

3 May 2008

Suriname

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Saturday, May 3, 2008

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PARAMARIBO, Suriname: Aiming at prevention of problems, irregularities and possible unrest in the future the Suriname government will introduce a basic collective bargaining agreement for contract workers, an official here disclosed.

According to Labour Minister Joyce Amarello-Williams, the government in collaboration with labour unions and business organizations has for some time now been trying to figure out how to tackle problems related to contract labour. Since discussions so far didn't produce significant results the government will introduce a basic collective bargaining agreement for contract workers.

"This agreement will not only indicate minimal wage standards but it will also secure basic secondary benefits such as health care for this category of workers," the minister said in an invited comment.

Meanwhile a concept agreement has been send to trade union associations and private sector organizations for comment and input. "I expect their comment as early as next week," said the minister.

Immediate actions in the field of contract labour are necessary, she argued, to avoid further disruptions of production processes at companies in the country.

The introduction of the basic collective agreement comes on the heels of strike action from contract workers in Suriname's bauxite industry. A strike of about 600-800 contract workers at bauxite mining company Suralco entering its third week is threatening to disrupt the bauxite sector, Suriname's second largest export industry.

The workers are not directly employed by Suralco, but by several sub-contractors, which are refusing to enter into collective negotiations with the disgruntled workers. These workers are reportedly being paid significantly less than colleagues in the sector who are conducting the same activities while they also lack secondary benefits such as healthcare and pension.

"The situation where companies are hiring contractor companies, who for their part are also hiring other contract companies and contractors to conduct activities is very complex and causing serious problems, since it is becoming very difficult to establish who is the real employer," Amarello-Williams maintained.

Meanwhile, the labour authorities had a meeting with the Suralco management to voice the government's concerns over the current situation.

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