

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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'Unions for Women, Women for Unions' campaign enters phase two

Brussels, 6 March 2006 (ICFTU Online): Antiunion violence against women, persistent wage gaps, the feminisation of poverty -the situation of women in the world of work is not getting any easier. On 8 March, International Women's Day, the international trade union movement, building on the progress made since 2002, is to launch phase two of the 'Unions for Women, Women for Unions' campaign.

The participation of women in the global economy has seen a considerable increase over recent decades, giving rise to sweeping changes in the way work, society and the family are organised. Adding to the usual difficulties, women in developing countries are also bearing the brunt of aggressive economic policies advocated by international financial institutions. Ever fewer jobs in the formal economy together with persistent discrimination on the labour market have pushed millions of female workers into the informal economy and export processing zones, renowned for the appalling working conditions, fierce anti-unionism, job insecurity and the general climate of fear.

Driven by the recommendation of the ICFTU Women's Committee, phase two of the 'Unions for Women, Women for Unions' campaign is to be launched on 8 March. The groups targeted as priorities under this campaign are women working in the informal economy and export processing zones, female migrant workers and young women workers. The initial campaign covering years 2002 - 2005 was a resounding success. Over 60 local and national trade union organisations in 49 countries took part in it. Pivoted around very finely targeted activities, the campaign has successfully contributed to boosting female membership, securing increases of between 40 and 150% in some cases.

"Over the last few years we have seen a considerable increase in the number of women within our affiliated organisations," said Helen Creed, president of the ICFTU Women's Committee, who is keenly involved in the campaign. "In Mauritania, female membership increased by over 100% in 2004. We must help other organisations meet the same objective. We believe that it is particularly important to reach out to young women, migrant women and those working in the informal economy and export processing zones," she added.

Many of the trade unions affiliated to the ICFTU and the Global Union Federations have shown a keen interest in this second phase of the campaign. The World Confederation of Labour (WCL) is also supporting it. November this year will see the formation of a new international trade union organisation grouping the affiliates of the WCL and the ICFTU as well as other independent trade unions not yet affiliated to an international organisation. The participation of women in trade unions will figure among the priorities of this new organisation.

The campaign will include the organisation of activities linked to current and future trade union recruitment drives, as well as to the special action programmes for EPZ and migrant workers and the Global Call to Action against Poverty. The unions involved in the campaign will be called on to launch new initiatives and/or intensify existing efforts to organise women and adopt and implement gender-related policies and programmes.

Establishing a direct link with day-to-day life in export processing zones and the informal economy, the ICFTU has published a series of interviews of women trade unionists from Peru, Honduras, Nicaragua and Burkina Faso (link to interviews <http://www.icftu.org/focus.asp?issue=equality&Language=EN>).

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. <http://www.icftu.org>
The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions:
<http://www.global-unions.org>

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