

Respect and Rights:

Protection for Domestic/Household Workers!

¡Protección para Trabajadoras Domésticas/Trabajadoras del Hogar!

MOM? IF I AM SO PRECIOUS TO YOU, WHY DO YOU PAY SO LITTLE TO WOMAN WHO TAKES CARE OF ME?



Extract from the report of the international conference:

Protection for domestic workers!!

¡Protección para Trabajadoras Domésticas/Trabajadoras del Hogar!

Held in Amsterdam, 8-10 November 2006

at the headquarters of the FNV trade union federation of the Netherlands.

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Cartoons by **Maarten Wolterink** <http://home.filtnet.nl/~fn001073/>

The international conference:

**Protection for domestic workers!!
¡Protección para Trabajadoras Domésticas/Trabajadoras del Hogar!**

Was organised by:

International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE)
FNV Mondiaal, Netherlands
Committee for Asian Women (CAW)
Asian Domestic Workers' Network (ADWN)
Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)
Women in the Informal Economy Globalising and Organising (WIEGO)
BLINN (Bonded Labour in the Netherlands)/Humanitas/Oxfam
Global Labour Institute (GLI)
Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

With the support of the International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC) and CONLACTRAHOS (Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar, the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers).

The conference was attended by some 60 representatives of domestic/household workers' trade unions, associations and regional/international networks, Global Unions and national trade unions, and support NGOs, from around the world.

Was financially supported by:

FNV Mondiaal, Netherlands
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Protection for domestic/household workers!

¡Protección para Trabajadoras Domésticas/ Trabajadoras del Hogar!

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1. Introduction

Respect and Rights

And their voice to be heard

This is what domestic/household workers want and need most.

Domestic/household workers, the vast majority of whom are women, work hard so as to feed their families and, like any other worker, they want to earn a living wage and be included in protective labour legislation and social protection schemes. They want to work themselves out of poverty.

Yet their work is hardly valued, and poorly paid. This is because it is connected with the unpaid caring work of the 'mother in the household'. Domestic/household work is rarely seen as 'work', just something that women, or too often children, do in the homes of others to 'help out'.

So domestic/household workers are rarely defined as 'workers' and usually left out of protective employment legislation. This leaves them open to abuse by those who employ them.

They come from the poorer sections of society. Many are migrants within their own countries; many, many migrate to other countries. They are often viewed as 'second-class citizens', or even not as 'citizens' at all.

Women are generally at higher risk of poverty than men, according to the United Nations women's organisation UNIFEM, and domestic workers are among the lowest income categories of all.

So, the 'decent work' strategy of the International Labour Organisation to reduce poverty can only be realised if it is combined with the promotion of gender equality. And domestic/household labour must be included in the concept of 'work'.

Domestic/household work could be 'decent' work - if the workers who do it are paid and treated properly. The work itself is not 'indecent'. What is indecent is the way that many, many domestic/household workers are treated around the world.

"Domestic workers' employment situation is considered not to 'fit' the general framework of existing employment laws. This is because most work done by them is generally invisible, done in houses (not considered as workplaces) of private persons (not considered as employers). So, domestic workers are not normally considered as employees, their work is undervalued, and their working conditions remain, in essence, unregulated. In fact, some countries not only do not consider household helpers as workers and exclude them from protection under their national labour codes; they do not provide them with protection under any other national law. In some countries they are denied the right to organise in trade unions. This of course leaves them vulnerable to abuse."

Gloria Moreno-Fontes Chammartin from the **International Migration Programme (MIGRANT)**, **International Labour Organisation**

in 'Out of the Shadows: Organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe: the role of trade unions', ETUC conference report, November 2005 www.etuc.org/a/2809

Why this conference was organised

The first aim of the conference was to take stock of how domestic/household workers are organising themselves around the world, what actions they are taking to improve their situation, and who is supporting them to do so.

Domestic/household workers are joining and forming organisations all over the world, often supported by women's associations, religious groups, and other kinds of NGO support/advocacy bodies.

Within the trade union movement too attention is increasingly being paid to the need to organise and support unprotected, informal workers, including domestic/household workers.

Many of these organisations of different types are now collaborating in regional networks or federations, particularly in Asia and Latin America.

The conference provided an opportunity to see how these different initiatives might develop better links and common strategies, at global and national levels, so as to project a stronger voice for the rights of domestic/household workers. A new concerted international strategy might be possible, to include initiatives such as:

- a new ILO Convention for Domestic/Household Workers
- better recognition for domestic/household workers under national laws in more countries
- better work permit systems for migrant workers in receiving countries
- better protection for migrant workers in sending countries
- an end to child labour in domestic/household work.

This international conference in November 2006 followed on a European one in April 2005 called 'Out of the Shadows: Organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe: the role of trade unions', organised by the European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC), International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE) and the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM). There the role of trade unions in organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe was fully discussed, and strategies outlined.

'Out of the Shadows: Organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe: the role of trade unions'

Report of a conference organised by the European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC), IRENE and PICUM, Brussels, 14-15 April 2005
English: www.etuc.org/a/2809
French: www.etuc.org/a/2810

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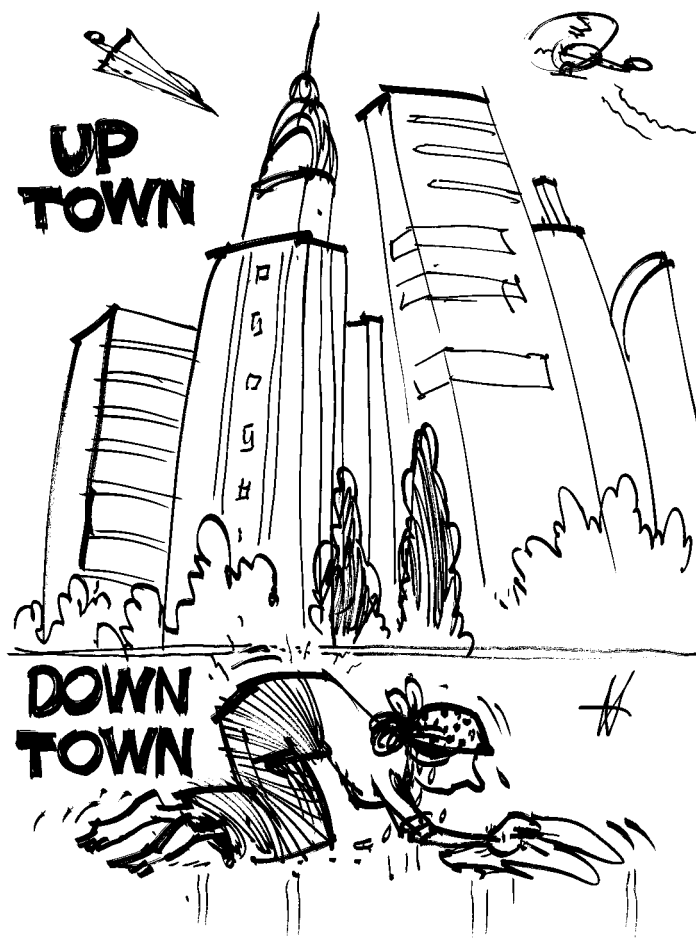
After the success of the European conference in 2005, it was time to bring together an international one, with representatives of domestic/household workers' organisations and their supporters from across the globe. IRENE took the lead and built a steering committee for the 2006 conference comprising:

International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE)
FNV Mondiaal, Netherlands
Committee for Asian Women (CAW)
Asian Domestic Workers' Network (ADWN)
Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)
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With the support of the International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC) and CONLACTRAHOS (Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar, the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers).

The 2006 conference in Amsterdam was only possible through the active assistance of all these organisations, especially the FNV who were excellent hosts, plus the many others who supported it financially.

The ability to work in English and Spanish made real exchange possible. It was very unfortunate that lack of funding meant there was no French translation at the conference. However, this report is being published in three languages: English, Spanish and French.



Who was at the conference

The conference organisers originally planned for some 35 participants. Yet, as word spread, more and more wanted to be present, indicating how timely an initiative this was. In the end, some 60 participants attended, from almost every continent, while many others unfortunately had to be turned away. A lack of funding for French translation, for example, meant that representatives from Southern Europe and French-speaking West Africa could not attend.

Those present included representatives of:

- ⇒ Domestic/household workers' trade unions and associations from the Basque Country/ Spain, Bolivia, Canada, Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Namibia, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, USA;
- ⇒ International networks of domestic/household workers' organisations in Asia and Latin America;
- ⇒ Global Unions: the International Trade Union Confederation, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) and the Public Services International (PSI);
- ⇒ International Labour Organisation (ILO);
- ⇒ Support NGOs and coalitions for domestic/household workers' and migrant workers' rights based in Belgium, China, Europe, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Switzerland, Tanzania, UK;
- ⇒ International organisations/networks active on forced labour, child labour, migrant labour, and workers in the informal economy;
- ⇒ International aid/development agencies from Germany and the Netherlands;

Plus academic researchers based in the Netherlands.

A full list of participants is given in Annex 1.

Among the participants were:

- 6 currently working as domestic/household workers
- 19 union members, of whom 8 are union leaders
- 10 mothers and 3 fathers
- 23 campaigning for better legislation for domestic/household workers
- 11 actively working to combat child labour
- 17 actively working on migration issues, whether within countries or across borders

In many such conferences it can be difficult to achieve 30 per cent women's representation. For this one, the tables were turned, with only 10 per cent male representation, indicating the extent to which domestic/household work is still seen as a 'women's issue' even within supportive organisations.

"Domestic work is a 'labour of love', mostly done by the women of the household; it is their duty to 'care' for others. Not being able to fulfil all of this duty is usually held up as a shortcoming; they are somehow 'inadequate'; the image is a negative one. This results in a negative attitude towards those who step in. They are just 'helping out' - and so aren't highly rewarded."

Anneke van Luijken, conference organiser, formerly of International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE)

THE DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC WORK:



2. What domestic/household workers want

**Recognition that domestic work is ‘work’
and that those who do it are ‘workers’
with the rights that all workers have
including the right to be heard**

This is the demand of domestic/household workers around the world, voiced very clearly by those attending the international conference in Amsterdam in November 2006. They also detailed what this would entail:

- ⇒ **Recognition by governments and the rest of society of the economic and social contribution that domestic/household workers make;** their labour means that others can engage in productive work outside the home, creating huge value; without them, economies and societies as we know them could not exist.

“Getting respect means recognition for the economic value of this work”
Geeta Menon, Karnataka Domestic Workers’ Union, Bangalore, India
- ⇒ **Respect for their dignity and skills,** for the fact that they often care for the most vulnerable members of society, the children, sick and elderly, increasing the well-being of all, instead of the contempt and abuse which they so often experience. More opportunities for skills training and recognition as ‘professionals’ would increase their mobility to other/better jobs.
- ⇒ **Enforcement of their right to ‘decent work’** (as agreed by the governments, employers and workers in the International Labour Organisation): this means inclusion in labour laws, trade union rights and employment contracts to achieve good working conditions, and access to social benefits including pensions.
- ⇒ **Opportunities to speak for themselves and to have their voices heard:** they are tired of others claiming to speak on their behalf.
- ⇒ **Recognition and identity:** most domestic workers have little or no record of their employment; they want official registration systems which prove their work history; migrant workers want identity cards that assist their status in their host communities.
- ⇒ **Organisational skills training** to help domestic/household workers participate in unions or build their own organisations; training in negotiating, advocacy and campaigning, fund-raising and accounting; exchange programmes at national and regional level for domestic workers to develop their ideas for strategies.
- ⇒ **More political and material support from allies** in the trade unions, NGOs and advocacy groups, in a way that increases domestic/household workers’ opportunities to speak for themselves and have their own voice heard.
- ⇒ **Better quality information about the size, scope and role of domestic/household work and the workers involved:** in most countries, because it is excluded from the definition of ‘work’, there is very little data about the who, what, where, and how of domestic/household labour; much more research and mapping is needed to provide the basis for well-informed campaigning.
- ⇒ **Better research and understanding** on how the combination of gender discrimination and neo-liberal globalisation is increasing migratory flows of women to work in the homes of others.

Suggestions for Action

How can domestic/household workers gain the recognition and rights to which they are entitled but are currently denied? Participants at the conference came up with a set of basic steps.

It was agreed there is not a 'one size fits all' solution. Domestic/household work is done in a wide range of situations, from relatively good employment with mutually agreed terms and conditions, to the worst forms of slavery and trafficking. So it is a question rather of looking at all the ideas and strategies that do exist – and as also shown by the conference participants in their detailed presentations (see Section 3) - and then assessing which are the priorities for any given situation.

The participants also agreed that actions at local, national, regional and global levels are not mutually exclusive, but should be taken forward simultaneously, cross-fertilising from each other.

⇒ **Support for domestic/household workers' organising**

A primary emphasis coming out of the conference was that domestic/household workers should be at the forefront of promoting their own rights rather than others tending to speak on their behalf.

"We are tired of hearing others speak in our name."

Marcolina de los Milagros Infante Ramirez, IPROFOTH, Peru

This means directing efforts first and foremost at supporting domestic/household workers to organise themselves, to know what rights they have, and get the opportunity to be heard.

"Household workers are invisible and we have to use our imagination to help them organise."

Marcelina Bautista, Secretary General, CONLACTRAHO, Latin America

- **Awareness-raising and assistance for domestic/household workers to organise**, through targeted organising activities within union structures or by supporting efforts at self-organisation.
- **Providing facilities for domestic/household workers' organisations** such as room space, printing, access to computers, and communications e.g. website space
- **Educational materials, workshops, etc.** that highlight the potential for organisation locally and the achievements elsewhere such as in Bolivia and Peru.
- **Organisational skills training** to improve the ability of domestic/household workers to organise themselves.

When domestic/household workers become organised it becomes much easier to find where child domestic/household workers are, providing much more opportunity to combat child labour.

⇒ **Greater cooperation between allies**

Greater cooperation between domestic/household workers' and/or migrant workers' associations, trade unions, and advocacy NGOs is needed. As the examples throughout this report show, it is happening in a number of countries, in all continents, but there is more to be done.

Trade unionists are becoming more aware of the role that domestic/household workers play to the benefit of the society and economy, as well as of the pressing needs these workers have if they are to achieve the conditions of 'decent work' to which they are entitled. However, there is clearly much more that can and should be done. Trade unions have a special role to play because of their formal status as 'social partners' in the ILO and in national contexts.

Trade unions can sometimes feel uneasy about the rise of workers' associations which are independent. However, given that domestic/household workers have rarely been considered as 'workers' entitled to union membership, it is not surprising if they form their own associations.

"There are situations where it is very difficult for domestic workers to form or join trade unions. Where there is union-busting or political suppression, workers are scared and tend to form self-help associations or cooperatives rather than unions. We need to accept that informal workers cannot always join unions. But trade unions can still recognise and support them. We need to lobby more national trade unions so that they support national and international legal reforms. We need to engage them in a systematic and strategic way. If not, this conference will become like a history book."

Lee Siew Hwa, Committee for Asian Women (CAW), Bangkok

"We call ourselves a union but I don't feel that joining another union would help us right now. The trade unions are too traditional, with white middle-aged men high in the hierarchy who just want to secure their own position. If we joined such a union, we would have to abide by its rules and there probably wouldn't be much benefit."

Erline Brown, Domestic Workers' United, New York, USA

"It is no secret that trade unions sometimes find it difficult to support domestic workers. But the FNV Mondiaal is now making it a priority, alongside our work on child labour, migrant workers, and those working in the informal economy."

Peter Gortzak, Chairperson, FNV Mondiaal, Netherlands

"It is true we had to change the opinions of the male leaders of our unions. When my union decided to organise community-based healthcare workers, among the lowest paid workers, many men members objected. However, the union leadership did make it a priority and we won better wages and a CBA. Now many of those who objected see us as an asset – because many of those recruited have become activists."

Ann Chambers, British Colombia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGSEU), Canada

- **Formalising alliances between unions and domestic/household workers' organisations**

Where domestic/household workers have set up their own organisations, trade unions can reach out and build solidarity. In the first instance, it can be simple help, such as providing meeting space and access to photocopying. As the collaboration and mutual respect grows, the relationship can be deepened and then formalised into an alliance or association; this may mean changing the union's Statutes. Domestic/household workers' organisations in many countries are keen to establish such a relationship, retaining their self-organisation but benefiting from the strength and position of the trade union movement.

⇒ **Public awareness-raising**

Much stronger efforts are needed to gain recognition for the role of domestic/household workers in underpinning economies and societies, and to raise the esteem in which they are held throughout society, everywhere.

This implies stronger awareness campaigns targeted at the general public, including the members of our own organisations, as well as efforts to impress and educate government officials.

“There is much that we in the trade unions can do to raise awareness, not least among our own members. After all, many trade unionists are also employers of domestic workers. We should get across the argument that ‘what you ask from your employer, you should give to your employee’.”

Kamalam, Equality Director, International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU)

- **Public hearings for the rights of domestic/household workers**
- **National days for domestic/household workers:** In various countries and world regions there are special days each year to highlight domestic/household workers' rights. In Latin America it is 30 March; in India it is 9 January, for example.



⇒ **Lobbying governments**

- **For ratification of international conventions**

“An area of useful work is to look at exactly which ILO Conventions your Government has ratified. Many have, for example, ratified early ones which may be useful. A major difficulty, as we know, is that many governments do not include domestic/household work in their concept of ‘work’ and exclude the workers concerned from protective legislation. However, technically they cannot do this without prior consultation with the trade unions and employers; so again trade unions have a key role to play.”

Simel Esim, Regional Gender Advisor, ILO Regional Office for the Arab States

- **For domestic/household workers to be included in national labour legislation:** achieving protection for domestic/household workers under national legislation can take many years, and in most countries this has yet to be achieved. Yet, in Bolivia and Peru, new laws have been won that give domestic/household workers recognition and rights as workers, providing examples for other countries to consider. Good legislation on the statute books is an essential part of the process.
- **For child domestic/household workers to be included in policies to combat child labour:** ILO Convention No.138 (Minimum Age) and ILO Convention No.182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) are core Conventions to which all countries are bound; but in many countries domestic/household work done by children is not seen as hazardous nor one of the ‘worst forms’ of child labour, and so it is not taken seriously; for example, minimum age legislation does not apply or is lowered. This must change.
- **For the proper enforcement of good legislation where it exists:** policy-makers are usually men, and they are often satisfied with the status quo, rarely concerned with how their own household is organised, as long as it is organised; getting them to see the significance of the domestic/household labour that supports them is an important element in achieving progress in legislation.

“Governments are not going to enforce the legislation for domestic/household workers. We have to organise to do it.”

Chris Bonner, WIEGO

- **Defending public services**

In those countries where care services have been in the public sector they are usually being privatised, weakening the working terms and conditions, and union organisation, for the workers concerned. Many care workers – whether local people or migrants - are being hired in through employment agencies which are poorly regulated.

“Care work is the responsibility of the State. Whether it is done by local or migrant workers, they contribute to the economy, and this must be recognised by the State.”

Report-back from conference workshop

“We need to be much more pro-active on the future of social services in our countries; many governments want to privatise but household services and care should be a collective responsibility.”

Kirsten Moller, International Advisor, Women Workers’ Union (KAD), Denmark

“We have to keep our care services in the public sector. One right-wing politician in Spain recently said that, if families cannot afford to pay their domestic worker a decent wage and we cannot create enough public services, then perhaps this work should be done by a network of volunteers. This would be a bad use of solidarity between people.”

Javier Miró, Programme Coordinator, ISCOD-UGT, Spain

⇒ **Reaching out to employers**

- **Promoting employment contracts**

In a situation where legal protection does not exist or is very weak, promoting employment contracts between individual employers and domestic/household workers is vital.

Model Employment Contracts for Domestic/Household Work

can be found:

English: 'Out of the Shadows: ETUC, Annex 1, www.etuc.org/a/2809

French: 'Sortir de l'Ombre', Annexe 1, www.etuc.org/a/2810

Spanish: 'Haz Valer Tus Derechos!', CESIP, Peru,
www.cesip.org.pe/publicaciones.htm

- **Encouraging the formation of associations of responsible employers with whom to negotiate**

Since trade unionists and progressive politicians are also employers of domestic workers, their help could be enlisted to establish an employers' association, if one does not already exist.

⇒ **Support for skills training / professional recognition of domestic/household workers**

With domestic/household work so rarely recognised as 'work', promoting the training and professional recognition of domestic/household workers is a great boost to their status.

"The skills training that we have been promoting for domestic/household workers includes environmental conservation and recycling of household wastes. This helps raise their knowledge-base and also their status."

Lita Anggraini, National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy (Jaringan Nasional Advokasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga, JALA PRT), Indonesia

Raising workers' skills and status also improves their bargaining position with employers.

What is more, training brings previously isolated workers together, and gives them an opportunity to organise themselves, either in their own organisations or by joining a trade union.

⇒ **Defending Migrant Domestic/Household Workers**

- **Campaign for signing the UN Convention on Migrants**

On 18 December 1990, the United Nations adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. So far, 34 States have signed the Convention, but none of them are receiving countries. This is clearly something that trade unions and migrant groups could campaign on together.

- **Lobbying sending governments to forge labour agreements with host governments.**
- **Support for the regularisation of migrant work in host countries, by arguing for proper work permit schemes which include domestic/household work.**

Because domestic/household work is not seen as 'work', it is often omitted from work permit systems; immigration authorities in many receiving countries allow domestic/household workers in under visas and permits which give them even fewer rights and lower status than other migrant workers. Poor work permit systems lead to more workers becoming 'undocumented'. So, pressing for domestic/household work to be included in work permit systems is an important area of activity.

"Governments are aware of undocumented migrant workers. Without them, care services in Europe would collapse. But they are not taking responsibility for these migrants, who are actually given the huge responsibility of looking after homes, children, and parents, even those of government officials and politicians. The question is how to get these workers regularised and protected."

Kamalam, Director of Equality, ITUC

"In Europe, it has been the unions who have pushed for regularisation of migrant workers, for example in the UK and Greece; they have played a very positive role."

Fe Jusay, Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers, Netherlands

Some unions provide migrant domestic/household workers with union ID cards, even those who are not directly union members. They do this out of solidarity because it helps to provide identity and regularisation of their status. One example is the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G) in the UK (see 'Out of the Shadows', pages 42-43). It is also being discussed in the FNV-ABVAKABO in the Netherlands, now that the union has opened its doors to undocumented migrants in the country.

- **Pre-departure information for migrant workers**

Conference participants thought there could be far greater liaison between workers' organisations in sending and receiving countries, so as to provide migrant workers with pre-departure information on their rights in the country to which they are going.

Pre-departure training needs to go far beyond skills such as learning how to use a vacuum cleaner; cultural behaviour questions are vital, such as learning the right body language for the host culture to understand, as a defence against abuse.

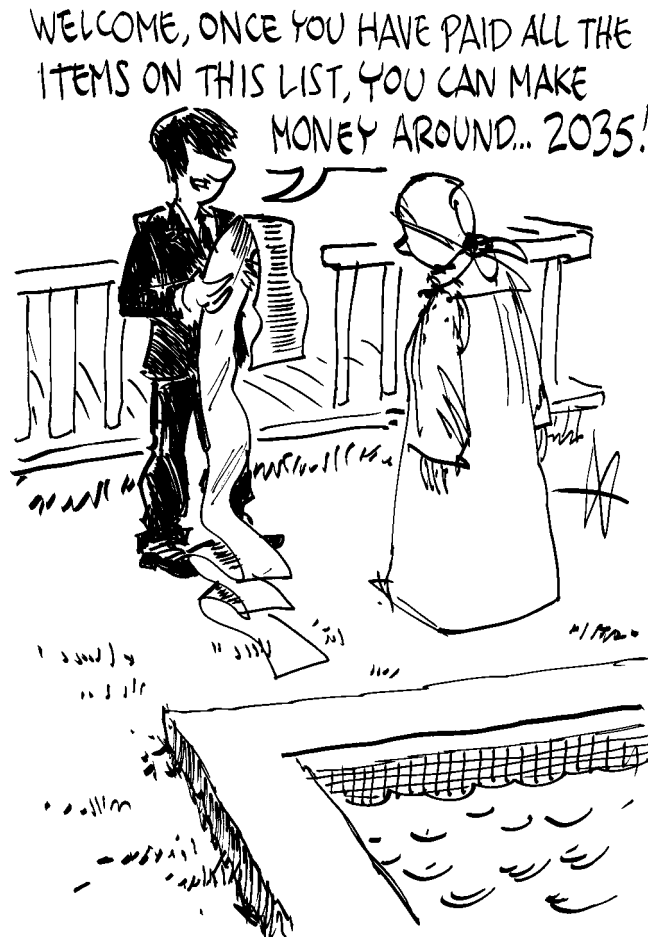
"Sometimes the body language is totally wrong. For example, young Asian women have learned never to say 'No' in a direct way; they always smile and are polite. But this can be wrongly interpreted by an employer as accepting the situation."

Erline Brown, Domestic Workers United, USA

"If a domestic worker is always smiling, the wife can think the worker is trying to seduce her husband, and this leads to a lot of trouble. Migrant workers need access to training about this."

Rima Sabban, Arab Women Academic Network

Domestic/household workers who have returned home should be encouraged to provide information and help with this training. They can give real insight into the situations that others will face.



The information should also cover such questions as labour rights and employment laws in the country concerned, the support organisations that exist including appropriate trade unions, access to healthcare, etc. Websites could be used better to circulate this information.

“In Jordan, there is a law that employers cannot keep passports. However, it is barely observed. Despite awareness-raising through posters and advertisements, few employers or domestic workers seem to know about this law. We need to intervene more in pre-departure training, giving migrant domestic workers much more information about how to defend themselves, for example not to give their passports to their employers.”

Rima Sabban, Arab Women Academic Network

“Pre-departure information is provided to Filipino migrant workers by the Philippines Government. However, it is not really serving the needs of the workers because the task is contracted out to the banks and employment agencies. It does not give specific information for the different host countries. Also, it is only given out on the day before departure which is far too late, and there is no turning back. We need domestic workers to have more input into the quality and timing of the information.”

Connie Bragas-Regalado, Migrante International

“Estonians leaving to work in Finland can contact an Information Point especially set up in the Estonian capital city Tallinn for information on the employment rights they

will have in Finland, and the unions in Finland that can help them. It was set up with help from the Finnish unions so that Estonians work under the same conditions as, and do not undercut, Finnish standards.”

Barbro Budin, Equality Officer, IUF
netti.sak.fi/workinginfinland/en/index.html

“We are an international cooperation wing of the UGT union federation in Spain, with programmes in countries like Ecuador, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Bulgaria. Many there want to migrate to find work in Spain, thinking that it will be a ‘golden paradise’, which it certainly is not. So we have helped set up offices in these countries to provide information on migrants’ rights in Spain, plus the UGT (Equality Department) has advice centres for when they have arrived. So, this is not a new question for us, but there is so much more work to do. And it is going to become a bigger priority in the years to come.”

Javier Miró, Programme Coordinator, ISCOD-UGT, Spain

Other examples of collaboration between unions include those in Ireland and Poland, and Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Though good developments, they are still piecemeal bilateral efforts between particular unions.

‘PSI Migration Pre-Decision and Information Kit’

Public Services International (PSI), 2006

Aimed particularly at women health care workers intending to migrate for work, the kit contains practical information on the cost of living, legal and employment rights, and union contacts in destination countries. It was developed by the PSI Migration and Women Health Workers Project in 16 migrant sending and receiving countries.

[www.world-](http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateEn.cfm?Section=Women_Health_Workers&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=14494)

psi.org/TemplateEn.cfm?Section=Women_Health_Workers&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=14494



⇒ **Union membership that is recognised across borders**

“Going back as far as the 1920s, the IUF has had in its Statutes a reciprocity agreement; this means that if you are a member of an IUF affiliated union in one country and then migrate to another country, you can automatically become a member of an IUF affiliate in your new country. This is something that could be used much more to protect migrant workers.”

Barbro Budin, Equality Officer, IUF

New Global Unions plan for migrant workers

In mid-December 2006, a four-day seminar organised by the ITUC (International Trades Union Confederation, formerly ICFTU) endorsed an action plan for the defence of migrant workers. This is now something to take up with national unions in each country, ensuring that these activities include domestic/household workers.

www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?rubrique48

18 December = International Migrants Day

As agreed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2000.
www.december18.net

“Today we pay tribute to the millions of migrant workers who have left their home countries to find work and better opportunities elsewhere to support their families and communities. This movement largely reflects the failure of policies to generate enough decent jobs where people live. Too often migrant workers become trapped in the most difficult circumstances including situations of exploitation, discrimination, poor working conditions, lack of respect for their rights at work, and limited opportunities for advancement. The ILO remains committed to examining innovative forms of migrant protection and

‘Claim and Celebrate Women Migrants’ Human Rights through CEDAW’

A briefing paper on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and how to use it, giving examples such as the Indonesian Migrant Workers’ Union (IMWU) in Hong Kong.

By Jean D’Cunha

UNIFEM, 2005

ISBN 1-932827-21-8

www.unifem-eseasia.org/projects/migrant/mig_pub.htm

Extracts from the Declaration of Philadelphia (1944), the Constitution of the ILO

- labour is not a commodity
- freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress
- poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere
- all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity

www.ilo.org/public/english/about/iloconst.htm

Supporting Child Domestic/Household Workers

“Child domestic workers usually work very long hours and carry heavy loads and are at risk of psychological, physical and sexual abuse from employers and their families – they also suffer from isolation and loneliness... Child workers living in the homes of their employers are more likely to experience conditions consistent with the worst forms of child labour.”

‘Child Domestic Labour and Trade Unions’, ILO, 2006

Despite the danger to children’s health and growth, there is a ‘blindness’ to child domestic/household labour around the world. In most countries there is legislation governing the minimum age for employment; but, because domestic/household labour is not seen as ‘work’ or, at best, only ‘light’ tasks, so the minimum age laws are often not applied to it.

Plus there is a mythology that employers are doing some kind of charitable act in providing a roof for poverty-stricken children. It is true that poverty drives many rural families to send their children to work in other people’s households. But it is not an act of charity to use and abuse the labour of a child who should be at home and at school.

Trade unions are also not used to organising child workers as members, or even helping them to organise themselves. Instead, it is religious or women’s groups who tend to provide support. However, there is much more that can and should be done, according to the conference participants:

- **Encouraging opportunities for self-organisation of children and giving them support to do this**
- **Providing opportunities for child domestic/household workers to become union members or to associate with unions**
- **Finding out what child domestic/household workers want and helping to find solutions to the problems they identify**
- **Including psycho-social trauma as an important problem to be taken up**
- **Ensuring that domestic/household work is included in national policies to eliminate the worst forms of child labour**
- **Ensuring that domestic/household work is included in minimum age legislation**
- **Helping to provide sanctuary for the victims of the worst forms of child labour**
- **Helping to remove children under minimum legal working age from domestic/household labour**
- **Awareness-raising among union members not to employ children under the age of 15 years**
- **Helping to identify where children are working in private households, e.g. by consulting adult domestic/household workers and union members**

Combating child labour raises the profile of unions

*"In Tanzania, the IPEC programme to combat the worst forms of child labour has been collaborating with one of our affiliates **CHODAWU (Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers' Union)**. In a comprehensive programme, they have been doing social mapping, education and income-generating activities among poor rural communities for whom sending children to work in urban areas has a long tradition. They have also been rescuing child domestic workers and giving them vocational training, as well as HIV-Aids treatment where needed. Several thousand children, the majority of them girls, have so far benefited. At the same time, these activities have raised the profile and the membership of the union."*

Barbro Budin, Equality Officer, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)

IPEC Programme to combat child labour in Tanzania

www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/themes/timebound/downloads/tanzania.pdf

www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/daressalaam/document/tbp_chodawu.doc



⇒ **A New International Network for Domestic/Household Workers**

No international network specifically for the rights of domestic/household workers currently exists, and so there was considerable support at the conference for building one.

Participants agreed it should be a network open to all those who share the common aim of achieving 'Respect and Rights for Domestic/Household Workers', providing a platform for them to communicate and work together more effectively. It should not be a membership-based organisation.

There were concerns, of course, not to replicate existing networks such as the regional ones in Latin America and Asia, or those for specific categories such as migrant workers. The overarching aim of a new international network would be to add value to and strengthen the work already going on that promotes domestic/household workers' rights.

It was recognised that the Global Unions have a special role to play because of their formal status within the International Labour Organisation, and the actual and potential supportive activities of their affiliated unions around the world.

However, the collaboration must also include non-union self-organisations of domestic/household workers plus advocacy/support groups and networks, otherwise any new initiatives would only be weak.

A start-up process for the new network and set of initial tasks were agreed, as laid out in the final conference statement. Participants thought areas of activity for the network in the near future could be:

- **An International Day for Domestic/Household Workers**

There has never yet been a day when organisations across the world unite to highlight the role, needs and rights of domestic/household workers. There was considerable support at the conference for organising such an international day, with activities encouraged simultaneously in all countries on a common theme. This would be a good way to generate much greater public awareness, particularly in the process, for example, of lobbying for an ILO Convention for the Rights of Domestic/Household Workers (see below).

Such days for domestic/household workers do already exist in individual countries, and in the Latin American region as a whole, though their dates vary. There is also the International Migrants Day on 18 December. There was concern to ensure that any such international day would not confuse or detract from these existing days.

While establishing an annual international Day is one possibility, another is to organise initially a single Global Day of Action. Such Days have been generated, for example, by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) as a way of building solidarity among railway workers or road transport drivers across the world, lobbying on a common theme. For the ITF Railway Workers International Day of Action, 27 March 2006, see www.itfglobal.org/campaigns/campaigns-1057.cfm. Such a one-off day for domestic/household workers' rights could be strategically timed to raise maximum awareness and lobbying power. Then its potential for an annual day could be evaluated.

- **An international (ILO) Convention for Domestic/Household Workers**

While some participants doubted that the time and effort needed to achieve an ILO Convention would be worthwhile, others saw it as an opportunity for mobilising, campaigning, and promoting domestic/household workers' organisations. There seems to be groundwork already existing within the ILO to support such an effort.

“Winning the ILO Convention on Home Work in 1996 is a model for achieving one for domestic/household workers. The lobbying effort needed can be used as a tool to organise and empower domestic workers.”

Lee Siew Hwa, Committee for Asian Women (CAW), Bangkok

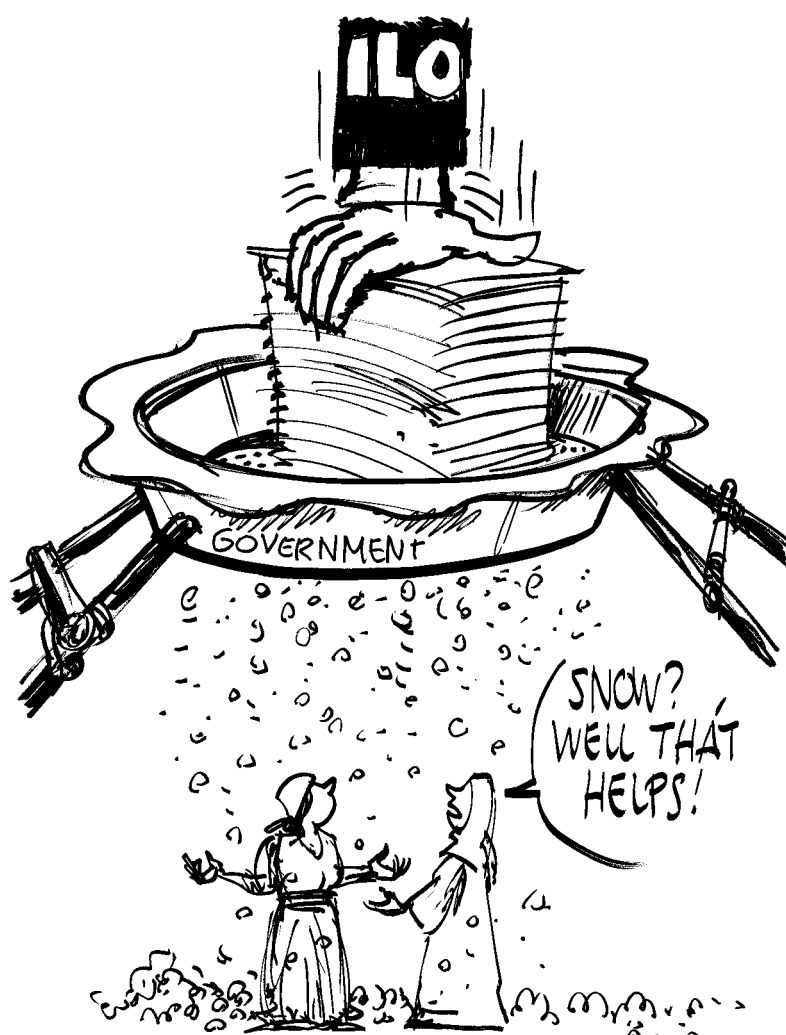
Again, it was repeated that domestic/household workers would need to be at the forefront in any such activity concerning their future, and this would include who can or should speak for them at the ILO.

“Achieving the Home Work Convention involved a long collaboration between the Global Unions (including the IUF), WIEGO (Women in the Informal Economy Globalising and Organising), IRENE, the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) of India, and others. Originally, the idea came from SEWA to get a Convention on informal economy workers’ rights. At that time the IUF wanted domestic workers included. However, we were all advised that it had to be slimmed down. To achieve a Domestic Workers’ Convention now, we would need the same kind of coalition with long-term purpose.”

Barbro Budin, Equality Officer, IUF

“ILO Conventions take five to ten years to achieve. For domestic workers in hardship, this is a long process. International unions and the ILO need to cut down on their bureaucratic structures. I would like to see domestic workers directly represented on those boards, not via third parties. I don’t believe in a long process; I want to know what we are going to do now.”

Alfred Angula, General Secretary, Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers’ Union



- **Lobbying the ILO and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** to ensure that existing work on migration includes domestic/household workers (both documented and undocumented)

‘The International Labour Organization: A handbook for minorities and indigenous peoples’
 This handbook, produced for those concerned with minority and indigenous peoples' rights, explains how the ILO works and how it can be used.
 By Chandra Roy and Mike Kaye
 Anti-Slavery International and Minority Rights Group International, 2002
 ISBN 1 897693 39 7
www.antislavery.org/homepage/resources/PDF/PDFun.htm#ILOhandbook

- **Greater exchange of information and strategies, for example through a new website dedicated to domestic/household workers’ rights**
- **An urgent appeal mechanism for extreme cases of abuse and exploitation of domestic/household workers**
- **Support for further research into domestic/household work in the context of neo-liberal globalisation and gender discrimination**

The next steps

At the end of the conference on 10 November 2006, a statement was agreed by the organisations present to consolidate these suggestions. This was followed up by a working group of remaining participants the following day to discuss what the next steps might be.

Since the conference, developments have proceeded apace.

Conference statement

Protection for domestic workers!!

International conference, held on 8-10 November 2006, at the headquarters of the FNV trade union federation, Amsterdam, Netherlands

This conference, attended by some 60 representatives of domestic/household workers' trade unions, associations and regional/international networks, Global Unions and national trade unions, and support NGOs, from around the world:

Expresses our common outrage at:

- ⇒ The exploitation of many domestic/household workers across the globe, particularly of highly vulnerable migrant workers (many forced to be undocumented) as well as children who do this work;
- ⇒ The lack of recognition of the contribution that domestic/household workers make, without which societies and economies could not function;
- ⇒ The continuing failure to recognise domestic/household work as “work” under employment legislation in many countries, so denying these workers the rights and respect they deserve.

We therefore demand:

Decent Work for Domestic Workers!

And recommend:

The setting up of an interim working group which, over the coming year to end 2007, has the task of investigating the possibilities for greater international activity for the rights of domestic/household workers worldwide.

The interim working group will comprise members of the steering group which founded this conference, plus representatives of domestic/household workers' organisations from as many world regions as possible. It will, however, not itself claim to represent domestic/household workers.

Tasks of the interim working group are:

(1) To explore the need and potential for an international network for the rights of domestic/household workers, being careful not to replicate but to add value to the international networks that already exist e.g. for migrant domestic workers' rights.

Such a network would be open to all organisations of whatever form – trade unions, associations, networks, support NGOs, etc. – who agree to work for the common aim of achieving the rights of and respect for all domestic/household workers.

The decision-making structures behind such a network should comprise a majority of representatives from domestic/household workers' self organisations.

(2) To explore, in collaboration with the Global Unions, the possibility for an ILO Convention on the rights of domestic/household workers, whether national or migrant workers.

(3) To support the organisation of domestic/household workers at all levels – local, national, regional and international – through:

- the greater involvement of trade unions at all levels in supporting domestic/household workers and their self-organisations;
- mapping and liaison with domestic/household workers' organisations and support groups worldwide so as to promote their visibility, capture the magnitude of the effort already being undertaken for domestic/household workers' rights, as well as encourage their involvement in a network;
- the exchange of information and strategies, for example through a new website dedicated to domestic/household workers' rights;
- the greater development of education/training programmes for domestic/household workers' groups/unions/associations/networks in strategising, organisation, accessing funding, accounting, etc.
- the potential for further funding for domestic/household workers' self-organisations;
- an urgent appeal mechanism for cases of extreme abuse and exploitation of domestic/household workers;
- further research into the role of domestic/household work including the vast migration of people to work as domestic workers as (a) an underpinning of neo-liberal globalisation and (b) a function of continuing gender discrimination in household work, so as to help promote the development of far stronger policies at international and national levels for the protection of domestic/household workers and their rights.

Post conference developments

A month after the conference, on 19 December 2006, a meeting was held between the conference organiser, Anneke van Luijken of IRENE, and several of the Global Unions: the ITUC and the IUF who took part in the conference, and the Union Network International (UNI) which is the Global Union Federation for workers in skills and services. The PSI, represented at the conference, was not able to attend but indicated its interest. The conference and its outcomes, particularly the statement, provided the basis for the discussions.

The IUF is the Global Union Federation that has a remit to represent domestic/household workers, but it has never had the resources to promote this work. So, the IUF agreed to take a lead in developing the international programme of work for domestic/household workers' rights decided at the conference, though as a specific project which will have to raise its own resources. The other Global Unions present will participate in the project. It was re-confirmed that the aim is not to build a membership-based organisation but an open network of those agreeing with the overall aims and objectives.

The Global Unions are particularly important for developing activities within the ILO, as they have full status as one of the tripartite members of the ILO, along with governments and employers. On 23 January 2007, a meeting was held in Geneva involving the IUF, ITUC, Anneke van Luijken and ILO officers from several departments: Gender, Migration, ACTRAV (the Workers Group), IPEC (Child Labour), and Declaration & Norms (ILO Standards). The participation of five ILO departments indicates the level of support there is in the organisation for finding better ways to promote the rights of domestic/household workers.

The Workers' Group ACTRAV, in conjunction with the ITUC office in Geneva, can take a lead in preparing the ground for a new Convention, for example by making a report to the ILO Governing Body and raising awareness through activities at the International Labour Conference, held each June. On-going liaison between the various interested ILO departments should be fostered, for example through an 'Expert Meeting', perhaps in 2008. It was clearly restated that domestic/household workers' organisations must be represented in all such activities.

With the success of these two meetings, work has continued on developing a plan of action for the first year, including fund-raising, the publication of this report, development of a special website, and maintaining and developing communications with all interested groups. As well as the 60 organisations attending the November 2006 conference, there are estimated to be a further 280 around the world - trade unions, workers' associations, support NGOs, etc. – to bring into the network.

As part of generating wider awareness, presentations have been made or are planned at a number of conferences and events, including:

- ITUC, international conference on migration, Brussels, December 2006
- Anti-Slavery International, International stakeholders' meeting on child domestic labour, London, February 2007
- IUF, international women's conference, Geneva, March 2007
- ILO International Labour Conference, Geneva, June 2007.

A powerpoint presentation developed for the ITUC conference on migration is available at: www.irene-network.nl/workers_is/domestic.htm

The pilot year will also be used to develop democratic decision-making in the network, so that the plans for future years can be discussed and agreed with the involvement particularly of domestic/household workers' own organisations.

IS IT A BIRD?
IS IT A PLANE?



NB: This extract of the conference report was made for the IUF women's conference and the IUF congress held March 2007.

The full report will be available in English, Spanish and French – Summer 2007.

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