

Domestic Workers at the ILC Geneva 2009

The National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) was represented by General Secretary Ida Le Blanc and Gillian Atwell (a member and Domestic worker with twelve years of experience) at the International Labour Conference (ILC) at the invitation of the IUF International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers` Association who facilitates the project of the International Network of Domestic Workers.

NUDE was one of the members of the steering committee attending the Conference, other members attending were Latin America and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO); Peru Trade Union of Household Workers (SINTRAHOGARP); South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU); Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers` Union (CHODAWU) of Tanzania, National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) of USA and Asian Domestic Workers` Network (ADWN)

Our Main purpose for attending the ILC was to observe the procedures of standard setting. We had first hand information whilst attending the meetings of the Workers group on the agenda of HIV/AIDS, which held general discussions on the issue, we listened to the arguments, and we also heard their deliberations in arguments concerning amendments to the issue on HIV/AIDS and workers. Many of the amendments that were made were through consensus. General discussions on Domestic workers will take place next year, so it was important for us to be there to observe.

We had training lectures from members of the ILO ACTRAV who informed us of the process of the ILO and the ILC. We learnt the process of standard setting, the different procedures that had to take place. We were further informed on the questionnaire for Domestic Workers that were sent out to governments. And useful documents pertaining to decent work and domestic workers were available to us. We also attended several side events and spoke from the floor.

It was also a chance for the Steering Committee to meet and reflect on our past work and our way forward. Several meeting were held and duties were delegated to officers of the committee for the coming months ahead.

Ms. Le Blanc was one of the panelists who spoke on behalf of the International network of Domestic Workers at one of the side events hosted by the International Co-ordinating Committee (ICC) on Organizing Workers in the Informal Economy at

the ILO Building. The event was chaired by the President of the Ghana Trade Union Congress and the other panelist was a representative of (SEWA) Self Employed Women Association from India and Street Net International from South Africa.

Ms. Le Blanc told the audience that was made up of governments, employers and trade union delegates of the ILC, who came to the event, that there were Millions of people Worldwide working in private homes of others, and they are mostly women from the poorer sections of society. Many of them are migrants from other countries and there was also children doing this work for no pay. She said Domestic workers were isolated in the homes so they remained invisible and vulnerable to abuse.

Despite all this caring work, caring for families and taking care of their daily needs, Domestic workers remained unrecognized and their rights are not respected as workers. Not any-where in the world.

She called for recognition of Domestics as workers because that is what we are, "WORKERS". We contribute to the economy and society yet we are not respected, she continued.

We work hard to feed our families trying to lift ourselves from poverty. We look after other people's families, their children, the elderly and the disabled. She argued that this is skilled work.

We look after people's homes and children so that they can go out to work and further their careers. Yet this work is neither respected nor valued.

She said the International Network of Domestic Workers that was formed in the Netherlands in November of 2006 was mobilizing across the World for the rights and respect that are justly deserved. Ms. Le Blanc called on the delegates present for their support for a better future for Domestic workers. She gave a history of the network, how it was started and where we are today.

Ms. Le Blanc told the audience that the network was forming alliances with Trade Unions, Federations, NGOs and Researchers. She went on, "Our Network is guided by a steering Committee of Domestic/Household Workers from Across the Globe, which is part of the IUF, which has provided an organizational base for us and we are supported by WEIGO, Global Unions and PSI."

We want an ILO Convention, setting out our rights as workers everywhere. We must be included in the Decent Work Agenda. We want Decent Work too, she stressed.

Well, the ILO Process has begun, in June 2010 on the agenda of the ILC will be standard setting for Domestic Workers. The ILO will adopt an International Standard, setting out the rights of Domestic /household workers as workers. This document must give us the protection we need and what we deserve. We want an ILO Convention and we need all the support we can get to ensure that we win protection for Domestic Workers.

In the meantime, the ILO has sent out a Questionnaire on Domestic workers to governments, employers and trade union centres, we must ensure that our governments answer the questionnaire, and also employers and trade unions alike respond to the questionnaire.

We are preparing our arguments and evidence for general discussions next year at the ILC, we have to lobby governments, we must ensure they respond to the ILO draft law and practice, reports and questionnaires. And we must raise awareness amongst the Public at Large. We are advising that domestic workers and supporters be vigilant. We must ensure that our governments and trade unions respond to the questionnaires. We need also to send our responses.

We are also asking all trade unions to include a domestic worker/organization on their delegation to the ILC next year 2010. Our work has just begun and we must win. We must win a Convention and a Recommendation. Domestic workers must make history at the ILC.