

AFL-CIO Executive Council Statement
Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
February 2013

**2013 George Meany–Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award:
International Domestic Workers’ Network**

More and more workers in the global economy find themselves in precarious and informal work situations. Among these vulnerable workers, domestic workers are some of the most exploited. They toil alone, by the millions, without protection and often far from home. In many ways, their work is invisible. But despite their vulnerable status, the tireless domestic workers who clean homes, care for children and the elderly, cook meals and otherwise ensure the smooth running of households are fighting for—and winning—their rights.

Primarily women and migrant workers, domestic workers labor in a hidden economy where their work is undervalued and under-regulated. Domestic workers make extraordinary sacrifices to support their families, often traveling to other countries for jobs, leaving their own children behind to care for others. As they work in private homes, away from the public eye and the purview of labor inspectors, they may experience physical, psychological and sexual abuse; forced confinement; nonpayment of wages; and excessively long working hours. In the worst situations, they suffer forced labor, debt bondage and other forms of human trafficking. In most countries, including in the United States, domestic workers are explicitly excluded from labor law protections.

Despite these harsh conditions, domestic workers have been courageously standing up for their rights on the job—creating associations and joining unions in places such as the Dominican Republic, Hong Kong, Kenya and the United States. The partnerships that have developed between labor unions and domestic worker organizations have helped the labor movement develop a new blueprint to respond to a global economy that increasingly is based on precarious work. This collaboration has raised the level of respect and recognition for domestic workers, established labor standards and built a more inclusive and powerful labor movement around the world. Collectively, domestic workers have formed the International Domestic Workers’ Network (IDWN). We are proud to work in partnership with domestic workers in the United States and around the world to build a stronger and more representative labor movement, and to award the 2013 George Meany–Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award to the IDWN.

In 2011, with the support of the IDWN, domestic workers achieved passage of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C. 189). This was an historic accomplishment as it was the first time that domestic work was recognized as work, deserving of full labor protections. The passage of this international standard culminated years of grassroots struggle by some of the most marginalized workers in the world, representing a huge victory for the rights of women workers, migrant workers and workers in the informal economy. Tens of millions of domestic workers now have a set of international standards aimed at improving their working conditions. In negotiating the convention, the AFL-CIO and the IDWN U.S. affiliate, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), led the way in setting an example for other labor collaborations globally, when the AFL-CIO appointed a domestic worker from NDWA as the lead delegate for the ILO convention negotiations. The IDWN currently leads the effort to promote ratification of the convention.

The importance of the IDWN in supporting local domestic worker movements, building bridges between unions and domestic worker organizations and providing a voice for domestic workers at the international level is crucial. IDWN is made up of domestic workers' organizations, including trade unions, around the world. The IDWN is provided with an organizational base by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), and is supported by Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

In recognition of the groundbreaking efforts of domestic workers worldwide to organize for greater awareness of and respect for their work, their historic success in the adoption of the ILO convention and their commitment to support, expand and build the global labor movement, the AFL-CIO is pleased to award the 2013 George Meany–Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award to the International Domestic Workers' Network.