

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Spotlight interview with Asma Elbassir (Morocco - UMT)

"Giving greater visibility to young people"

Brussels, 18 January 2007 (ITUC OnLine): A qualified dental prosthetist, Asma Elbassir is now a public employee with the social service of Casablanca. A member of the UMT women's committee and youth committee, she warmly welcomes the strengthened capabilities women have gained thanks to the campaign to unionise women (1). As young Moroccans are increasingly hard hit by unemployment and excluded from the development equation, Asma Elbassir advocates giving them greater visibility and recognition, both within society and the unions.

What motivated your involvement in the union?

I was initially drawn by the associative world of civil society, where I learnt a great deal. The main thing is the idea of making a contribution, to serve others.

I realised that in the world of work, an ordinary woman worker cannot assert her rights if she stands alone in front of her superiors, she cannot defend herself against discrimination and protect her dignity. That's why it's important to join a strong organisation where our efforts are united, so that we can better protect the rights of all men and women. I chose the UMT for this purpose, as it carries weight at national and international level, and provides a stimulating framework for promoting rights.

How do you see the situation of women in Moroccan society and on the labour market?

Moroccan women have played an important role in the evolution of Morocco's human potential. Following a period during which she was left out of the human development process, after a hard fight, she has now achieved unanimously recognised rights. But women are still confronted with obstacles linked to our traditional and cultural heritage, a feeling of inferiority to men, which puts them in a position of weakness when faced with sexual and moral harassment, and confines them to laborious and mediocre jobs without decision making powers. The problems surrounding maternity, which is not taken on board as it ought, mean that women do not have the same training and promotional opportunities as men, who have much easier access to positions of responsibility.

What role did you play in the campaign to organise women in Morocco? (1)

I took part in the campaign by doing the trade union rounds at companies, listening to the problems faced by the women workers and promoting the idea that women have every interest in taking part themselves in defending their rights. If women are not involved and do not make their voice heard in the union, the union will not be fully

capable of dealing with their specific problems, such as discrimination and harassment.

Has the campaign produced any concrete results?

Absolutely, there are real and concrete results. We have strengthened our skills as trade unionists, by building our self confidence, learning how to speak out, developing our communication techniques and our awareness of cultural factors. Women have strengthened their capabilities and are better equipped to take trade union responsibilities.

What are the main problems facing young Moroccans?

Young people constitute two thirds of the population, but since independence, Morocco's policies have not sufficiently integrated young people in the global development equation. The lack of prospects, the difficulties in fulfilling one's ambitions, unemployment, clandestine immigration, poverty, drugs, unemployment among graduates, all these problems bear witness to the failure to make the most of the nation's human resources.

Do you form part of a specific structure for young people within the union?

Yes. Of course. I am a member of the youth committee. I also take part in the holiday camps for children.

Do you think that the UMT pays sufficient attention to young people and their problems?

Since its ninth Congress in 1995, the UMT decided to open up to the democratic civil society organisations (human rights, youth, women's, unemployed workers' groups, etc.) that it considers allies of the working classes. The prime minister recently held talks with the UMT, in which particular attention was given to the employment of qualified young people and the national initiative for human development. As regards women, the UMT is part of the network for the fight against sexual harassment, which was set up following the case where a manager at the Sofitel Diwan hotel sexually harassed several female employees. Violence against women, be it physical, verbal, psychological or sexual, is constantly on the rise.

As a young person, how would you like to see the Moroccan trade union movement evolve?

As a young person, I have a great desire to see the modern values of democracy integrated within our institutions and society. Morocco is a country of young people, who hold an unlimited source of intelligence and capabilities. These young people want to take part in a new culture of confidence and recognition. They want a greater voice, integration mechanisms and opportunities to participate and develop new relations with the State, society and the nation. The trade union movement must move in this direction and commit to a different approach based on enterprise and initiative. Efforts must be made to mobilise young people

and raise their awareness, as they feel a real need for greater visibility.

Interview by Natacha David.

(1)- Also read the ITUC briefing on the UMT organising campaign in Morocco at

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/maroc_EN.pdf

Also read the interview of Samira Kinami (Morocco - UMT) "Unionised... and fired on the spot at

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article514&lang=en>

Also see the interview of Naima Bouguerjouma (Morocco - UMT) "Women have understood that joining a union provides them with more rights" at

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article505>

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