May Day

Latin America and the Caribbean should be a region of integration, democracy and sustainable development

Like every year on this important date for the union movement, in various cities of the Americas, unions mobilize to demand that governments and employers provide the responses needed to assure a decent life for working people.

Excessive work shifts, poor salaries, unsafe and unhealthy workplaces, absence of collective bargaining, union persecution, millions of children working, discrimination and abuse of women workers, are all realities that need to be eliminated.

In addition, there are no signs that the global crisis is being resolved, as it continues to affect most men and women workers throughout the world. Although some centers of power affirm the crisis is being overcome, it proves to be resistant in most European countries and the United States.

The anti-union offensive of the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress and in various state governments has exposed the most reactionary and conservative thinking and policies in this country, which seeks to blame workers, migrants and the most needy for the crisis now experienced by U.S. society.

In Latin America, the inequality that is a structural characteristic of the region continues to indicate that we have much more wealth concentrated in few hands and more poverty. Except for exceptional situations, in most countries, salaries are not keeping up with rising inflation and the cost of living.

We cannot fail to mention that antiunion violence persists in Colombia and Guatemala where various union members have been assassinated. Honduras continues to suffer with persistent impunity in the context of increasingly repressive actions by the illegitimate government in that country.

On May 1, the working class of the Americas must include in its demands the end of the war in Libya launched against the regime of Muammar el-Qadafi, through the intervention of NATO, which shows no signs of having a military result. Countries in the tumultuous Middle East and North Africa must be assured a sovereign and autonomous process as they seek alternatives to the current repressive regimes.

Latin America and the Caribbean should be a region of integration, democracy and sustainable development that benefits all peoples. For this reason, we salute the consolidation of integration processes such as those launched by ALBA and UNASUR, scenarios which present alternative spaces that favor the complete realization of the rights of all men and women in our country. We salute the upcoming constitution of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), as a space for the opportunity of unity within the economic, political, social and cultural diversity of our region.
TUCA and Sotermun together

Union movement of the Americas sign agreement in central Spain to train leaders.

On March 1, TUCA signed an agreement with the NGO Sotermun, promoted by the Unión Sindical Obrera (USO) of Spain for solidarity with men and women workers of the more impoverished countries.

The document expresses and details the will of the Spanish union center to contribute to the union movement of the Americas in its struggle for a world based on decent work, social justice, solidarity and peace.

The document is composed of ten points. Through them, Sotermun-USO commits to administering the search for solidarity resources from Spanish and European sources, to be destined to organizations affiliated to TUCA. The funds should be used to train union militants and directors, with an emphasis on training women and youth who work with policies of equality and non-discrimination.

"TUCA and and Sotermun-USO manifest their openness to considering and defining with other Spanish and European ITUC affiliates activities and initiatives," concluded the agreement, which was signed at the TUCA offices in São Paulo, during the visit of Spanish union leaders Manuel Zaguirre, director de Sotermun, and Javier de Vicente, international relations secretary of USO.

Domestic Workers

This May 1st, women workers in the Americas mobilized to demand from governments and business the responses needed to assure the new agreement "Decent Work for Domestic Workers" at the next International Labor Conference.

In our countries, domestic labor is not considered formal employment and is often left at the margin of social protection, so that workers in this sector are at the mercy of their employers, often suffering a variety of abuses and violations of their human rights.

Therefore, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) recognizes and promotes the right that every woman has to opt for decent labor norms to guarantee her health and safety at work and the support of public policies that guarantee a decent quality of life and Equal Opportunities for Domestic Workers.
Social justice and Democracy

"Winds of change for social justice and democracy 1 May 2011". Common statement of the ITUC and its Global Unions partners

Today as trade unionists around the world celebrate the role of workers in the fight for democracy and social justice, the international union movement takes inspiration from winds of change sweeping across Arab countries.

ITUC salutes the courage of working men and women and the independent trade unions in the vanguard of this historic fight for freedom.

We pledge our support to their struggle and we condemn without reservation the tyranny of regimes, in the Middle East and elsewhere, who continue to deny their people fundamental rights and who use violence to silence voices of dissent. We urge the international community to act to end this oppression.

The time has come to turn away from the failed policies of the past. We must abandon programmes of austerity that tear into the fabric of society and that diminish people’s lives. We must end the scandal of falling living standards caused by the growth of informal, unprotected and precarious work and, particularly, the grotesque exploitation of migrant workers. There must be action now to rescue a lost generation of young people who yearn for jobs and a decent future.

But none of this will happen unless governments put their people first by regulating the finance sector and by curbing the excesses of corporate power. All governments must invest in job creation, in education and training, in programmes to strengthen investment in quality public services and in providing a universal social protection floor. The largest and most powerful economies, in the G20, must provide the lead for this.

Governments must put finance at the service of the real economy and reclaim the wealth needed to put the world economy to rights by taxing banks and finance, including urgent action to introduce a financial transactions tax.

Unless there is an immediate change of direction in governance and management of the world economy, the noble aspirations of the Millennium Development Goals will not be met and there will be no progress to stop the catastrophe of climate change.

Globalisation can only work if it brings sustainable wealth for all and promotes action for a just transition to a sustainable world built around principles of strong economies, social justice, and green jobs.

ITUC will work to expose governments who refuse to change and who are withdrawing from provision of services, imposing fiscal cuts and attacking public sector workers with devastating effect on the lives of all people, particularly women.

We will continue to isolate, condemn and target those companies that are reckless in their disregard for labour standards and who prey upon the weakest in the workforce.

Today the global challenges are as great as we have ever faced, but the union movement is in good heart. Our proud traditions of solidarity are the foundations of social progress, democracy and peace, and they give us the strength to make real the dream of a global economy based upon justice, equality, humanity and sustainability.
Paraguay:

Core Labour Standards

Paraguay must increase efforts to achieve compliance with ILO core labour standards Conventions

A new report by the ITUC on core labour standards in Paraguay, published to coincide with the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) review of its trade policies, has found that the government does not effectively enforce its laws on trade union rights.

The report finds that although to some extent workers have the right to organise, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to strike, there are severe restrictions on exercising these rights. In practice, many cases of anti-union discrimination and harassment against union members have been reported. The report finds that many of these labour rights violations remain unpunished. Furthermore, discrimination in employment and remuneration is widespread. Those experiencing discrimination include women, indigenous people, disabled persons, people living with HIV/AIDS and homosexuals.

The report takes note of estimates that half the country’s children work, mainly in agriculture, manufacturing, street vending and domestic servitude. Furthermore, forced labour occurs, usually in the forms of debt bondage and forced prostitution. Many cases of forced labour are found in the region of Chaco and involve persons of indigenous origin. The report calls on the government to strengthen its law enforcing capacities and take urgent measures to address core labour standards violations.

USA: Wis. Protests Inspire Morello’s ‘Union Town’

Singer Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine has always been a strong supporter of working people. Morello was so inspired after taking part in a demonstration and headlining a concert in February for the protesters at the state Capitol in Madison, Wis., that he wrote what he calls “fighting songs.”

Not only did he write and record the songs, he’s donating the proceeds of the new eight-song extended play (EP) “Union Town” to help working people.
April 28

For safer, healthier, better work

Every year on 28 April 2011 trade unions all over the world commemorate workers who have died or who have gotten ill or injured at the workplace.

According to ILO data, an estimated 337 million accidents and 2.3 million deaths occur every year at workplaces, with some 6,300 deaths per day.

April 28 is about highlighting the crucial role trade unions play, of strong regulation and effective enforcement in securing safer working conditions, a vital component of a decent work agenda.

The day is also about promoting a different model, where workers have access to better jobs, where safety is not treated as a cost and where sustainable development goes beyond theory and realises the commitment to give people a decent livelihood in a better planet.

Concrete actions are set to take place in more than 50 countries such as rallies, marches, demanding the ratification of ILO standards, and commemorative acts, all of which represent an opportunity for reflection and sharing of experiences.

Unions make work safer! - A map and country listings of activities focusing on health and safety, prevention and control of risks at work is available on the joint Hazards/ITUC site

On the occasion of this day, ILO has released a report on an Occupational Safety and Health Management System (OSHMS) for the improved management of hazards and risks in the workplace.

Anti-regulation agenda of business groups

“Business groups and companies in a succession of countries, including some of the world’s largest economies, are pushing to reduce protection from hazards at work. If they succeed, more lives will be lost and the toll of work-related injury and illness will increase. Trade unions are challenging the rigged statistics and bogus arguments that are being put forward by business interests that care more about profit than the lives of the people who work for them,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

“Consider the devastation wrought a year ago by the Deepwater Horizon disaster,” added Burrow. “Eleven lives lost, environmental devastation and economic costs to the economy in the billions – all down to an appalling disregard for safety aided and abetted by an absence of effective regulation and official oversight. Lessons from this and other disasters like the Fukushima complex in Japan show how critically important regulation and enforcement is. Added to this, ‘slow burn’ disasters like asbestos mean today’s failures to regulate can have a deadly legacy spanning two generations and killing millions.”

While accidents at work kill hundreds of thousands each year, this total is dwarfed by the number of deaths from occupational diseases such as work-related cancers. The World Health Organisation estimates the annual toll from asbestos-related diseases alone at 107,000 deaths a year.
Global Action Week 2011 begins

Latin American teacher unionists will also be active during GAW. In Argentina for example, one of EI’s national affiliates, the Confederación de trabajadores de la educación de la República Argentina (CTERA), will undertake awareness-raising activities on the education level reached by women in different regions across the country, and will be present at the 37th international book fair in Buenos Aires to inform visitors about GAW.

In Brazil, the national campaign is looking forward to participate in a public session of the National Congress to present MPs with civil society’s worries and demands regarding education laws and strategies, as well as discriminatory practices within the education sector. On 3 May, the coalition will organise a workshop on wall-tagging, allowing young people to debate on discriminations in schools at district-level.

For more

All-women flight crew in Argentina

All-women flight crew in Argentina breaks new ground on equality

The Aerolíneas Argentinas flight, which left the airport on 1 April, was operated by Captain Viviana Rosell Benavente, co-pilot Colonel Maria Fernanda (photo) and cabin crew chief Marcela Ferre Ferre as well as cabin crew staff Adriana Rodriguez and Natalia Losi. They are all members either of the ITF’s affiliates Asociación Argentina de Aeronavegantes (AAA), the cabin crew union, or Asociación de Pilotos de Líneas Aéreas, the pilots’ union, which have long campaigned for gender equality.

Alicia Castro of the AAA and member of the ITF women’s committee explained how an all female crew was still unusual in the commercial aviation sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. She said: "Those who have been campaigning for some 30 years to promote equal opportunities for women are very happy with this ground-breaking development. It was as a result of our struggle that women began to enter into careers as head of cabin crew. Our union also succeeded in introducing cabin crew licensing, which helped raise the standards of the profession, preventing casualisation and outsourcing.” (ITF News. 20.04.2011)