

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/141/2011
17 March 2011

Warning on US states' plan to severely restrict workers' rights

Amnesty International has urged several US states to abandon planned legislation that would drastically restrict workers' rights.

States including Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee have proposed bills severely limiting the collective bargaining rights of trade union members. A similar bill was passed in Wisconsin on Friday.

"State governors must withdraw support for these measures which, if adopted, would violate international law," said Shane Enright, Amnesty International's trade union adviser.

"The US has an obligation to uphold the rights of American workers - including the specific right to organize and bargain collectively."

Wisconsin governor Scott Walker signed a bill on Friday that undermines the ability of unions in the public sector to protect workers. The legislation also takes away nearly all collective bargaining rights for most public employees, limiting their negotiation rights only to wages.

As well as restricting collective bargaining rights, union activists say legislators in as many as 37 states have introduced hundreds of anti-union bills. Some affect negotiation of healthcare benefits, restrict freedom of association, place caps on the minimum wage and deprive workers of the right to strike.

Similar measures being promoted in Congress would affect federal public employees.

"The Wisconsin bill is symbolic of a wider attack on unions in the USA, where workers are facing an onslaught from the authorities," said Shane Enright.

"Many employees are already struggling because of the economic crisis and these laws will undermine fundamental human rights and labour rights protections, which are sorely needed to ensure that employees do not bear the brunt of the crisis. It will also jeopardize the delivery of vital public services that these employees deliver."

"This is also a struggle for migrant workers' rights, for education and health rights, for wage security, for workplace health and safety. We are seeing communities insisting on social justice, economic rights and personal liberties against powerful vested interests. Fundamental human rights are at stake, and we stand in solidarity with the US labour movement in this struggle."

Background

Under international law, all workers have a human right to organize and to bargain collectively.

These rights are an essential foundation to the realisation of other rights, and are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

(ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, as well as conventions adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

As a state party to the ICCPR and a signatory to the ICESCR, the USA has an obligation to respect the human rights under these instruments and treaties.

As a member of the ILO, the USA also has a commitment, through the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, to respect, promote and realize the fundamental rights set out in the organization's core conventions.

Moves to limit such rights in the USA are also at odds with commitments made under the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) as well as numerous subsequent trade agreements negotiated and ratified over the last 15 years.