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BENIN

The Government of Benin has demonstrated through its actions that it does not respect, observe, or enforce internationally recognized worker rights. The AFL-CIO urges that Benin's GSP eligibility be terminated.

BACKGROUND

A petition designed to strip a country of important trading preferences with the United States is a serious matter. In recognition of this fact, it is AFL-CIO policy to develop its cases using mostly original materials obtained through relationships with local unions or on-the-ground research by AFL-CIO specialists. There are instances, however, where the abuse of internationally recognized worker rights is flagrant and well-known, even to U.S. Government sources. Repression may be so severe that labor contacts are difficult to make and independent research virtually impossible to conduct. The policies of Benin present such an example. Thus, the AFL-CIO will simply present here a number of sources for these facts, including the U.S. State Department's own Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Together these constitute a prima facie case that Benin should be denied GSP benefits.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE AND BARGAIN COLLECTIVELY

The Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Benin (UNSTB) is a government-created and government-controlled mass organization of the People's Revolutionary Party. All labor unions in the country must affiliate to the UNSTB. Consistent

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with the government's ties to the Soviet Union and its adherence to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the UNSTB is affiliated to the communist-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The AFL-CIO has had informal contacts with representatives of the UNSTB through a regional trade union organization, the Organization of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA), to which the UNSTB belongs. Over the past two to three years, UNSTB officials have indicated a willingness to disaffiliate from the WFTU, but they have been prevented from doing so by their government's control over their international affiliations. Because there is no formal relationship between the AFL-CIO and the UNSTB, the information that is available from union-to-union contact is limited.

Other evidence is based on the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, and the August 1988 report by Amnesty International on Benin. The Government of Benin denies its workers the fundamental right of association, circumscribes the right to strike, and persecutes workers who attempt to exercise freedom of expression.

The State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices, published in February 1989, writes of Benin:

The UNSTB frequently plays the role of a mass organization of the People's Revolutionary Party. Workers are not free to organize and join labor unions free of government control. Benin's Constitution states that "union activities are guaranteed to workers" but "must be used for the elevation of conscience of the proletarian class."

And further:

While the right to strike is not explicitly denied or protected in the Beninese labor code, the last labor strike in Benin occurred in 1975 and was forcefully suppressed by the Government after 3 days.

In a report published in August 1988, entitled Benin: Political Imprisonment and Torture, Amnesty International cites the following activities that have resulted in arrests and torture:

- * Participation in strikes either at the country's national university or in schools,
- * Membership in an unofficial students' union,
- * Striking for payment of wages withheld for months and
- * Contact with other people involved in such activities.

CONCLUSION

The Government of Benin clearly stands in gross violation of the minimal standards of freedom of association which U.S. law has established as requisite for participation in the GSP program. Accordingly, its eligibility should be terminated.

