



# UNITED, STRONG & GROWING

**International Domestic Workers Federation  
(IDWF)**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2018**

**IDWF Annual Report 2018**

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**The IDWF second Congress was convened in Cape Town, South Africa on 16 – 19 November 2018.**

# President's Message

Myrtle Witbooi

**Looking back at IDWF's accomplishments of 2018 gives me a feeling of enormous pride in my community.**

We are the children of so-called kitchen girls and garden-boys, born into poverty, lacking good education and without opportunities to uplift ourselves and our families. But we found a way.

Despite being told that domestic work was not real work, we found a way. Despite being told that domestic workers could not organize, we found a way. Despite being told that we were too poor and too unskilled to create our own federation, we found a way.

**IDWF has now established itself as an essential organization—based on the ideas, life experiences and leadership of domestic workers worldwide.** We are united in our belief that we can change our circumstances for the better. We are strong in our principles and our plans for the future. And we are growing our movement of domestic workers, fighting for our own rights and the rights of our sisters and brothers globally.



...we found a way.

# General Secretary's Message

Elizabeth Tang

**2018 was a truly pivotal year for IDWF.**

We held our **Second Congress** in November 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa, and the planning process and implementation clarified for us how much we had **matured as an organization and as a movement** since our first Congress five years prior. Our members showed leadership every step of the way, on the agenda, substance, and logistics. The details of the Congress are found later in this report, but I do want to say this: the energy, passion and ideas in the room were electric. I hope all left the Congress feeling that we are at the beginning of a new phase in our organizing, optimistic about concrete changes for the future and readying ourselves for the many challenges ahead.

Thank you, to the organizers, the participants, the interpreters, the donors and all who gave so much of themselves to ensure that the Congress was substantive and powerful.

Our work is urgent, challenging and growing—which requires a talented staff committed to the cause of domestic workers worldwide. I am so pleased that IDWF was able to create several new staff positions in 2018—we now have 16 staff members, with seven based in our Hong Kong headquarters and 9 based in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and MENA. This new **woman-power** will enable us to increase the depth and breadth of our work at the local, national and international levels. It also helps IDWF itself to be a more resilient and sustainable organization over the long term.

IDWF is constantly humming with activity to support our overarching goal: to protect and advance domestic workers' rights, across the world. In 2018, we provided training on combatting gender-based violence, conducted “train the trainers” leadership seminars, represented domes-



Our members showed leadership every step of the way, on the agenda, substance, and logistics.

tic workers at local, national, regional and international forums, published manuals and videos, and assisted with membership recruitment and organizing so that domestic workers can form strong organizations. IDWF and its affiliates are changing the status quo: please look at the list of **policy victories** later in this report to see how much we have accomplished across the globe in just one year.

IDWF is also proud to be recognized for its innovative work. IDWF and its President Myrtle Witbooi were selected as a Winning Changemaker Organization of

the Challenging Norms, Powering Economies Initiative. This award is an initiative of Ashoka, Open Society Foundations and UN Women. This award, and **all recognition we receive, is a testament to our members—the domestic workers who fight for the rights, dignity and livelihoods of their community every day.**



# Context and the Need

## According to the International Labour Organization (ILO):

- There are over **67 million domestic** workers globally
- **80%** of domestic workers are women
- **17%** are migrants
- Domestic work accounts for **7.5%** of women's wage employment **worldwide**

**Domestic workers provide essential services in the modern economy**, enabling other men and women to participate in the external labour force while maintaining their home-lives. Our job duties often include care for children and increasingly, the elderly—as advances in medicine allow people to live longer, yet many no longer live in close proximity to their extended families. Domestic workers are a critical part of the **“care economy,”** which is recognized as a growing area of need and employment.

Despite the importance of our labour, the **working conditions of domestic workers are very poor, and wages are low.** In many countries, domestic workers even lack legal recognition as workers, and are therefore not entitled to labour protections afforded to virtually all other workers. For example, domestic workers are not protected by minimum wage laws in many countries. In those countries where decent laws are on the books, these laws are rarely enforced. The private, isolated nature of domestic work often makes violations invisible.

In the worst cases, domestic workers suffer **extreme abuse**: beatings, rape, starvation, imprisonment and death. Of the 25 million people in forced slavery worldwide, approximately 4 million are domestic workers.

**The risks can be especially great for migrants**—who often face language and cultural barriers, manipulation by employment agencies, lack of access to justice and more. Withholding of salaries—along with passports and visas—is not uncommon, leaving migrant domestic workers extremely vulnerable. Women who migrate for care work constitute the largest demographic segment of women who migrate for employment.

# About IDWF



**The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) is a global membership-based organization of domestic and household workers led by women**—which means that our understanding of the context, needs and challenges is both personal and international. We were founded in October 2013 by forty-seven domestic workers' member-based organizations who saw the need for a global federation to support, train, and help build a world-wide movement.

IDWF helps domestic and household workers build strong, democratic and sustainable workers' organizations, and weaves new and existing organizations into our influential global federation.

We do this by:

- Supporting domestic workers to form new organizations through membership recruitment, organizing, and strengthening women's leadership;
- Capacity-building and exchange of best practices among affiliates;
- Advocacy and awareness campaigns, on ratification of ILO Convention 189 and other legal improvements; and
- Leveraging the support of strategic partners, such as trade unions and labour rights organizations.

2018 was the third year in a 5-year strategic plan, and the activities outlined in this report reflect the objectives developed in that plan.

# 2018 Accomplishments and Activities

## By the end of 2018 IDWF had:

- 68 affiliates – increased from 65 in 2017
- From 55 countries – increased from 53 in 2017
- Representing over 500,000 domestic workers

## Welcome to our new affiliates!

Ethiopia:	Mulu Tesfa Domestic Workers Association (MTDWA)
Brazil:	Federação Nacional das Trabalhadoras Domésticas (FENATRAD)
Dominican Republic:	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadora/es Domesticas (SINTRADOMES-CASC)
USA:	United Domestic Workers of America (UDWA)



## Second IDWF Congress

**Preparing for a productive second Congress was a critical part of IDWF's 2018 activities.**

We held pre-Congress meetings in Africa (Tanzania), Asia (Sri Lanka), Europe (Belgium) and the Americas (Brazil) between January and May. The purpose of these meetings was to get feedback from our members on the most important issues and challenges faced by domestic workers in their regions—to ensure that the Congress was highly relevant to the needs of our members.





## The IDWF second Congress was convened in Cape Town, South Africa on 16 – 19 November 2018.

Among the 207 participants, there were 107 delegates and 100 observers from our affiliates as well as other organizations. They included trade unions, labour NGOs and other partners and allies of the IDWF who support our programs financially or with technical expertise. The four days were packed with speeches, workshops, networking, voting, laughter, singing, dancing, photo-taking and eating.

Sharing best practices, training, and learning are a critical part of IDWF's mission, and the Congress reflected those values. We were fortunate to have a diverse array of people address our community: **Hester Stephens**, President of

SADSAWU; **Nkosi Phathekile Holomisa**, Deputy Minister of Labour of South Africa; **Pia Stalpaert** of the IUF/ACVCSC; **Zingiswa Losi**, President of COSATU; **Sally Roever**, International Coordinator, WIEGO; **Sharan Burrow**, General Secretary of the ITUC; **Claire Hobden**, Technical Officer for Vulnerable Workers at the ILO; Marieke Koning Policy Advisor, ITUC; **Shawna Bada-Blau**, Executive Director, Solidarity Centre; **Sofia Eriksson**, International Secretary, Kommunal; **Mohammed Mwamadzingo**, ILO ACTRAV; and many others!

We held workshops on vital issues, such as labour organizing, ratification of C189, gender-based violence and the ILO process, migrants and refugees, and occupational safety and health, to name a few.

These learnings filled us with inspiration, spirit and concrete ideas to move on.



**Those concrete ideas are embodied in the resolutions passed at the Congress, which will provide the framework and priorities for IDWF's next five years of work:**

1. Composite Resolution on Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination: Building an Inclusive Global Union
2. Quality Child Care for Domestic Workers
3. Rights of Domestic Workers in a Comprehensive System of Care
4. Developing Solutions to the Care Crisis
5. Protection of Migrant Domestic Workers
6. To Promote Environmental Protection through Waste Reduction and Recycling
7. Building Power for Domestic Workers in the Online Economy
8. On Domestic Workers Health and Safety
9. Eradication of Child Labour
10. To Eradicate Gender Based Violence
11. Appointment of an Assistant General Secretary
12. On Ratification of C189
13. Consolidating the Base of the IDWF and its Affiliates
14. Focusing on the Role of the State in Protecting the Rights of Domestic Workers



15. On Solidarity with the Labour Movement through Collaboration Especially with the Informal Sector
16. A Sustainability Strategy for IDWF
17. Emergency Resolution (1): In Support of Central American Migrants and Condemning the US Government Border Militarization
18. Emergency Resolution (2): On Solidarity with the Working Class in Brazil



Finally, our delegates unanimously voted to install members of IDWF's Executive Committee to provide leadership to IDWF for the next five years. Delegates re-elected Myrtle Witbooi and Elizabeth Tang as the President and General Secretary respectively, and elected Carmen Britez of UPACP (Argentina) as Vice-President.

A full report on the Congress, written by Dr. Jennifer Fish, Professor at Old Dominion University, is forthcoming and will be available at [www.idwfed.org](http://www.idwfed.org)





The four days were packed with speeches, workshops, networking, voting, laughter, singing, dancing, photo-taking and eating.





## International Campaigns

### Ratification of C189

The IDWF and domestic worker organizations continued to prioritize ratification of the ILO Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers—known as C189.

C189 is a landmark convention that establishes the first global standards for domestic workers. It gives domestic workers the same basic rights as other workers, including weekly days off, limits to hours of work, minimum wages, paid overtime, social security, and clear terms and conditions of employment.

#### 2018 saw three new ratifications:

- Brazil (31 Jan 2018)
- Grenada (12 Nov 2018), and
- Peru (26 Nov 2018)



As of Dec 2018, **27 countries have ratified of C189**. Work is now being done to hold governments accountable for implementation.

## My Fair Home

This campaign focuses on the employers of domestic workers – encouraging them to personally take the My Fair Home pledge to uphold the rights of domestic workers in their own homes. The campaign is a collaboration between IDWF and the ILO.



In March 2018, as part of the celebrations for International Women’s Day, IDWF held a “My Fair Home” campaign event at the residence of Sri Lankan ambassador in Beirut, Lebanon. Members of the Sri Lanka Women Society in Beirut attended. Domestic worker Malani Kandeacrachchige, president of the society, told the audience:

“We take care of your home, we take care of your children, we prepare your food. We give our best, and all we want is to work and live in a Fair Home, where we feel respected. Please think how much will change the day we feel appreciated for all we do every single day. Because we know that when we come to this distant country, we are leaving behind many things. But we sacrifice because we dream of a better future for us and for our families.”

With the ILO initiative, the My Fair Home campaign also brought together a group of Jordanian youth for an intensive training workshop on campaigning for attitude and behaviour change toward migrant domestic workers. Over a two-day period, they were equipped with the knowledge and practical skills to implement social media and community outreach activities within their communities in different regions of Jordan.



## A Seat at the Table: International Representation and Alliances

It is crucial for domestic workers to be present and heard in international fora on the issues that affect our lives—including women’s rights, gender-based violence, labour rights, and migration, to name just a few. IDWF provided representation for domestic workers at the following major international gatherings in 2018:

- International Labour Conference on Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, Geneva, May-June 2018
- Abu Dhabi Dialogue on labour migration, Senior Officials Meeting, Colombo, Sri Lanka, May 2018
- Global Union strategy meeting on the care economy, Nyon, Switzerland, October 2018
- The bi-annual meetings of the ADLSA/ILO/GUFs, Qatar, April and October 2018

## Gender-Based Violence and the ILO Process

Domestic workers suffer from gender-based violence, though their stories are often untold. IDWF builds the capacity of its affiliates to advocate for violence-free workplaces. It also is involved in the ILO process to create a new ILO Convention on Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work—ensuring that the voices of domestic workers are heard loud and clear. In the run-up to the discussion on this new standard at the International Labour Conference in June 2018, IDWF mobilized its affiliates to foster support for an ILO Convention and Recommendation, holding trainings, distributing social media and other communications toolkits and encouraging sharing among affiliates. This work built upon activities from the previous year, in which IDWF sent ILO questionnaires to its affiliates and then sent a report integrating the responses to the ILO to ensure that domestic workers’ experiences with gender-based violence are included in international efforts.



# National Campaigns

**IDWF and its affiliates are involved in national campaigns to improve the daily lives of domestic workers. This year, we saw positive movement across the globe:**

## Africa

- Domestic workers are now included in the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) in **South Africa**, which means that domestic workers are finally able to claim compensation for injuries in the household. South African domestic workers also successfully fought for the inclusion of domestic workers in the minimum wage laws—and an increase in minimum wages. (SADSAWU)



- **Namibian** domestic workers won the inclusion of domestic workers in the minimum wage laws and an increase in minimum wages. (NDAWU)



## Asia

- In **Cambodia**, the government issued a prakas (regulation) on the rights of domestic workers, mandating days off, minimum age requirements, and employer responsibility for occupational accidents. (CDWN)
- **Hong Kong**'s Employment Ordinance was amended to curb the rampant abuses by domestic worker employment agencies. The amendment increased penalties for overcharging workers and operating an employment agency without a license from HK\$50,000 to HK\$350,000 and three years' imprisonment. The time limit for prosecution of abuses was extended from six months to 12 months. The ordinance also makes it harder to hide behind complex ownership structures. Also in Hong Kong, the minimum wage for domestic workers increased by 2.5% and minimum food allowance of domestic workers by 2.1%. (FADWU)



## Europe

- **Belgium** passed a new law incorporating all staff of embassies and missions into their labour relations system, which means that domestic workers of embassies and missions are now granted the same conditions and salaries as Belgian public services workers. Previously, embassies only needed to grant working conditions and salaries from their own countries. (ACV-CSC and ABVV-FGTB).

## Latin America

- In **Paraguay**, at the time of this report, domestic workers have won a historic achievement: parliamentary approval (lower and upper cameras) of a minimum wage for the sector at 100%, rather than 60% of the minimum wage. We are still waiting for the promulgation of the Law. (SINTRADESPY)



- The Supreme Court of **Mexico** declared the exclusion of domestic workers from the obligatory social security regime unconstitutional. The court mandated the establishment of a pilot program in 2019 to develop a new system designed around the particularities of domestic work. (RMEHAC and SINACTRAHO)
- In **Argentina**, domestic workers received a 25% salary increase after the domestic workers union successfully negotiated for the sector during the tri-partite meeting. (UPACP)



## Middle East & North Africa

- The government of **Qatar** has agreed to strengthen implementation of the domestic workers law (Law no. 15), particularly on rest days and payment of wages. Abolition of exit visas for domestic workers will be considered by the end of 2019. Under the current system, domestic workers must get permission from their employers in order to depart the country—leaving those in abusive households with no means to escape, and subjecting domestic workers to unscrupulous practices. (IDWF)

## North America

- In **Seattle**, the first-ever municipal level Bill of Rights for domestic workers was passed. This breakthrough bill is the strongest in the USA so far. It includes mechanisms for enforcement and organization-building. (NDWA)



## In the pipeline!

**Policy changes on minimum wage and social protection in Malaysia and Nepal. (AMMPO and HUN)**

## Breakthroughs on Organizing: A Creative Approach for Migrant Domestic Workers' Rights in the MENA region



There are more than 3 million migrant domestic workers in the **Middle East North Africa** (MENA) region. Domestic workers are often excluded from labour laws, leaving them little protections when faced with overwork, withholding of wages, the confiscation of passports, and verbal, physical and sexual abuse. The majority of migrant domestic workers in the region are beholden to the Kafala or sponsorship system, in which a migrant worker's immigration status is legally bound to an individual sponsor for their contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from their sponsor.

Given the web of challenges facing domestic workers in the MENA region, IDWF has invested in creative approaches. We emphasize building membership-based organizations until unions are legally and culturally accepted—with the long-term

goal of integrating domestic workers into the ranks and leadership of the trade union movement. IDWF has actively supported the organization of groups of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, Kuwait and Jordan, collaborating with key partners such as the FES, Solidarity Center and the ILO. In Kuwait, for example, after a six-month leadership course, the Sandigan Kuwait Domestic Workers Association (SKDWA) was formed. Its goal is to unite the many Filipino migrant domestic workers in Kuwait to advocate for their rights. We are in close contact with existing groups, such as the Sri Lankan Women Society in Lebanon and the Domestic Workers Solidarity Network in Jordan, who are role models for new groups. In Lebanon and Jordan, we've developed advocacy strategies on discriminatory wage setting (migrants' wages are often set according to nationality rather than qualifications), recruitment agency fees, and over-staying fines.

# Publications, Videos and Training

## Publications

### Platform of Demands – Violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work

<http://idwfed.org/en/resources/platform-of-demands-violence-and-harassment-against-women-and-men-in-the-world-of-work>

### Tackling Child Labour in Domestic Work

(Translated into Nepali, Khmer and Bengali)

<http://idwfed.org/en/resources/tackling-child-labour-in-domestic-work-a-handbook-for-action-for-domestic-workers-and-their-organizations>

## Videos

### My Second Home

<http://www.idwfed.org/en/updates/philippines-my-second-home-migrant-domestic-workers>



### Nothing Can Stop Us

(Organizing in Malaysia, available on request)





## Regional Training

- Asia Regional Train the Trainers (ToT) on Child Domestic Workers, Nepal, February
- Asia Workshop on Gender-Based Violence, Sri Lanka, April
- Latin America Workshop on Gender-Based Violence, Sao Paulo, Brazil, May
- Africa Capacity-Building Workshop on Ratification of C189, Kenya, June
- Domestic Workers Side Meeting to the Southern African Development Council meeting, Namibia, August

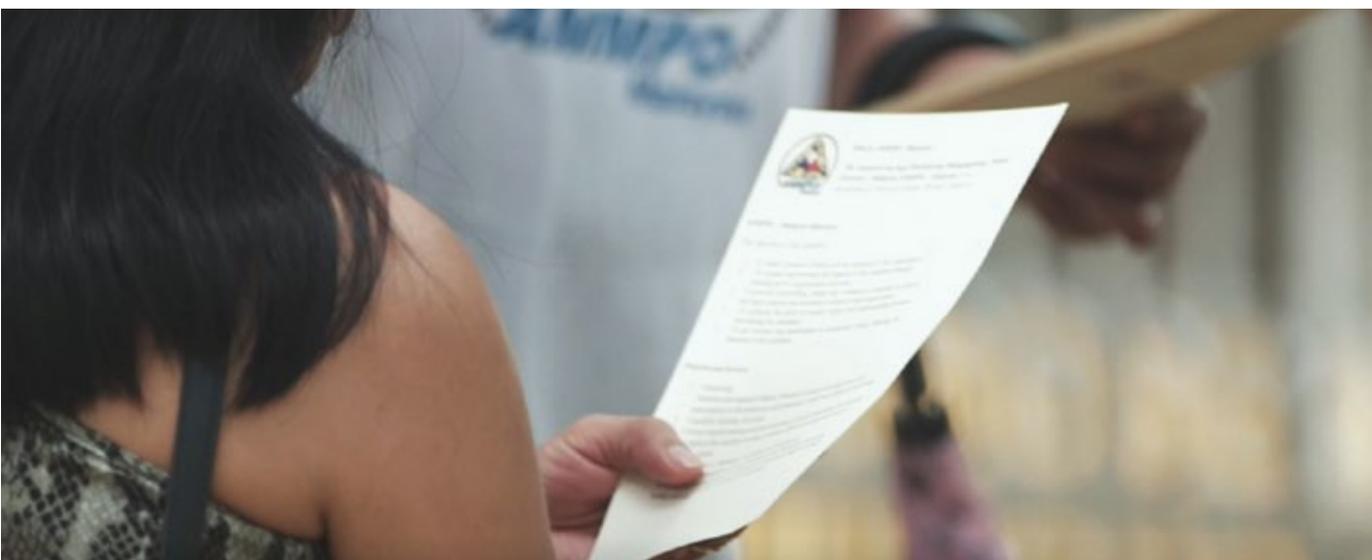


- Consultation Workshop on Qatar Law No. 15 in partnership with Bayanihan-Qatar and over 20 migrant domestic workers leaders, Qatar, October
- Inter-Regional Exchange Workshop with domestic workers' leaders from the MENA Region and Africa, Cape Town, South Africa, November

# Challenges

**Our work presents many challenges—both external and internal:**

- Isolated and invisible nature of work in private homes
- Dependence on employer for housing, food and immigration status
- Fear of assault and harassment
- Domestic work is often excluded from labour laws
- Long work hours, no rest or free time or holidays
- Hostility from authorities



## **External Challenge: Hostility from Authorities**

Domestic workers in Malaysia faced major challenges in 2018, when the government conducted raids to deport migrants. Regardless of their immigration status, these raids left many domestic workers feeling frightened and vulnerable. AMMPO has persevered through this difficult time, keeping up their organizing work and training and using the raids to highlight the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers. IDWF produced a training video showcasing their courageous work, which has been inspiring and educational to domestic workers groups outside of Malaysia who face similar challenges.

## Internal Challenge: Stable, Dues-Paying Membership

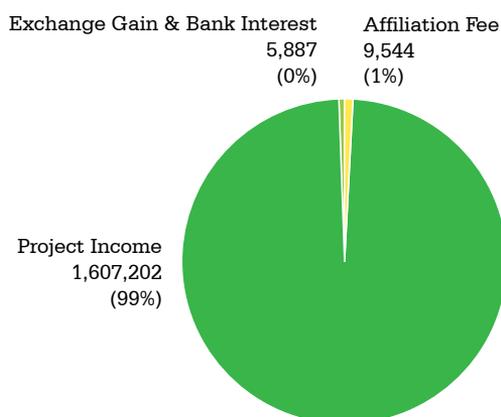
Domestic workers unions across the globe rely on their membership for active participation and dues to support their work. But the isolated nature, long hours, lack of job security and low pay of domestic work presents challenges to domestic workers unions. New members may express interest or even sign on to join the union, but then it is difficult to contact them again. With barely subsistence level wages and families to support, payment of modest dues can feel like a luxury to domestic workers despite their hunger for increased protections and the support system provided by our members.



# Financial Report 2018

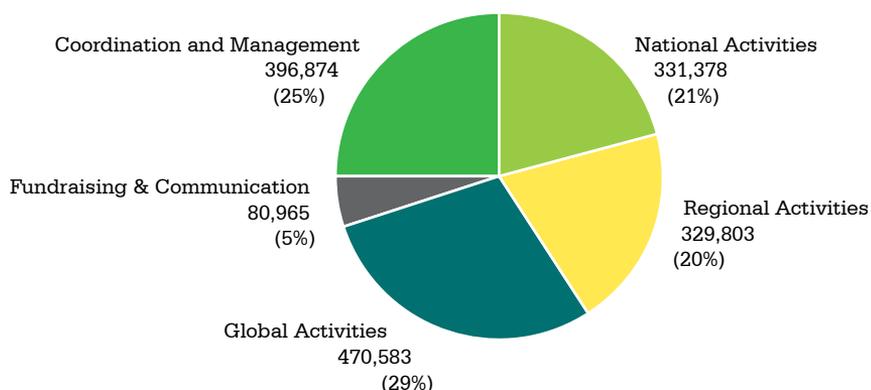
## Income

January – December 2018



## Expenditure

January – December 2018



*The currency used is USD. Exchange rate: USD 1 = HKD 7.85  
For details on the consolidated financial statements, please refer to [www.idwfed.org](http://www.idwfed.org).*

# Our Funders and Partners

**IDWF is grateful for the support of and partnerships with**

ACVCSC Service Union

Bread for the World

DGB Bildungswerk

Ford Foundation

Foundation to Promote Open Society

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)

Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)

Mondiaal FNV

NoVo Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation

Olof Palme International Center

Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)

Solidarity Center

Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK)

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

and many more enhance our resources and enable IDWF to grow stronger.



Our financial outlook improved in 2018 with an increased number of funders, several of which have expressed intentions to support our growth while we explore additional sources of funding. We are pleased to report a significant improvement in collecting affiliation fees, with approximately 95% of our affiliates paying their fees to be a part of our joint federation.

# Our Affiliations

The IDWF is also affiliated to two other global organizations:

International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)

<http://www.iuf.org>



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

<http://www.wiego.org>



# Who We Are

## Officers

President: Myrtle Witbooi, SADSAWU, South Africa

Vice President: Carmen Britez, UPACP, Argentina

General Secretary: Elizabeth Tang, IDWF Secretariat, Hong Kong

## Executive Committee Members

Novelita Valdez Palisoc, UNITED, Philippines

Shirley Pryce, JHWU, Jamaica

Grace Papa, CSC A&S, Belgium

Andrea del Carmen Morales Perez, FETRADOMOV, Nicaragua

Gilda Victoria Blanco Franzua, NDWA, USA

## Alternative Committee Members

Asmaou Bah, SYNEM-GUINEE, Guinea

Gyanu Maya Kshastri, HUN, Nepal

Norma Nelson, ATLU, Antigua & Barbuda

Wendy Paula Galarza Quinonez, FILCAMS CGIL, Italy

Doug Moore, UDWA, USA

## Secretariat

General Secretary: Elizabeth Tang

Accounting Officer: Ivan Wong

Administrative Officer: Phyllis Law

Communication Officer: Yee Ting Ma

Field Organizer: Bariyah

Migration Expert: Marie-José Tayah (until July 2018)

Network Facilitator – Latin America: Sofia Trevino (part-time, seconded from WIEGO)

Organizational Development Officer: Carmel Purkis (March 2018-March 2019)

Program Manager – Middle East and North Africa: May Abi Samra (Sep 2018-March 2019)

Program Officer – Africa: Deograsia Vuluwa

Program Officer – Asia: Niken Wulan (part-time)

Project Manager: Daphne Ip

Regional Coordinator – Africa: Vicky Kanyoka

Regional Coordinator – Asia Pacific: Fish Ip

Regional Coordinator – Europe: Karin Pape (part-time, seconded from WIEGO)

Regional Coordinator – Latin America: Adriana Paz Ramirez

Regional Coordinator – Middle East and North Africa: Mariela Acuña (until March 2019)

May Abi Samra (since April 1, 2019)

Training Officer: Erlinda Binti Joseph (Lindu) (part-time)

## Photo credits

covers	Jennifer Natalie Fish
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page 12	Africa Domestic Workers Network
page 12	Federazione Italiana dei lavoratori del Commercio, Alberghi, Mense e Servizi (FILCAMS CGIL)
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THE INTERNATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS FEDERATION (IDWF) IS A MEMBERSHIP-BASED, GLOBAL ORGANIZATION OF DOMESTIC WORKERS. WE AIM TO UNITE DOMESTIC WORKERS TO FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS, OVERCOME EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE, AND SECURE DIGNITY, JUSTICE AND SECURITY.

[IDWFED.ORG](http://IDWFED.ORG)