

THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Spotlight on Noxolo Gxumsia (FEDUSA - South Africa)

"I try to convince all young people to join a union"

Vienna, November 3, 2006: (ITUC OnLine): The youth representative of the South African organisation FEDUSA (Federation of Unions of South Africa) Noxolo Gxumsia explains how committed she is to convincing students and young workers of the importance of joining a union

How did you become a trade unionist?

I joined the unions in 2004 because I would not have any protection of my rights in South Africa without being in a union. I work in the administration department of a hospital near Pretoria, where a soon became a union rep. I regularly read the magazine for nursing staff sent by FEDUSA. In return I used to send the union some articles on what was happening on the ground. That way they could see I was interested and that is probably why they selected me this year when they needed someone to represent young people at international level. So that is why I am now the youth representative of FEDUSA.

What specific youth activities does FEDUSA have?

Not much was done specifically for young people until we attended a pan-African meeting in Nairobi organised by the former ICFTU's African regional organisation. The FEDUSA Youth Committee was set up after that meeting. Last month my General Secretary helped me write to all the FEDUSA affiliates to find out how many young members they had. One of our first projects was our contribution to the International Day against HIV on 1 December. FEDUSA also sends us to the training seminars on HIV run by the ACILS (American Center for International Labor Solidarity) so that we can then provide advice to our colleagues and friends. I am very happy to have this chance to fight for the victims of that illness.

What do your friends think about the unions?

They're not really interested in trade unions. Some can't see the point of unions and only contact a union when they have a problem. Others, particularly in the private sector, are not allowed to join a union. I try to convince them all to join a union. When we give them all the information they need we get results, and the number of my union's members is increasing. We go into secondary schools to talk about the union movement so that future workers will know who to get in touch with when they get a job.

What does being a trade unionist mean to you personally?

In fact I like nearly all aspects of being a trade unionist. My work allows me to meet a lot of people, including in other countries, so I learn a lot I did not know about other places. The union movement is full of people with warm hearts and clear thinking. I had never been abroad before I became the FEDUSA youth representative. Thanks to the militancy of the main South African trade unions most employers now respect them more, as does the government. Unlike in the apartheid era we are not scared of presenting our demands.

Interview by Samuel Grumiau

For more information contact the ITUC Press Department on: +43 (0) 664 593 6190.

Created on November 1, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories and has 306 national affiliates.

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