1. Conditions of paid domestic/household work in Latin America

It is clear that paid domestic work has the same characteristics worldwide, both regarding who does it (which means: women who have been marginalized due to their gender, origin and/or economic conditions) as well as in the conditions of mistreatment, discrimination and violence that occur within the realms of household privacy.

The constant invisibility of paid domestic work, the lack of political will shown by most governments, and the absence of domestic workers in public debates where they can express their needs, have all favored a practice of regulating these people and their rights without consulting their needs. This has led to decades of inequality, exclusion and discrimination of domestic workers. Despite the valuable contribution that domestic workers carry out so that employers’ households and society in general can function, many domestic workers are still unprotected by national laws.

- There are more than 14 million domestic workers in Latin America.
- It is estimated that 10-15% of houses in the region employ a domestic worker, not even counting those workers who work per day or per hour.
- In Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, almost one in five of all female workers is a domestic worker. In other countries such as Bolivia, Costa Rica and Mexico, one out of every ten women workers performs this activity.
- In all countries of the region, it is the most feminized occupation, since women represent approximately 90% of domestic workers. It is the main occupation for women in the region.

Nowadays, paid domestic work is also changing in the way that it is performed, because of changes in what both households and domestic workers want.

For instance, it is no longer common for domestic workers to live in the household where they work. Today, more domestic workers prefer to work per hour or per day, and even for different employers throughout the week. This helps them avoid long working days where often they do not get paid for overtime. Also, live-in work and long working days mean a lack of personal development and greater separation from their own families.
Meanwhile, this work is demanding more specialized knowledge, with the greater introduction of domestic appliances and/or chemical products. Yet, there is rarely any education or training for this. Actually, ‘school’ for the majority of domestic workers is life itself.

2. **Historical background of domestic workers’ organizations in Latin America**

Here is a snapshot of some of the origins of domestic workers’ organizing in Latin America:

- **In Argentina**, the oldest organizations are the *Unión Personal Auxiliar de Casas Particulares*, founded in 1901 and, in the province of Córdoba, the *Sindicato de Personal de Casas de Familia* (1963).

- **In Bolivia**, the *Sindicato de Culinarias* was organized in 1935 and one of their demands in 1950 was to replace the word ‘doméstica’ [domestic] for the expression of ‘empleada de labores del hogar’ [workers of household activities]. Nearly 50 years later, on May 20th 1984, the *Sindicato de Trabajadoras del Hogar Zona Sopocachi* was founded, and later on other unions were set up too, giving rise to the federation FENATRAHOB on March 28th 1993.

- **In Brazil**, the *Asociación de Trabajadoras Domésticas do Brasil* was created in the city of Santos in 1936.

- **In Costa Rica**, the *Asociación de Servidoras Domésticas* was created in 1962, as part of the local catholic trade union movement that was then dissolved in 1972.

- **Chile’s** oldest background is in 1926, when the *Sindicato Autónomo de Empleados de Casa Particular de Ambos Sexos* was created.

- Similarly, in the decade of the 1930s there are records of several local unions being founded in **México**.

- **In Uruguay**, domestic workers used to meet in churches in the 1960s, especially at the El Cordón church in the capital city Montevideo. There, the *Asociación de Empleadas de Casas Particulares* was founded in 1967. In 1975, the *Asociación Laboral de Empleadas del Servicio Doméstico y Afines* was also created. It became a union in 1985, under the name of *Sindicato Único de Trabajadoras Domésticas*, which was dissolved some years later and then re-founded in 2005.

3. **CONLACTRAHO and its action program**

At a regional level, the *Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar* (CONLACTRAHO) was founded in 1988. It comprises affiliated unions, associations and groups of domestic workers in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Currently, it has affiliates from 15 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, as well as Canada.

Its policies and activities have made a significant contribution to the recognition and achievement of domestic workers’ rights throughout the region. CONLACTRAHO established 30th March as the ‘International Day for Domestic Workers’.
The demands of CONLACTRAHO are:

- Greater awareness among all social levels about the role and working conditions of domestic workers.
- The right for domestic workers to participate and organize in unions that represent their interests.
- Domestic workers should not to be excluded from any laws that benefit all other workers.
- The right for all domestic workers to social security and a retirement pension plan.
- The right to have decent work and a decent salary that allows domestic workers to live with dignity.
- The right to a clearly established working schedule.
- The right to education.

**Better legal rights for domestic workers**

The increasing demand for paid domestic work and the consolidation of democratic processes in Latin America have created greater space for debate regarding laws and public policies that strengthen domestic workers’ rights. But, more than that, the domestic workers’ own strong efforts to organize, with CONLACTRAHO’s support for them in that process, as well as alliances with trade unions that recognize domestic workers’ demands, have been vital in winning better laws and practice in some countries. Examples include:

- In **Uruguay**, Law N° 18.065 of November 15th 2006 established that domestic workers enjoy the same labor rights and social security benefits as all other workers. In 2008, Uruguay became the first (and only to date) Latin American country with collective bargaining for domestic workers.
- In **Brazil, Costa Rica** and **Peru**, an 8-hour working day has been recognized.
- In **Brazil** and **Bolivia**, payment in kind has been disallowed.
- **Chile** and **Ecuador** have established measures to improve wages.
- **Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador** and **Paraguay** have extended health care and social security.
- In **Argentina**, Law N° 26844 passed in March 2013 set out the nature of work contracts specifically for domestic workers.
- In both **Argentina** and **Brazil**, the governments have developed fiscal incentives for employers who legalize their workers.

Despite these advancements, in all countries there is still some discrimination in legislation against domestic workers, and there are serious delays in law enforcement.
4. **Alliance between IDWN and CONLACTRAHO: Strengthening the labor rights of domestic workers through ILO Convention 189**

When the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) was founded in November 2006, CONLACTRAHO was one of the founding members and took part in the decision to fight for an ILO Convention for the rights of domestic workers. With economic support through the IDWN, CONLACTRAHO then mobilized campaigns and, above all, training of domestic workers in our member organizations about the proposed Convention. The IDWN also promoted CONLACTRAHO’s international participation and profile, for instance at the ITUC-CSI Women’s Congress, the World Social Forum in Dakar in 2011, the Congress of Italian Unions, etc.

We supported capacity-building and participation of domestic workers to attend the 99th and 100th International Labour Conferences in Geneva where the proposed Convention was discussed. They included domestic workers leaders from FENATRAHOB in Bolivia, SINPECAF in Argentina, SINTRADOP in Paraguay, UTRAHOGAR in Cali, Colombia, the Asociación de Trabajadoras del Hogar de Republica Dominicana in the Dominican Republic, Astradomes in Costa Rica, Sintracap in Chile, and various Mexican organizations.

So far, four countries in this region have ratified the C189 – Uruguay, Paraguay, Nicaragua and Bolivia. The adoption of the C189 was very important for Latin America because it meant an improvement of domestic workers’ rights and the revaluation of their work – and several countries have since strengthened equality of rights for domestic workers. However, inequality still prevails. This is a challenge for domestic workers’ organizations and trade unions, to ensure that the C189 is implemented and that legislations are enforced.

At its October 2012 Coordination Meeting, and with the participation of our General Secretary, the IDWN decided to continue supporting Latin American organizations through CONLACTRAHO. Activities then took place under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ FLOW project (Financing Leadership and Opportunities for Women), including a regional workshop in December 2012 for 40 Peruvian domestic workers, a national workshop in Brazil, and the printing and distribution of a brochure on C189 in Portuguese for Brazil and in Spanish for Chile.

5. **Proposals for Future Collaboration**

For CONLACTRAHO, the alliance with the IDWN has been very important. Now, since C189 was won, it is time for the further development of a global domestic workers’ movement. CONLACTRAHO’s proposals for the Action Plan of the new International Domestic Workers’ Federation are:

- To develop strategies that will allow us to increase the visibility of migrant domestic workers’ rights and to organize them into trade unions.
- To promote the organization of domestic workers in trade unions at national level.

To promote the regulation of job agencies that often hires undocumented workers outside the legal framework.