



In times of global economic crisis, **Gender matters!**

On International Women's Day, BWI Asia-Pacific Region called for the advancement of workers including women towards decent work and living conditions.

The present global economic crisis is affecting all workers---men and women---and their families. As a result, millions of workers have found themselves jobless, have seen their life savings and pensions vanished, have limited or no access to public services such as health care, public education, and other social safety nets, and have become homeless. Although the economic crisis has no gender prejudice, the reality is that because of the existing gender dynamics and divides within our society, the economic crisis impacts women workers more severely than men.

During periods of economic turmoil, women are particularly vulnerable because of their marginalized political, economic, and social status. On an average, women receive 79% of male wages and women are less likely to be in positions of power in both the public and private arena; thus, further isolating them. Because of this, women will be more prone to be pushed into poverty and thus a high probability of women and girls resorting to prostitution and trafficking.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UN CEDAW) issued a statement that stated, "Women and girls in both developed and developing countries will be particularly affected by the potential social and economic consequences such as unemployment, increase of responsibilities both at work and at home, decrease of income and potential increase in societal and domestic violence."

In the sectors that BWI represent, only 10% of the workforce is women. The majority of these women are in jobs that are unskilled, informal, lowly paid, and unsafe and dangerous. Far often these women are exposed to discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence. In light of the economic crisis, BWI calls on governments, employers, civil society organizations, and the trade union movement to address the worsening situation of women workers. BWI recognizes that women must be included in redefining economic development and recovery programs.

Recently, the trade union delegates at the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women strongly recommended governments to adopt policies and laws that promote equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, and the elimination of discrimination against women in the labour market. In the context of stimulus packages that are being presented to restore growth, trade unions are recommending the strengthening and broadening of social safety nets and social protection guaranteeing access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection, quality education and health care, as well as measures which would

enable reconciliation of work and family life. Further, there is a need for increased and predictable funding for employment creation based on gender-sensitive decent work objectives.

As more governments throughout the world are resorting to infrastructure program to create employment, it is important that they consider the "social infrastructure" aspect of any proposals. According to Anita Normak, General Secretary of the BWI, "As jobs in the wood and construction industry are disappearing at an accelerating rate, women are likely to be severely hit by unemployment and poverty." She continued, "We must not forget women in these difficult times but recognize the unique contributions that they can make in the resolving this crisis and toward social progress. Creating decent jobs for women is a basic requirement for the sustainability of our societies. Gender perspectives should be taken into account in relation to vocational training, health and safety as well as livelihoods."

It is for this reason that BWI has developed a gender mainstreaming strategy and policy as a tool to achieve gender equality and to enhance women's participation in trade union activities and structures. BWI is also integrating women workers' concerns in its decent work and capacity building programs.



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Philippine Trade Union Network on Asbestos Ban Formed



“Our collective strength will be more effective in pushing legislators and government agencies to take action,” opened Brother Gerard Seno, National Vice President of the Associated Labor Unions (ALU).

On March 5, 2009 BWI along with ALU and the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) called on all trade unions regardless of their affiliation to participate in a Forum that would discuss and develop a Philippine trade union network with the objective of launching an advocacy campaign calling for a ban on asbestos in the Philippines. Over 30 trade unionists representing national centers, federations, Global Union Federation (GUF) affiliates and local unions heeded this call.

To advance the ban asbestos campaign, the trade unions adopted the following pillars:

1. Passage of Legislation ---Advocate for pending bills in Congress and ensure that provisions based on international standards and instruments are integrated into these bills.
2. Formation of a Trade Union Network – With the support of GUF affiliates a network will be established to broaden the support for the campaign within and outside the Philippines.
3. Engagement with Government Agencies – Work with government agencies to expand their asbestos policy protection mandates, improve compliance with their mandates, and adopt a national program on the elimination of asbestos-related diseases.
4. Monitoring Workers Exposed to Asbestos – Urge the creation of a central registry and medical surveillance of workers with exposures to asbestos.
5. Public Information Campaign - Educate legislators, government agencies, workers and unions, and the public to them into action.

The network’s advocacy agenda were formulated based on these pillars. Participants agreed to a Joint Communiqué, which called for joint activities and monitor campaign developments through a Technical Working Group (TWG) and periodic strategy meetings.

Child Labour Projects Mission - India

The issue of child labour and its elimination has been a priority for the BWI for several years. In South Asia, home to the largest number of child labourers in the world, the BWI and its affiliates have adopted a comprehensive integrated strategy to pull children out from work and bring them into the educational fold. At the same time, BWI supports trade unions to improve the overall working conditions including wages; thereby, addressing the economic conditions that give rise to child labour.

In an effort to evaluate and develop future strategic directions of the BWI Child Labour project, a Child Labour Projects Mission took place from March 7 to 8 in Agra, India. The Child Labour Mission comprised of SASK, FNV Bouw, BAT-KARTEL, CFMEU-CLSC, IGBAU, CLC, and CHILD LEARN Netherlands as well as the project implementing unions from India (BMS, UPGMS, HKMP, UPSNVPWDMS, OKKS and INBCWF) and Nepal (Nepal Affiliates Committee comprising of CUPPEC and new entity - CAWUN - born out of the merger of CAWUN and NBCWU). Beside the



BWI South Asia Project Office, Brother Ambet Yuson, Regional Representative of BWI APRO, Apolinar Tolentino, Education Secretary of BWI APRO, and Brother Tos Anonuevo, Education Secretary, BWI Headquarters participated in the mission.



The Child Labour Projects Mission comprised of field visits and a Joint Evaluation Workshop, where achievements and bottlenecks in the project were discussed and deliberated. The concluding day saw inputs from the Solidarity Support Organizations on the various aspects of the project in light of the field visits and overall project assessment. The workshop stressed on the need for networking with a number of areas including government schooling, quality education, different (conventional and non-conventional) organising strategies, focused campaigns, and micro finance (Self Help Groups).

The Agra District Brick Kiln Owners Association and UPGMS hosted a solidarity dinner for the participants. Children from child labour school also showed a short play on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

ASEAN Trade Union Unity Towards ASEAN Regional Economic Integration

As a follow up to the resolution passed by the BWI Asia Pacific Regional Committee on BWI APRO developing a concrete agenda on the ASEAN, BWI along with representatives from other Global Unions participated in a FES sponsored ASEAN mapping workshop that was held from February 9 to 11 in Puncak, Indonesia. The objective of the workshop was to “map out a clear route map for the trade unions with regards to their engagement with ASEAN’s economic regional integration process. This would form the basis for a focused agenda and action plan for the next three years, 2009-2011.”

The BWI delegation, which was led by Ernesto Arellano, President of NUBCW of the Philippines, stated, “This is an important opportunity for the trade unions within the ASEAN to develop a concrete platform to address the key issues facing workers and their families as a result of the ASEAN economic integration.”

The workshop concluded with a joint statement that outlined the proposed work plan of the trade unions in relation to the ASEAN economic integration. The crux of the work will focus on conducting an impact study of the ASEAN integration nationally, regionally, and sectorally. Based on these studies, training materials will be developed to educate trade union leaders, members, general public, and the media



within the ASEAN countries. These impact studies will be also be used to develop a unified trade union policy that will be used to discuss with national governments and the ASEAN secretariat on the impact of the ASEAN economic integration on workers and their families.

In addition to the workshop, the BWI delegation participated in the 3rd ASETUC Board meeting where BWI officially became members of ASETUC. Finally, the ASETUC delegation met with the ASEAN Secretariat which is based in Jakarta to raise the discussion points that were brought out in the workshop as well as a deliver a letter addressed Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Surin Pitsuwan.

ORGANIZING

Philippines Senate Labour Committee Calls Hanjin to Honour OSH Regulations



The Philippines Senate Labour Committee chaired by Senator JInggy Estrada conducted two hearings this past February to address the increasing high number of accidents at the ship yard operated by Hanjin Heavy Industries in Construction---Philippines Incorporated (HHIC-Philippines) in the Subic Freeport Zone in Zambales.

During the hearing Senator Pia Cayetano pointed out that there were 84 sub contractors and only 21 were registered with the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE). When the representative of DOLE was questioned as to why they did not investigate into the illegal sub contracting, they shifted the blame to Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) by stating that SBMA had refused its request to investigate. SBMA responded by stating they never prevented DOLE. In summing up this situation, President Arellano stated, “As a result of the uncoordinated duties and responsibilities between DOLE and SBMA, the workers are suffering.”

The Hanjin management continue its repression against the union. According to the union, after the first senate labor committee hearing, union members faced threats of terminations, particularly those who appeared and testified before the Senate. The Hanjin management accused them of “soiling Hanjin’s name by going public.”

After the second hearing, the Senate Committee called on HHIC-Philippines to build a hospital within the next six months. In addition, the Occupational Health and Safety Center agreed to investigate Hanjin to ensure that workers receive Employees’ Compensation, as it came out in the hearing that injured workers were still waiting for the EC. Finally, the Hanjin management assured that workers who testified at the hearing will not be terminated unlike after the first hearing. NUBCW has vowed to remain vigilant to ensure that these recommendations and assurances are followed through.

KFCITU Provide Financial Assistance to Patrick Molina

Patrick Molina, a 20-year old fit up ship fitter, who worked at the Hanjin ship yard in Subis until he was injured in a work-related accident on November 14, 2008. During his lunch break, piles of iron slabs near the area he was sitting collapsed when the piece of wood edged in between the slabs gave in. As a result of this accident, Molina lost his right foot.

Despite concerns of the Hanjin management renegeing their promise to provide an artificial foot and provide ECC benefits, Molina testified before the Senate Committee to ensure that other workers at the Hanjin ship yard did not meet the same fate. In his testimony, he stated that had HHIC--Philippines followed strict occupational health and safety standards at the work site, then, his accident could have been prevented. Immediately following the Senate hearing, Molina was informed by Hanjin management that he made a mistake and breached the trust of the Hanjin when he testified, thus Hanjin was no long going to provide medical procedures for Molina to receive an artificial foot. Once the members of the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Union heard about Molina’s situation, they raised funds to support his medical expenses. Recently, the HHIC-Philippines agreed to pay for Patrick Molina’s amputation costs to avoid further bad publicity.

Pakistani Construction workers take to streets for Workers Right



As a part of their continued struggle, members of the Pakistan Federation of Building and Wood Workers (PFBWW) agitated against the Labour Laws and Industrial Relations Act 2008. The union’s main demand is the right to organize and negotiate collective bargaining for construction workers in Pakistan.

Members of Capital Development Authority, an affiliate of the PFBWW took to the streets demanding service regularisation, promotion of field staff and provision of medical and conveyance allowances. Hundreds of workers from Islamabad and Rawalpindi’s along with supporters from 40 organisations participated in a rally and march from the press club’s camp office to the parliament house. Brother Asalm Adil, the General Secretary of PFBWW addressed the workers at the rally.

BWI engagement with International Financial Institution's on Labour clauses

The BWI organized two trainings on labour clauses in International Financial Institution's (IFIs) procurement practices for its affiliates in Nepal and India on March 13 to 14 and March 19 to 20 respectively. The trainings focused on dissemination of information on the BWI engagement with IFIs, particularly the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the International Finance Corporation. Of particular interest and focus was the recent World Bank consent on the mandatory inclusion of trade unions' right to organise and to collective bargaining on all bank funded infrastructure projects. The new commitments are to be introduced in July 2009.

BWI affiliates in Nepal have identified and launched organizing campaigns of certain ADB funded infrastructure projects such as water supply, dams, and roads. Although the affiliates have had some degree of success, the union's initiatives need to be further developed and with this mind the following recommendations were made at the trainings:

- Follow-up visits by BWI to project sites to develop a better understanding of union organizing and to guide affiliates with practical suggestions at the worksite level;

- Proper documentation of union organizing experiences at these worksites so as to develop them into best practice examples;
- Review the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Nepal Affiliates Committee (NAC) and Federation of Contractors Association of Nepal (FCAN) with a more focused approach on composition and functioning of OHS committees at various worksites;
 - Initiate further dialogue for the expansion of the MOU into a more broad general agreement that includes working conditions; and
 - NAC to explore opportunities to organize a tripartite conference on decent work in the construction industry, sometime towards the end of 2009

In India, for the first time, the leadership of BWI affiliates were exposed to the IFIs policies and practices in relation to labour clauses in their procurement practices. With this new information, the union leadership felt motivated and reviewed their ongoing organizing strategies. Affiliates proposed plans to make inroads and tap the organizing opportunities of these projects, specifically the numerous large public works' projects underway in the sub region.

UNION ACTIVITIES

BWI strengthens ties with Timor Leste Unions

"The International Trade Union Organisations strongly supported your struggle for national independence; provided concrete trade union solidarity to lay the foundations for a dynamic trade union organization, and again on this occasion we re-affirm to struggle together to sustain your gains as our common contribution to a better world", was the main message delivered by BWI to the 3rd National Congress and 8th Anniversary of Konfederacion Sindikatu Timor Leste (KSTL or the National Trade Union Confederation of Timor Leste).

The BWI has established working relationship with the KSTL-affiliated Construction Workers Union, headed by Brother Marcelino Gama, the President of CWU. The union has 300 members and has signed a collective agreement and another to be concluded this year. To support the organising and consolidation thrust of the CWU, last year, the BWI conducted a training workshop on Occupational Safety and Health as supplementary organising strategy. The training workshop also provided the KSTL additional key elements to design policy proposals to the government to establish OSH committees in all construction worksites as well as a national-level OSH Council.

"To consolidate our membership and reach out to more construction workers, the CWU has decided to include as our constituents electricians and energy workers and this will be officially launched in our scheduled Conference this year," said Brother Marcelino; and "we would like BWI to be part of this process," he added.

Close to 150 Congress delegates and guests from the international trade unions attended the Congress. Peter Jennings, Executive Director of APHEDA headed the delegation of Australian Trade Unions while Apolinar Tolentino, Regional Education Officer of BWI APRO represented the BWI. Brothers Zito da Costa and Rigo Montiero were re-elected as National President and General Secretary, respectively.

Two Unions merged in Nepal



Moving towards a single unified union, two BWI affiliates in Nepal - Nepal Building Construction Workers Union (NBCWU) and Construction and Allied Workers' Union of Nepal (CAWUN) successfully convened its historical merger convention in Kathmandu from February 14 to 16, 2009. The new unified union - Construction and Allied Workers' Union of Nepal (CAWUN) has brought four other local unions under the new unified union; thus improving the strength of the new union.

Apart from the 284 official union delegates, representatives from national trade union centres, solidarity organisations and political parties participated in this historic convention, where solidarity message from BWI was readout. The two-day convention adopted the plan of action on important issues such as trade union rights, labour law, social security, minimum wage, skill development, capacity building, migration and peace and security. The convention elected Brother J.B. Gurung and Brother Rajendra Kumar Baniya as President and General Secretary respectively.

The new union along with CUPPEC are part of the BWI Nepal Affiliates Committee, which is an umbrella organization advocating on behalf of construction workers in Nepal through social dialogue with employers and government.



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