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## News

### Trade unionists rap sections of report on Jamaica's labour standards

ARLENE MARTIN-WILKINS, Observer staff reporter  
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**TWO of the island's largest trade unions have criticised aspects of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) report on Jamaica's adherence to core labour standards, and supported the government's stance that some issues were overstated.**

Both the National Workers Union (NWU) and Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) say they believe that the report, released on Monday, had accurately reflected shortcomings particularly as they relate to collective bargaining and the right to strike, but had difficulties with allegations made on child labour, sexual harassment and gender bias in the workplace.

"There was a touch of exaggeration especially with the child labour aspect of it," said Danny Roberts, a vice president of the NWU.

"But apart from the touch of exaggerations, overall I think that the report does no injustice, outside of those sections, to the situation existing in Jamaica," added Roberts.

On Monday the ICFTU highlighted several shortcomings in government's application and enforcement of International Labour Organisation (ILO) labour rules.

The report cited several restrictions to collective bargaining and the right to strike, but also took a swipe at sexual harassment and the existence of

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gender bias in the workplace.

The report also cited child labour as a serious problem in Jamaica, claiming that as many as four per cent of Jamaican children between the ages of five and 17 were involved in some form of economic activity, prostitution and begging.

"No worse forms of child labour exist in Jamaica," Roberts said. "And based upon the definition of the ILO standards, in terms of convention number 182, we would not characterise ourselves as having the worst forms of child labour here."

Dwight Nelson, a vice-president of the BITU and president of the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions, agreed.

"I don't think that in Jamaica, like some other countries, the problem is as significant (as was stated)," Nelson said.

But Nelson said the "errors" could be avoided if the stakeholders had made an effort to correct the mistakes before the report was published.

"I am blaming the Ministry of Labour, the trade unions and the employers because they were all aware of the content of the report before it was published and had an opportunity to correct the incorrect data that was included," Nelson told the Observer.

Both trade unionists, however, supported the call for equal pay for equal work between the two sexes and for provisions to be made to give workers the right to strike and remove the possibility of workers being dismissed for taking industrial actions.

Nelson, in the meanwhile, said the ICFTU was premature with allegations made regarding sexual harassment in the workplace, saying that the report should point to developments in that area where government is drafting legislation to deal with the problem.

He was also in agreement with the ICFTU's call for the labour ministry to be relieved of the power it has to send disputes to arbitration before consulting the disputing parties.

"Yes, I strongly believe the ministry has too much power in that regard, and that power should be rescinded," Nelson told the Observer.

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