

## NEWS

### **ITUC Congress calls for gender equality and the respect of trade union rights**

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#### **Gender Equality**

The global crisis has deepened inequality and undermined women's rights, says the resolution on Gender Equality adopted by the ITUC Congress. In the same resolution, the Congress sets out a programme of action to achieve gender equality in the workplace and society.

Diana Holland, chair of the ITUC Women's Committee, reminded delegates that women constitute half the world's population, perform two-thirds of the work, but earn just 10 percent of the income and own only one percent of property.

Women make up the majority of workers with precarious jobs and of workers in the unprotected informal economy. Women constitute nearly half the world's migrants, and the trafficking of women is increasing. The ILO also estimates that 18.7 million more women lost their jobs in 2009, as a direct result of the financial crisis.

Gladys Branche of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress called on delegates to sign postcards in support of the UNIFEM campaign Say No - Unite to end violence against women.

"Violence affects all lives, and millions of women around the world. Violence cuts across all classes, and impedes women's rights to participate fully in society. Violence is a crime against women," she said.

Antonie de Jong, head of UNIFEM Outreach and Business Development, noted that the issue of ending violence against women and girls has rightly been called the "missing target" of the Millennium Development Goals, and spoke about how it is critical to engage men and boys in order to achieve lasting change on this issue.

With this resolution, Congress instructed the ITUC, working together with Global Union partners and affiliates, to “intensify the Decent Work for Decent Life for Women Campaign aimed at achieving social justice and gender equality at the workplace and in trade unions and to continue the drive to organise women workers, particularly in EPZs and the informal economy, as well as domestic, migrant, rural, young, and other vulnerable workers.”

Congress also emphasised that in spite of the growth in women’s membership of ITUC affiliates to 40 percent and the efforts made to better represent women in their structures and policies, the full integration of gender perspective in trade union decision-making, policies and activities remains inadequate.

Trade unions must be at the forefront of the struggle, to achieve gender equality in the workplace, in their policies, in their own structures and in society.

► [ITUC resolution on gender equality \(PDF\)](#)

### **Promoting and Defending Fundamental Workers’ Rights**

The resolution on trade union rights was introduced with the ITUC’s moving video about the shocking murders of and violent attacks against trade unionists in 2009\*.

Agnes Jongerius of FNV Netherlands added that she had sad news: “During our ITUC World Congress this week, three more of our trade union colleagues have been killed.” The three were one Colombian teacher and two Iraqis.

She paid stirring tribute to teacher Farzad Kamangar who was executed, in secret, on Sunday 9 May at Evin prison in Tehran. She also pledged that the FNV would continue to work with the ITUC on behalf of Mansour Osanloo, who led a campaign to increase wages and working conditions for Iranian bus drivers, and who is currently detained as a political prisoner in the Evin prison.

Maung Maung of the FTUB Burma told delegates about the risks trade unionists take to organise workers in his country. “If you are caught, you are sentenced to a minimum of seven years in jail. I also have a colleague who has been imprisoned for life.”

Maung Maung called on ITUC affiliates to continue providing solidarity assistance for his fellow Burmese trade unionists as they struggle to achieve basic rights and recognition.

In recent years, 43 trade unionists in Guatemala have been brutally killed. Trade union leader Noe Antonio Ramirez Portela of SITRABI Guatemala spoke about the brutal working conditions of banana workers, and the savage attacks on labour organisers.

"This exported fruit - these bananas - smell of blood because of the way our sisters and brothers are mistreated," he said.

"There are 40,000 workers on the southern coast of Guatemala who are not organised," he explained. "They leave their homes at four in the morning to be taken by bus or truck to the farms. They work some 12 hours to earn just seven or eight dollars a day. The major transnational companies are closing down their farms where the workers are organised, and moving to where the workers are unorganised.

As a trade union organiser, his own life is under threat.

"We have met major obstacles in organising these workers because there are paramilitary groups on these farms that do not allow labour organisers to come in. What is the most difficult for us as organisers are the death threats, and being under surveillance. On 23 September 2007 my brother was murdered because he defended the sacred and fundamental rights of workers. I have had the support of the ITUC, UNI and other organisations and that is why I have survived. But thank god we are alive and it is our intention to continue our work to protect the rights of these workers."

The rights of workers in the industrialised world are also being violated, as in the case of American workers who are struggling for recognition of their right to organise under a Free Choice Act.

"Labour law is broken in the United States. The law is not protecting workers, it is protecting corporations," said Liz Shuler, AFL-CIO USA. However, "in the end we believe we will be successful in achieving the Free Choice Act," she said. Jongerius

also spoke about the ITUC's work with affiliates to draw the world's attention to the horrendous situation of twelve workers who jumped from the buildings or attempted to commit suicide in the Shenzhen production facilities of Foxconn. Ten of these young migrant workers have died, and two others were seriously injured. The Congress affirmed that workers' rights are human rights and that promoting and defending fundamental workers' rights is and must remain a priority for the ITUC. The right to form and join a trade union, the right to bargain, and the right to free and independent trade union action are essential for all working people to defend and promote their interests.

Underlining the crucial role of the ILO, the Congress deplored and condemned the persistent and widespread violation of fundamental workers' rights.

At least 12.3 million people are subjected to modern forms of slavery and other forms of forced labour. Urgent efforts are needed to eradicate the growth of trafficking and other abuses related to globalisation.

Congress also outlined a plan of action for the eradication of child labour.