

**WORKER RIGHTS  
AND THE  
GENERALIZED SYSTEM OF  
PREFERENCES**

**BELARUS**

**The AFL-CIO Petition to the  
Office of the United States Trade  
Representative**

#3701998  
KN

PCV : 1  
OUTSHEA: 2

**June 16, 1998**

1998

## UPDATE FOR BELARUS PETITION

This update to the AFL-CIO's 1997 petition to remove eligibility from the Republic of Belarus to participate in the Generalized System of Preferences contends that the Belarusian government continues to maintain a policy of suppression of internationally-recognized worker rights.

### **Freedom of Association**

FOIA

According to the U.S. Department of State's Belarus Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997: "Belarus has a government in which nearly all power rests in the hands of the President." President Lukashenko, through a series of decrees issued in 1997 and 1998, has drastically undermined the already compromised freedom of association of independent labor unions and other opposition groups in Belarus.

On March 5, 1997 President Lukashenko issued a decree on "Gatherings, Meetings, Demonstrations, and Picketing" which severely limits freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. This decree makes virtually any meaningful demonstration or protest march illegal. As of January 1998, the decree was formalized into law by the new parliament that had been handpicked by Lukashenko after he dissolved the previous, more rebellious legislature. EOA

In December 1997, the Belarusian government repealed the ban of legal registration for the independent Belarus Congress of Independent Trade Unions (BKDP). However, a decree on "Measures aimed at Improvement of Cooperation of State Governing Bodies and Trade Unions," dated December 16, 1997, requires that unions be of a certain size before they will be recognized officially or allowed to take part in collective bargaining. This decree most likely will render the newly legal BKDP, along with most other independent trade union organizations, powerless.

### **Conclusion**

The Government of Belarus continues to systematically deny workers their rights. The AFL-CIO calls for Belarus to be removed from the list of eligible beneficiaries of the Generalized System of Preferences.

# American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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June 16, 1998

Mr. H. Jon Rosenbaum, Ph.D.  
Assistant U.S. Trade Representative  
GSP Subcommittee  
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative  
600 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. Suite 518  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Jon:

The AFL-CIO hereby submits petitions to the USTR on the basis of worker rights violations in accordance with Section 502(b)(7) the Trade Act of 1974, as amended. The petitions include information on worker rights violations in Cambodia and Guatemala, and updates on the existing cases on Belarus, Indonesia, Swaziland and Thailand. This petition is submitted as required by the notice printed in the Federal Register.

Sincerely,

Barbara Shailor, Director  
International Affairs Department

BS/AK:dl  
opeiu #2 afl-cio



