

PSI World News 21-2003

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- Human Rights Day 10 December
- Public Forum on Human Rights in Colombia
- PSI Communications Officer
- Pay Equity launch in the Andes
- Women's workshop and leadership training in Thailand
- WTO negotiators: back to the future!
- Canadian meat inspectors come back to the public sector
- Sewerage processing plants campaign in South Africa
- IMF moves to expel Zimbabwe
- Retirements and promotions for PSI's Asia Pacific staff

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, 10 DECEMBER

PSI is requesting all affiliates to write to President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia to protest at continuing human rights violations. See the website www.world-psi.org for a model letter and please make sure you send copies to us at rights@world-psi.org.

PSI has written to protest at the assassination of Jose de Jesús Rojas Castañeda, a member of the Trade Union Association of Municipal Teachers (ASEM) in the city of Barrancabermeja at 9pm on 4 December. This is the 69th assassination this year according to the National Trade Union Centre.

GLOBAL UNIONS PUBLIC FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA AT ILO, GENEVA

Hans Engelberts, PSI General Secretary will take part in a public forum at the ILO in Geneva on 10 December together with Gloria Ramirez from the Colombian Teachers' Trade Union, FECODE, and speakers from the ICFTU, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities and Amnesty International. The forum will seek to highlight the important role the international community can play in promoting respect for human rights and to end the situation of impunity in which these crimes are committed. A global union delegation, including the PSI, will then be received at the Colombian Mission to hand over a letter to President Alvaro Uribe expressing the international union movement's concerns at the failure of the government to protect the life, liberty and integrity of trade unionists.

JOB VACANCY: PSI COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

PSI will shortly have a vacancy for a full-time position of Communications Officer at the PSI Head Office. The job involves supporting the organisation in enhancing its visibility and promoting its activities by developing relationships with affiliates, the media and other organisations and advising on communication methods and strategy. The position requires fluent English, and knowledge of other PSI languages would be an asset. Full information including the job description, application form and skills requirements is available on www.world-psi.org.

PAY EQUITY LAUNCH IN THE ANDES

A Subregional Forum was held in Quito, Ecuador, on November 25, to launch the PSI Pay Equity Campaign in the Andean Region. The Forum was organised by project coordinator Verónica Montúfar in cooperation with ILDIS/FES, the Andean University and various national NGOs and was widely publicised both on TV and radio. The national women's committees of PSI affiliates presented the findings of their national research on pay inequalities to a public of some 150 persons. Key speakers were PSI Education Officer Christine Roos, Subregional Secretary Juan Diego Gómez and Oscar Valverde from ACTRAV/ILO. The Forum also paid special homage to the Mirabal Sisters of Dominican Republic, whose assassination in 1960 led to the proclamation of November 25 as the International Day of No Violence Against Women.

WOMEN'S WORKSHOP AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN THAILAND

Jenny Luck, PSI UDIS coordinator, went to Bangkok in November to discuss the progress of ongoing projects in the country with the Project Coordinator, Project Trainer and affiliates. She attended a two-day workshop for women that is part of the Asia Pacific women's project and a leadership training programme for all affiliates that is part of the SASK project. The women's workshop concentrated on providing Internet and email skills to facilitate communication between the women and their unions. The leadership training programme was a four-day course for newly appointed leaders from various state enterprises. The subjects covered included problem solving and giving presentations.

WTO NEGOTIATORS: BACK TO THE FUTURE!

Following the collapse of the WTO Ministerial Conference trade negotiations in Cancún in September, there has been much informal discussion in Geneva on how to resurrect the talks - and, more important, on WHAT to resurrect. In spite of the clear rejection by the developing countries and many NGOs and trade unions of attempts to negotiate the four Singapore issues into formal WTO Agreements (investment, competition, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation), their protagonists are trying to put them back on the negotiating agenda when the WTO next meets on December 15. Similarly, negotiations on agriculture, the deal breaker in Cancún, appear to be following the agenda of the USA and the EU, continuing to pursue policies which would see the South making

bigger cuts than the North - the very opposite of a Development Round. Therefore, PSI has jointly signed with other NGOs in Geneva (and with the International Union of Foodworkers on agriculture) two letters to the WTO and to member states on these issues, calling for a return to a genuine development agenda. They are both on the PSI website.

CANADIAN MEAT INSPECTORS COME BACK TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union, a member of PSI affiliate NUPGE, is welcoming the province's contract meat inspectors back into the Ontario public service, with 118 jobs. The former Conservative government had replaced most of the province's meat inspectors with private contract inspectors in 1996-97. However, poor working conditions, frozen wages and no benefits or pension plan meant that annual staff turnover rates were as high as 30%. This led to high numbers of inexperienced inspectors, resulting in huge variations on inspection levels. The decision was the result of a grievance settlement ratified on 27 November. OPSEU president Leah Casselman said "Good union jobs for inspectors will cut the turnover rate immediately". See www.nupge.ca.

SEWERAGE PROCESSING PLANTS CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH AFRICA

PSI affiliate SAMWU (South African Municipal and Allied Workers Union) decided to start this campaign after the death of a worker at a sewerage processing plant. SAMWU will represent the worker's family to take up the cause of his death, and if tests show the death was work-related, SAMWU will take the case to court. The campaign has allowed the union to force management to upgrade plants and to ensure workers are provided with proper protective equipment, changing rooms, hot water, shower and soap. SAMWU has demanded that the Department of Labour intervene when regulations are not respected. See www.samwu.org.za.

IMF MOVES TO EXPEL ZIMBABWE

The International Monetary Fund's board of directors decided in early December to begin procedures for expelling Zimbabwe as a member-country of the IMF. The Fund's press statement evokes Zimbabwe's overdue financial obligations and the government's lack of cooperation with the Fund. It does not mention the Zimbabwean government's long record of repression against the trade union movement, including last month's mass detentions of ZCTU members, nor does it mention other human rights abuses. However the IMF communiqué does include references to the country's deteriorating social conditions, such as increasing poverty and unemployment. Zimbabwe's voting rights at the IMF were suspended last June. See the press release on <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2003/pr03210.htm>.

RETIREMENTS AND PROMOTIONS FOR PSI'S ASIA PACIFIC STAFF

Albert Ponniah will be retiring as the PSI Asian Pacific Regional Secretary at the end of this month. Albert has worked for PSI since 1998 and has been instrumental in consolidating the presence of PSI in this region. Thanks to the initiatives of Albert, PSI has been successful in recruiting affiliates and securing new projects, especially in a promising new sub region, South East Asia. Albert will be replaced by Katshuiko Sato, promoted from PSI's East Asia office in Japan.

Jay Bhan, PSI's longest serving regional staff member, will also retire after more than 20 years with the organisation. Jay founded the South Asia office in Delhi, India, working initially from a one -room office with four affiliates. Jay leaves the organisation with a staff of four, affiliates in 5 countries, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Lakshmi Vaidhiyanathan has been promoted to this position with effect from January 2004.

PSI extends its sincere appreciation for the contributions of all our Asian Pacific staff members and looks forward to continuing our cooperation within Asia Pacific.

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