



IDWN news

INTERNATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS' NETWORK

OCTOBER 2011

A MESSAGE FROM MYRTLE WITBOOI, IDWN CHAIR

“ On 16 June 2011, our dream became a reality, and we are free – slaves no more, but workers. We cannot stop now. We won't stop until this ILO Convention is carried out. So we have work to do and, yes, we will be united as never before. The voices of domestic workers cannot be silenced.”



Photo: Sofia Trevino/WIEGO



Yes, we won it!

Now domestic workers have an international ILO Convention that confirms we are workers with the basic rights of all other workers. It is called 'C 189', and it is a milestone in the history of domestic workers' struggles worldwide.

By campaigning for the Convention over the last few years, we have also – through our own creativity, hard work and perseverance – gained momentum in our organising and networking.

At the start, many leaders found it difficult to explain to domestic workers what the 'ILO' is, and so to mobilise them in the fight for a Convention. Many training activities were held worldwide. Wherever possible, domestic workers' organisations held public forums and rallies. Some developed 'twin-goal' campaigns – to advocate for an ILO Convention and at the same time to win better local laws to protect domestic workers.

All this did lead to tremendous interest and motivation among domestic workers and even other workers.

In many places, domestic workers' organisations have gained a lot of support from trade unions, as well as non-government organisations (NGOs). At the international level, we could not have done it without the global union for food and allied workers IUF, and the global network for informal economy workers WIEGO. They gave huge support, from fund-raising, writing and translation, to office space and communications, and more. We also needed the trade unions to get us into the official ILO process.

As a result, when it came to the crucial discussions in Geneva, Switzerland, this June, many domestic workers were included in the official union delegations and could speak for themselves, and vote. We domestic workers made history for ourselves.

We are so grateful to everyone who contributed to our success in winning C 189. Now we ask you to continue the work, to turn the paper into reality, to bring lasting improvements to the lives of the world's millions of domestic workers.

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HOW WE DID IT

On 16 June 2011, domestic workers and supporters from around the world unfurled a banner from the balcony of the grand United Nations Assembly Hall in Geneva, Switzerland. It read “C 189 – Congratulations! Now comes the domestic work for governments: RATIFY – IMPLEMENT!” In the hall below, supporters in the official delegations of governments, workers and even some employers clapped and cheered. It was a truly historic moment.

The overwhelming vote for ILO Convention No.189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C 189) came after decades of struggles by domestic workers’ organisations for recognition, rights and respect. It was also the result of two long negotiating sessions at the International Labour Conferences (ILCs) of 2010 and 2011. Some employers and governments argued heavily against us, but others supported us, and we had an excellent negotiator heading the Workers’ Group, Ms. Halima Jacob from Singapore.

This international treaty now acknowledges domestic workers as equal to any other wage earners. C 189 brings us international recognition and dignity, where previously we were unrecognised and undervalued, though we number millions in the world and are mostly women.

BUILDING THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

It was only five years ago that domestic workers’ organisations from around the world met for the first time. It was at a conference in 2006 in Amsterdam, Netherlands, organised by labour organisations including the Dutch-based NGO IRENE, the Dutch union federation FNV, the food and allied workers’ global union IUF, the global research-policy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organizing (WIEGO), and the Committee for Asian Women (CAW).

There, we decided to demand an ILO Convention. But we made it clear this would be only one step, albeit important, in protecting domestic workers. We would also use it to build a global movement of domestic workers.

Two years later, domestic workers’ representatives from different regions came to Geneva. They decided to form a Steering Committee, supported by a technical team, to take the plan forward. Domestic workers want to speak for ourselves. Our demands had to be reflected in the Convention. But we also needed the Global Unions to help us. The ILO process is very formal and we couldn’t do it on our own. Happily, the IUF gave our network an organisational base. WIEGO also gave a lot of advice,

and helped to raise funds. We started to send out awareness-raising materials to contacts worldwide.

In the same period, the Workers’ Group at the ILO, which is made up of trade unions, got ‘Decent Work for Domestic Workers’ on the agenda of the ILC, to start in 2010. They found support from some Latin America and Africa governments, as well as professionals in the ILO.

Then the official process started. All governments of the world were asked to submit reports about laws and practice in their countries on domestic workers’ employment rights. Technical experts drew up more reports, and produced a draft Convention and an accompanying Recommendation for the ILC to discuss.

Before those discussions started, network Steering Committee members went to the ILC in 2009. It was a training exercise, to be better prepared for the ILC the following year. Internal meetings also led to the launch of the International Domestic Workers’ Network (IDWN).

Meanwhile, domestic workers took initiatives at every level to influence trade unions, governments and employers’ associations to recognise our demands. Our campaigning drew media attention. The plight of domestic workers was on TV, radio, the Internet, and in the newspapers around the world like never before. Our organisations grew in strength and capacity. In Kenya, the domestic workers’ union KUDHEIHA increased in membership from just nine in 2008 to 13,000 three years later!

Most importantly, we lobbied to be included in the official union delegations to the ILC. The strategy was successful. A lot of our leaders had full voting rights. We also filled the Observers’ Gallery so that employers and governments knew we were watching their every move.

Many factors played a role, and many organisations have been involved in achieving our Convention. But it was the direct participation of domestic workers which was crucial.

The next stage is to get governments to put C189 into national legislation, and to make sure the laws that give us rights and protection are implemented. For more on this, see pages 4-5.

Karin Pape

Former IDWN Coordinator, and now Co-ordinator for the European region and for research



Photos, videos and speeches of IDWN members at the ILC in Geneva, June 2011, can be found at: <http://idwnilo.wordpress.com>

ILO documents about domestic workers can be found at: www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm

THE RIGHTS THAT C 189 CONTAINS

Domestic workers now have the same fundamental rights as all other workers: to form and join organisations of our own choice, to bargain collectively, to suffer no forced or compulsory labour nor discrimination of any kind, and not to work as children.

We specifically have the right, amongst others, to:

- be informed of our terms and conditions of work, in an easily understandable way, preferably through a written contract
- normal hours of work, overtime compensation, periods of daily and weekly rest and annual paid leave; a weekly rest period of at least 24 consecutive hours;
- be paid at least the minimum wage, if one exists for other workers
- a safe and healthy working environment
- social security, including maternity benefits
- decent living conditions that also respect our right to privacy
- keep our own identity card and travel documents
- access to the courts or other ways to settle disputes with employers.

C 189 applies to anyone who is employed to do domestic work in the private home of someone else, whether that is cleaning, washing, cooking, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, etc., and whether we:

- work part-time or full-time
- live in or outside our employer's home
- work for one household or many
- are employed by a household or through an agency
- are migrant workers, no matter what our immigration status is.

WHAT THE WORDS MEAN

Conventions: International standards that guarantee labour rights; they are agreed by representatives of the world's governments, employers and workers, meeting each year at the ILC. National governments are then invited to 'ratify' each Convention - this means they agree to put it into national legislation and then report back to the ILO about how well they are implementing it.

Recommendations: Guidelines to help governments shape their national labour laws.

ILO: International Labour Organisation, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and offices in many countries.

ILC: International Labour Conference of the ILO, meeting in Geneva in June every year, attended by representatives of governments, employers and workers.

Photo: Jennifer Fish



ILO FACTSHEET 'CONVENTION 189: DECENT WORK FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS'

www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_161104.pdf

Turning paper into reality

Getting governments to do their 'domestic work'

IDWN network members around the world are now busy organising, forging alliances, raising public awareness and lobbying their governments. ILO Convention 189 for our rights must not fade into dust but make a real difference to domestic workers' lives.

These are some of our activities since our success in June 2011.

AFRICA

West Africa: A regional meeting in Accra, Ghana, in late September, organised by the Governments of Ghana and Switzerland and UN Women, looked at migration and domestic workers. Alongside speakers from the ILO, and the governments of South Africa, Jamaica, and India, were Professor Adelle Blackett, the IUF Regional Women's Coordinator Adwoa Sakyi, and the IDWN Chairperson Myrtle Witbooi. The Ghanaian Minister for Employment and Social Welfare announced there that his Government is ready to implement C 189.

Benin: Fataou Raimi of the SYNEMB trade union for domestic workers was on television in mid-September to talk about C 189. He is now planning to meet with the president of the National Assembly, the president of the Social and Economic Council, and the Minister of Labour.

Ghana: The IDWN and IUF helped organise a one-day workshop in late July to inform domestic workers about C 189 and current law in their country, and to foster a new trade union specifically for them.

Kenya: The KUDHEIHA domestic workers' trade union held a press conference on C 189. Taking part were Evaline Mulo, a domestic worker, along with Albert Njeru, General Secretary of the KUDHEIHA domestic workers' union, plus Francis Atwoli, Secretary General of the COTWU union federation.

South Africa: In early August, the SADSAWU union for domestic workers met with the Portfolio Labour Committee in Parliament to discuss ratification of C189 by South Africa. Later that month, a 'Domestic Workers Summit' was co-hosted by SADSAWU and the national union federation COSATU, attended also by the Department of Labour, to raise more awareness, particularly in other unions.

Tanzania: In early July, the IDWN Regional Coordinator and a local ILO official were interviewed live on TV. The next month, a seminar in parliament was co-organised by the CHODAWU union and two Members of Parliament representing workers to encourage MPs to champion ratification of C 189. 45 MPs attended, and listened to speakers including Anna Mbunda, Chair of domestic workers in the capital city, Dar es Salaam.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Now is the time to lobby your Government to ratify C 189 - to make sure that your own country's laws reflect what the new Convention says. Many governments will try to delay, using tricky arguments. Others have already said they won't ratify.

So, just as we did to get the C 189, we need to build strong organisations, and strong alliances - with the trade unions (especially their women's sections), women's organisations, migrant workers' associations, religious groups, friendly journalists, lawyers, and academics, and so on.

What are the arguments to persuade the doubters? Where and how can we bring the necessary pressure? Share your strategies within our network. Your ideas and experiences may well prove useful to others.

ILO Convention 189 for our rights must not fade into dust but make a real difference to domestic workers' lives.

Evaline Mulo from Kenya being interviewed by the press in Geneva.



Photo credit: Jennifer Fish

SOME OF OUR KEY PARTNERS

Anti-Slavery International: Especially on child domestic workers. www.antislavery.org

DW-RN: A network of researchers around the world on domestic work. Email: dw-rn@icdd.uni-kassel.de

FNV Dutch union federation: www.fnv.nl/publiek/english

Global Network: www.theglobalnetwork.net

Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org

ILO-ACTRAV/TRAVAIL: The part of the ILO that supports Workers' activities: www.ilo.org/actrav

ITUC: International Trade Union Confederation and ITUC Asia Pacific: www.ituc-csi.org

IUF: International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations: www.iuf.org

Migrants Forum Asia: www.mfasia.org

UN Women: www.unwomen.org

WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment, Globalising and Organising: www.wiego.org



LATIN AMERICA

The CONACTRAHO regional confederation of domestic workers' organisations launched their campaign for ratification in Mexico and Brazil in mid-September, with the slogan 'Put the Gloves on for Domestic Workers' Rights'. Their initial focus will be on Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile. Most of these countries as well as Paraguay are already working on ratification.

They have a new website for the Latin America campaign:
www.poruntrabajodigno.com

ASIA

Hong Kong: The Federation of Asian Domestic Workers' Unions (FADWU), which comprises local and migrant domestic workers of various nationalities, held a training workshop on C189 in late July.

They looked at the gap between domestic workers' actual situation and Hong Kong laws and policies, and the action needed to get C189 ratified. FADWU is producing a booklet.



CARIBBEAN

In early September, IDWN Regional Coordinator Ida le Blanc, and Shirley Pryce, President of the Jamaica Household Workers' Association (JHWA), spoke at a regional conference on labour and social protection for migrant domestic workers, organised by the Government of Jamaica, UN Women, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Jamaica: The JHWA is holding awareness-raising workshops across their island, supported by the ILO. They are working with the Jamaica Employers' Federation to "move employers from resistance to acceptance". On 7 October, 'World Day for Decent Work', they held an event called 'The Way to Ratification', with the Jamaican Minister of Labour and Social Security as guest speaker, along with employers, trade unions, NGOs, and of course domestic workers.

Trinidad & Tobago: The domestic workers' union NUDE, UN Women, and the ILO also held a joint event on 'World Day for Decent Work', with the slogan:

"Sweeping Change Needed: Recognise Domestic Workers as Workers"

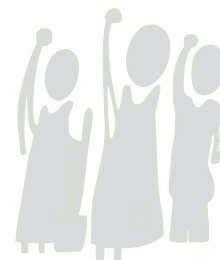
MYTHS & REALITIES ABOUT DOMESTIC WORKERS:

What They Say and What We Say, 2011

This IDWN pamphlet has arguments used to persuade more people for C 189, and may be useful in your national campaign for ratification.

Available in English, Spanish, French, Chinese, and being translated into further languages.

www.domesticworkerrights.org



IDWN members

organising around the world

Here are some recent activities by IDWN members to mobilise domestic workers and build their own organisations around the world.

AFRICA

Kenya: With the support of the IDWN, the KUDHEIHA union has produced a booklet on organising domestic workers, to be published soon.

Namibia: The Domestic Workers' Union, supported by the National Farm Workers' Union, has been on a recruitment drive. In the capital city of Windhoek, they have organised 453 domestic workers.

South Africa: Some 876,000 domestic workers are still not registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund, eight years after laws were amended to include them. So, the SADSAWU union welcomed a week-long blitz by the Labour Department in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in mid-September. SADSAWU's own new recruitment campaign attracted 148 new members in just one month. The union also recently won its first Wage Bargaining Agreement, representing 26 homecare workers employed at a retirement village near Cape Town.

COMING UP:

IDWN Africa Regional Conference: 28-29 November 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya, to discuss how to further strengthen domestic workers' organisations in the continent.

IDWN Africa Regional Coordinator: Vicky Kanyoka

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ASIA

Hong Kong: The High Court has ruled that migrant domestic workers should have the same rights as other migrant workers to gain permanent residency after seven years. Sringatin, Chair of the Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Union there, welcomed the news at a City Forum on 2 October, saying, "We are happy when we have equal choice and opportunity".

Indonesia: In late September, a workshop was held in Semarang, Central Java, by domestic workers' organisations including Tunas Mulia and Jala-PRT, as well as the IDWN. Its aim was to strengthen domestic workers' organising and advocacy, and work towards a federation in the country.

COMING UP:

IUF Asia-Pacific Regional Conference 17-19 October in Bali, Indonesia: the IDWN and Jala-PRT will share the campaign for domestic workers' rights with IUF union affiliates.

Asia Regional Conference on C189, 24-26 October 2011, in Manila, Philippines, jointly organized by the ILO, ITUC, IDWN, Migrants Forum Asia, and Global Network, to produce a strategy for ratification of C189 in countries across Asia.

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CARIBBEAN

Jamaica: Jamaica Household Workers' Association has been getting good media coverage; President Shirley Pryce was a guest on the 'Roots 101' radio show 'Know Your Rights', along with a community lawyer. JHWA membership has increased by 210, including one man who is a gardener. Senior figures in the University and Allied Workers Union are helping the Association to establish the Jamaica Union of Domestic Workers.

Trinidad & Tobago: As part of their awareness-raising and recruitment drive for more members, General Secretary of the domestic workers' union NUDE, Ida Le Blanc, went on local radio in early September to highlight excessive working hours, and that more employers should register their domestic workers with the National Insurance Board.

COMING UP:

IDWN Caribbean regional network: to be launched at the Barbados Workers' Union headquarters, on the island of Barbados, on 13-14 November 2011, attended also by IDWN International Coordinator Elizabeth Tang.

IDWN Caribbean Regional Coordinator: Ida le Blanc

National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE), General Secretary
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LATIN AMERICA

IDWN Latin America Regional Coordinator: Marcelina Bautista

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On 4 September, migrant domestic workers rallied outside the Houses of Parliament in London

EUROPE

UK: The UK Government is proposing changes to the migrant domestic workers' visa to the UK which would make them more vulnerable to trafficking by criminals or more dependent for their visas on their employers. Domestic workers must have the right to a proper visa/work permit, which lets them leave an abusive employer to find a better one.

"Where are we heading... back to the century of slavery?"

Marissa Begonia, Chair of Justice 4 Domestic Workers, UK

The UK Government was one of only 8 to abstain in the vote for C 189 and has said it will not ratify it. A coalition of organisations – including Justice for Domestic Workers (J4DW), Unite the Union, the TUC union federation, the advocacy support centre Kalayaan, Anti-Slavery International, and Oxfam – is challenging them hard, working also with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, a trade association for recruitment agencies. C 189 will be a focus of the TUC's events on 7 October 'World Day for Decent Work'.

IDWN European Regional Coordinator: Karin Pape

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NORTH AMERICA

USA: 'Caring Across Generations': A national campaign launched in mid-July, led by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). Over 700 people - domestic workers, disability rights and senior action groups, policymakers, and others - gathered in Washington, DC, to discuss what they can do to overcome the care crisis in the country.

In California, the Domestic Workers Coalition has got a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights through the Assembly, but is now fighting to get it out of "suspense". At a rally in the city of Sacramento in late August, California Senators heard moving testimonies from domestic workers. The Coalition is confident of victory in 2012. www.cadomesticworkers.org

New York State passed a Bill of Rights in 2010, and the Domestic Workers' Union (DWU) there has produced a handbook 'Rights Begin at Home' and a website - www.knowyourrightsny.org - to educate workers and employers about it. DWU members can get free legal advice at a new Domestic Workers Legal Clinic, set up with the Urban Justice Center. Across the city, DWU has 'Ambassadors', domestic workers who are local points of contact between the union and workers.

IDWN North America Regional Coordinator: Jill Shenker, Field Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)

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'The Help': Domestic workers and allies are using this new movie by DreamWorks to raise awareness of their struggles. It is based on a best-selling book by Kathryn Stockett: www.thehelpmovie.com

Now to organise, more than ever!

At this time, when we celebrate the fruit of our struggle – C189 – we find ourselves stronger, with more members, represented in organisations including trade unions and others. Our domestic workers' leaders have grown in numbers, and are speaking for themselves even at the international level.

We are more visible and increasingly recognised. We have other trade unions and NGOs working alongside with us, as well as supportive academics. Our messages and actions are reported across the world, including through the social media, and are now reaching decision-makers and the general public.

We have to organise as we never have before. Unless we are solid and strong on the ground, no-one will take us seriously, and the C189 will remain just on paper. We are determined not to let it happen. Therefore the dual-goal of the IDWN today is organising, and getting our governments to put the Convention into law and implement it.

I feel fortunate to join the IDWN at this time, when the organisation is in transition to a new phrase. Our main goal now is to consolidate ourselves and build a true membership-based organisation, linking all domestic workers organisations worldwide. We are consulting our members and some of our partner organizations, and we aim to hold our founding Congress in 2012.

I feel fortunate because I am joined by a strong team of people, who share the same commitments and passions. Our Coordinators based in the regions are truly multi-skilled through years of working in the field. The team is further strengthened as Karin Pape, my predecessor as IDWN Coordinator, continues to serve the IDWN as Coordinator for Europe as well as for research.

My commitment to build a strong domestic workers' organisation is the flower of a plant growing ever since the early 1990s when I was involved in organising the first domestic workers' union in Hong Kong. I was very fortunate then to have strong support not only from my organisation – the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions – and a local migrants' NGO, but also international trade unions, the IUF and the then ICFTU (now ITUC). As I come back to the domestic workers' family, I am heartened to see that we are still working together – and joined by many more.

For the IDWN Regional Coordinator in your region, see contact details on pages 6-7.



Photo credit: Sofia Trevino/WIEGO

The hand-prints of hundreds of domestic workers in Hong Kong fill this banner. It was unfurled in the streets of Geneva, Switzerland, to remind everyone of the millions of lives worldwide that could be improved if domestic workers' rights are respected.

ELIZABETH TANG

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ABOUT THE IDWN

The International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) is made up of domestic workers' organisations, including trade unions, around the world. Our Steering Committee comprises representatives from domestic workers' organisations, and we are provided with an organisational base by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). We are also supported by Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO).

www.domesticworkerrights.org

