Rapporteur outlined the objective of the meeting: To identify key rights, issues and potential principles for the protection of workers who may be exposed to toxic substances in their workplace.

Tuncak stressed that there exist numerous rights for workers, such as the right to life, health, and safe working conditions, as well as the right to information, participation, freedom of association and remedy for

impacts. Rather than a lack of rights protecting workers exposed to toxic substances it is their implementation in practice that causes concern. Often, there is a disconnect between recognized human rights standards and labor laws at all levels of governance. A more coherent set of principles at the global level are needed to help bridge this divergence.

The participants agreed and stressed that the development of guiding principles on workers' rights and toxics would not only help to better protect workers, but also their family, local community and the global environment. They also emphasized that the complexities created by global supply chains require a global approach to help resolve what was described as major public health concern. Participants did note challenges and divergences of views, emphasizing the need for further consultations with all stakeholders.

The aim is to begin public consultation on an initial draft of guiding principles on worker rights and toxic substances, which is to be expected to begin towards the end of 2017.

On the author

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