



Press release

Women unite across labour federations for new campaign

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A collective focus on gender based violence, sexual harassment, support for domestic workers and maternity protection is a priority, according to labour representatives who met on May 15 – 17 2013..

Women from affiliates of all four labour federations, COSATU, FEDUSA, NACTU and CONSAWU, have agreed to work together on a new campaign that focuses on gender and work. This was the decision reached after an intensive three-day national workshop in Johannesburg this month on strengthening collective bargaining demands and strategies towards gender equality.

The new campaign of the International Trade Union Confederation(ITUC) is titled **Labour Rights for Women (LRW)**, and is aimed at improving the lives and working conditions of women in 11 countries: South Africa, Egypt, Guatemala, Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Peru, Paraguay, India and Indonesia.

National leaders from all four federations addressed the workshop - Zingiswa Losi (COSATU), Ma Edna Bokaba (FEDUSA), Maggie Makgoba (NACTU) and Rene Govender (CONSAWU). All of the presentations noted the significance of bringing the four federations together into one room to share different views and experiences, and to collectively strengthen the struggle for labour rights for women.

“As women we have a lot of challenges in all the sectors we work in. We belong to different churches – and that is okay. So we need to teach each other that it is okay to be different. The more different we are, the more spice we can bring in,” said Maggie Makgoba (NACTU).

Representatives from the American Centre for International Solidarity, the CCMA and the ILO assisted with presentations. The CCMA provided important practical tips on handling discrimination cases and in particular sexual harassment. Delegates discussed the role of the ILO and the conventions relevant to creating gender equality, with a particular focus on Convention 183, the Maternity Protection convention. SADSAWU also presented their struggle to get the South African government to ratify Convention 189, on Decent Work and domestic workers.

The launch ended with the commitment to take following issues forward as part of the campaign:

- A programme of education and awareness-raising amongst union members who employ domestic workers – focused on the rights of domestic workers.
- Promoting the unionisation of domestic workers – particularly by union members who are employers of domestic workers.
- Supporting trade unions and organisations promoting the rights of domestic workers.
- Addressing sexual harassment through collective bargaining – by getting the issues in the code onto the bargaining agenda.
- Raising awareness on Convention 183 (the Maternity Protection convention), and to advocate for ratification by the South African Government.
- Using the convention to strengthen collective bargaining strategies and to improve the basic provisions in the BCEA.
- Strengthening the campaign on gender based violence

In all, close to 70 women from all four federations, including trade union gender co-ordinators and women negotiators, agreed that it was important to strengthen women's leadership and participation in trade unions, and particularly in collective bargaining. Issues such as sexual harassment, violence against women in the workplace, discrimination, unfair treatment (particularly of vulnerable groups such as domestic workers) and unequal pay should and could be tackled by a united front of women in labour.

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Issued by Labour Research Service (LRS), project coordinator of the Labour Rights for Women campaign on behalf of COSATU, FEDUSA, NACTU and CONSAWU.

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