

Organize, Fight and Win!

Geneva, May 12 – 13, 2012

IUF Action Program for Equality

Since 1980, IUF Congresses have unanimously adopted resolutions reaffirming the principle of equal opportunities for men and women:

- Equal right and access to decent employment, training and professional advancement.
- Equal pay for work of equal value.
- The right to combine work and family responsibilities.
- Fair representation of women in decision-making bodies at all levels of trade unions (local, national, regional, international) according to the rules of the IUF.
- The right to be safe at work, safe at home.

And calling for the active promotion of equality at the workplace, in the trade union movement and in society.



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Although the proportion of women in the labour market has increased over the years, the modest progress in terms of increased participation of women in trade unions, implementation of internationally recognized labour standards of special concern for women workers, (including domestic workers and workers in the informal economy), and improved labour legislation, etc., is far from satisfactory.

Equal pay for work of equal value is still far from being achieved. On the contrary, there remains a gap of 20% on average between women's and men's full-time earnings.

Health and safety conditions for women workers are deteriorating due to increased use of pesticides in agriculture, use of chemical substances and high line speeds in the food industry. In all sectors of the IUF, including the hotel and restaurant sectors, long hours and stress and repetitive strain injuries seriously affect women.

Millions of women in the IUF sectors are forced to work outside their home country. Women migrant workers are in a more vulnerable situation than their male colleagues since they are discriminated against not only as migrants but also as women. There is evidence that forced labour and trafficking of women are increasing.

Rural women workers, who contribute enormously to building union strength and developing visibility of rural women, are still often denied access to education, housing, health systems and credit.

The recent global financial crisis has increased the responsibilities of women, particularly in the areas of elderly care and childcare in the home which is resulting in even greater stresses on their work/life balance.

These realities fall short of the expectations of women workers who have been struggling for recognition of the enormous contribution they make through their labour as workers, as trade unionists, within the family and in society.

In this context there can be no further argument to continue with the same patient attitude that has marked IUF work towards equality over the past decades. These are urgent matters and must be tackled accordingly by the IUF and its affiliates.

Campaigns to organize migrant women should be carried out and agreements on equal treatment and conditions for all should be signed. The level of trade union organisation among women is generally lower than among men. This might be related to the fact that women do not always see how unions can help to improve their living and working conditions. There is also a fear of reprisals by employers. Unions still have a lot to do to enable men and women to combine family life with trade union work. There are too few women both at the negotiating table and as leaders at all levels in many of the unions.

The precarious employment status of so many women workers has also increased the incidence of bullying and sexual harassment and violence against women, particularly in the agricultural sector, in domestic work and in the hotel and restaurant sector, but in food processing as well. Women are forced to give sexual favours as a condition of continued employment. An action plan against bullying and sexual harassment should be negotiated and implemented in all workplaces and displayed on the notice board. There should also be scope for systems to allow domestic workers to lodge claims against bullying and sexual harassment.

Maternity is one of the major reasons for discrimination at work in spite of ILO Conventions, national legislation and collective agreements.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has more than any other crisis revealed the persisting inequalities between men and women at all levels in society. Women are more vulnerable to the infection than men for biological reasons but also because they lack power over their own bodies and lives.



In light of the above, the IUF 26th Congress calls on affiliates and on the IUF to:

- Urgently implement the decision of the 23rd Congress that women should have at least 40% representation in all decision-making bodies of the IUF, including the regional committees;
- develop special organizing strategies for women in precarious employment and in the informal economy, including domestic workers and migrant workers;
- develop and implement adequate negotiating tools to curb gender inequalities with regard to wages and other working conditions;
- develop and implement gender-inclusive job evaluation and grading tools;
- promote equality platforms for bargaining within transnational companies;
- promote the right for fathers and mothers to reconcile family and working life in line with ILO Convention 156;
- fight for safe and decent workplaces for women;
- promote the ratification and implementation of international labour standards of special concern to women workers with particular focus on ILO C189 Decent work for domestic workers.

In order to translate Congress resolutions into practical and measurable objectives, the following steps should be taken:

The IUF and its affiliates should:

- actively promote the participation of women at all levels of union organisation and structures;
- absolutely commit to pursue the training of women as leaders, organizers, negotiators and educators;
- use the IUF gender equality manual in leadership courses for both men and women trade unionists;
- collect statistics on female / male union membership per occupation / sector;
- conduct research into the working conditions of women workers in order to respond more effectively to their needs;
- reinforce the work on and co-ordination of equality platforms with TNCs;
- ensure that ILO conventions 100 Equal Pay, 111 Non discrimination, 156 Workers with family responsibilities, 183 Maternity Protection and 189 Decent work for Domestic workers are reflected in collective agreements, plus terms from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – particularly article 7a (i);
- ensure that a policy on bullying and sexual harassment is agreed upon at every work place and/or part of the collective agreement. The IUF policy can be used as a model;
- continue to address women's health & safety at work with special emphasis on pesticides, RSI, stress, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and violence in the workplace;
- campaign for social security, including health care, for all;
- campaign for public policies for rural women to ensure they have access to education, housing, health care, credit, etc.

Employers / companies should be requested to provide statistics on

- the number of women/men workers per job category
- job classifications of women / men
- type of employment contract (permanent, full time, part time, seasonal, temporary, casual) women/men
- earnings (hourly wages / yearly earnings including benefits) by gender
- training and further training opportunities by gender
- resources to facilitate family-work balance
- these statistics should be drawn up annually to measure developments and to take action on any negative results, e.g. through a gender equality plan.

Gender equality plans shall be developed to address inequalities at the workplace. They must state clear goals and activities regarding recruitment, salaries, skills development, parental leave, health and safety aspects including bullying and sexual harassment policies. A regular review procedure should also be included in the equality plans.

The IUF Women's Committee should monitor the implementation and progress of the action plan, leading up to next Congress.





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