



International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)

Founding Congress

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Item 4 (a): Report of Activities, 2009-2013

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A. Who are We / What are We?

Domestic workers are workers. Their work makes all other work possible. However, despite their enormous contribution economically and socially, domestic work has not been properly recognized and is undervalued. For a long time, they have been called “maids”, “servants” or “helpers” and have extremely low or no status.

There are both women and men domestic workers, but in most cases domestic workers are women, driven by poverty and left with no choice to earn a living other than to do domestic work. Domestic workers are mostly the jobless, migrants, and boys, girls and women from marginalized communities.

Just like other workers, domestic workers have been organizing themselves for a long time, as long ago as the 1900s - for mutual support, to share information about job opportunities, and to advocate for their rights. Amongst our affiliates, the Union Personal Auxiliar de Casas Particulares (UPACP) in Argentina was formed in 1901, the CSC Service Workers' Union in Belgium began to organize domestic workers in the 1950s, and the South African Domestic and Allied Service Workers Union (SADSAWU, formerly South African Domestic Workers' Union, SADWU) was founded in 1985.

Global Networking Begins

It was only in November 2006 that domestic workers from across the world first came together at an international conference, hosted by the FNV Netherlands. There they shared experiences and ideas of organizing and of advocating for their rights. From this experience came the idea of building a long-term network at an international level. With the support of the global foodworkers' union federation IUF and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), and the strong role played also by the global union confederation International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Global Labor Institute (GLI), this international networking flourished.

It was at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva in 2009 that the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) was launched, by leaders of some key domestic workers' organizations from across the world: the regional network of domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean CONLACTRAHO, the Asian Domestic Workers Network (ADWN) in Asia, the National Domestic Workers' Alliance (NDWA) of the USA, the South African Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union

(SADSAWU), Jala-Prt (Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy) in Indonesia, IPROFOTH in Peru, and the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) in Trinidad & Tobago. They formed the first Steering Committee to lead the organization meaning that all world regions were included except Europe. A team of Coordinators was appointed to carry out programs of activities in the regions and internationally, supported by a technical team from the IUF, WIEGO and GLI.

The main objective then was to mobilize domestic workers' organizations and their supporters worldwide to win an ILO Convention for the rights of domestic workers: one goal, clear and specific. In June 2011, the ILO Convention C189 Decent Work for Domestic Workers was won, a huge and historic achievement.

From 'Network' to 'Federation'

It was after this success that the Steering Committee took the major decision to transform the IDWN from a loose, informal 'network' to a formal 'federation' of member organizations. Two main tasks were then carried out: a draft Constitution for a global organization of domestic workers was developed, and the national or local domestic workers' organizations already working closely with the IDWN were invited to become formal members. At a meeting in May 2012, the Steering Committee approved the membership applications of 14 domestic workers' organizations, and they became the first group of affiliates of the IDWN. At the same time, the Steering Committee decided to inaugurate the organization at a Founding Congress in October 2013. By the end of September 2013, the number of IDWN affiliates had reached 47, representing some 300,000 domestic workers worldwide.

What are these organizations? As our membership criteria prescribe, they are local or national membership-based organizations of domestic workers, led by domestic workers according to democratic rules and practices.

Most of our member organizations are trade unions. Some are trade unions specifically of domestic workers, such as Tunas Mulia in Indonesia. Some are unions including workers from other sectors, such as KUDHEIHA in Kenya, and the CSC Service Workers' Union in Belgium. Some are domestic workers' trade union federations, such as the India Federation of Domestic Workers (IFDW) in India, the Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong, FENNTTRAGARP in Peru, and the National Domestic Workers' Alliance (NDWA) in the USA.

Others are associations and workers' cooperatives formed by domestic workers out of their own choosing or due to legal restrictions. They include the Household Managers Coop in South Korea, and the SIT in Switzerland. In countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh and Cambodia, domestic workers have formed networks as the national laws do not allow them to form trade unions.

B. How We Did It: Our Strategies and Activities

The birth of IDWN is closely linked to the birth of the C189. The IDWN seized the short window of opportunity in 2009–2011 to contact domestic workers' organizations across the world, to raise their awareness about the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its Conventions, to develop joint positions on demands, to help and encourage them to strengthen their membership, to work with the trade unions to lobby their governments and, where possible, employers, and to raise public awareness through activities such as rallies, media coverage, and so on.

In those two years or so, the IDWN together with our partner organizations organized 27 national meetings, workshops and conferences, attended by some 1,380 domestic workers. Over 500 of them were trained specifically to explain why an ILO Convention would be a good idea, not only for themselves but also for wider society. Other activities included numerous meetings with trade unions, migrant rights' networks, and other civil society organizations to win their support.

Then, between June 2011 and June 2012 after the proposed ILO Convention C189 had been won, over 400 domestic workers participated in various capacity-building workshops and seminars on the C189 and organizing of domestic workers in countries such as Indonesia, Hong Kong, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Mexico, Brazil, and other Andean countries in Latin America.

To many of us, the C189 and the IDWN are like twins. What gave birth to the C189 also gave birth to the IDWN. The process has enabled domestic workers to develop collective visions, increase their capacities, raise their self-confidence and imagination for what they can achieve, and most importantly recruit many more domestic workers to their organizations.

By June 2011, the IDWN was a network of some 70 domestic workers' organizations from 35 countries. Then, after the Steering Committee took the decision to transform the IDWN into a formal body, similar decisions were taken by many domestic workers' organizations on the ground, deciding to transform themselves into trade unions, to form alliances with other organizations, or simply to develop goals and plans to recruit more members and to strengthen themselves.

To strengthen this process and these initiatives, the IDWN set itself new objectives and goals: to achieve the ratification of C189 and improved national legislation in as many countries as possible, and secondly to support domestic workers to organize and to help with their capacity-building. This has become our dual-track strategy, as we believe that domestic workers have to be organized, in big numbers and in unity. Then they will be able to achieve and defend their gains now and in the future. Again, this is the moment to seize and we are working hard on this, with the continuing support of the IUF and WIEGO and in strong alliances with the ITUC and other civil society organizations.

In the two years since June 2011, no fewer than 13 countries have ratified C189, with 9 already registered at the ILO: Bolivia, Guyana, Italy, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Uruguay, and 4 more in the process of registering: Germany, Columbia, Dominican Republic, and Ecuador.

Some Key Developments on the Ground

What is more, over 100,000 domestic workers have been organized into membership-based organizations, most of them trade unions, all over the world. Here are some examples:

- Domestic workers have formed organizations in countries where they did not exist before – such as in Thailand, Cambodia, Guinea, and Cameroon.
- In India, under the leadership of the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM), started in the 1960s by Sister Jeanne Devos, domestic workers' organizations in over ten states have been transformed to become trade unions and come together under one federation, the India Federation of Domestic Workers (IFDW).
- In Bénin, West Africa, a new and stronger domestic workers' union was formed when two domestic workers organizations merged together soon after the adoption of the C189.
- In Jamaica, the Jamaica Household Workers Association was transformed into a trade union in March 2013.
- In Hong Kong, the Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions was formed to bring together domestic workers of five nationalities, including local and migrant workers.
- Other organizations have been organizing more rigorously, resulting in significant growth of membership. Examples include KUDHEIHA in Kenya, and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India.
- Most recently, the African Domestic Workers Network (AfDWN) was founded in Cape Town in June 2013. This will help to consolidate the regional voice of domestic workers in Africa, and facilitate cross-learning and joint campaigning in the region.

Organizing domestic workers is no easy task anywhere, from recruiting new members, to leadership development, to strengthening the capacities of each organization as a whole. Many have played their part, contributing towards strengthening organizing and achieving or working towards ratification of C189 at the national level.

Strong Partnership with Trade Unions

In many places, our partnership with the ITUC, its regional organizations and affiliates has resulted in a significant increase in the number of domestic workers being organized, and many domestic workers' organizations are now being included in the trade union national centers. This has been achieved through strong collaboration in the "12 by 12" campaign for the ratification of C189, as well as partnership between us and our various member organizations on the ground. In the past two years, the ITUC and IDWN have jointly held several regional and national workshops during which this message was delivered and joint strategies and work plans were developed. Through concrete follow-up at national level, we now see many good practices of union-to-union and workers-to-workers solidarity and support – such as in South Africa, Kenya, Bénin, Indonesia, India, Nepal, Costa Rica, and

Brazil.

Many IUF affiliated unions have been organizing domestic workers for a long time. The increase of activities over these years, including also the participation of the IDWN Steering Committee at the IUF 26th Global Congress in 2012, has resulted in several domestic workers' unions affiliating to the IUF. It has also led to strong involvement by IUF affiliates in promoting the ratification of C189. Examples include UNIA in Switzerland, and FILCAMS-CGIL and the ACV-CSC Service Union in Belgium. In Asia, the IUF regional organization is supporting an organizing project with the Tunas Mulia domestic workers' union in Indonesia. At this year's IUF Executive Committee meeting, the regional reports from Africa, Caribbean and Latin America included their activities with domestic workers. The IUF in Latin America, based in Montevideo, is the local host and organizer of the IDWN Founding Congress.

Finally, we are thankful to the ILO and the many funding organizations which have provided us with the financial and technical means to do our work. In recent years, they include the Dutch Ministry through the FLOW project, FNV Mondial (Netherlands), UN Women, the FES (Germany) and the ACV-CSC Service Union (Belgium). With their support, we currently have a team of 4 Coordinators and some part-time staff. Together with the technical support provided by WIEGO and the IUF, we have been able to build the capacities of the IDWN at all levels.

C. Highlights of Activities, 2009 to mid-2013

- **January-June 2009:** Mobilizing domestic workers to send responses to the ILO questionnaires on decent work for domestic workers, at global and national levels.
- **June 2009:** IDWN website (www.domesticworkersrights.org) launched, revamped in 2011 as www.idwn.info
- **June 2009:** A training course for 13 domestic workers' leaders in Geneva, including participation at the 98th Session of International Labour Conference (ILC) to gain practical experience of the ILO and the ILC process in particular. Afterwards, the IDWN was launched, with a Steering Committee of domestic workers' leaders, supported by a team of Coordinators, plus a technical team from the IUF, WIEGO and GLI.
- **2009:** Three Regional Conferences held on the ILO process, and to help build common platforms with trade unions and other civil society organizations:
 - September: Latin America, held in Mexico
 - November: Africa, held in Kenya
 - December: Asia, held in Hong Kong
- **June 2010:** ILC 99th Session, Geneva: the first official discussions on a possible ILO Convention for decent work for domestic workers: support for about 20 domestic workers' representatives present, through activities such as a 2-day pre-meeting and daily meetings to exchange information, clarify questions, and discuss strategies, opportunities to make official speeches, plus wider awareness-raising through side events and public demonstrations organized with partners.

- **June 2011:** ILC 100th Session, Geneva: the second official discussions and the final vote on the proposed ILO Convention: the IDWN and partners provided similar support as the previous year for the numerous domestic workers' representatives now present, plus more such as for media coverage.
- **October 2011:** Asian Regional Conference, Manila, Philippines: held jointly with the ILO, ITUC, Migrant Forum Asia, and the Global Network. It reaffirmed the commitment of all organizations to work as an alliance to achieve ratification of the C189 in the region, and organizations present shared their own work plans for this.
- **December 2011:** Accra, Ghana: IDWN Steering Committee workshop to develop a 3-year Plan, listing priority countries. It made the major decision to become a global membership-based organization of domestic workers. It would start formalizing its members by recruiting relevant organizations to join. On completion of this process in 2013, it would then hold its founding Congress.
- **December 2011:** Launch events at national level of the ITUC "12 by 12" ratification campaign: letters sent to all the IDWN network and IUF affiliates to call for support and participation. Public events held by domestic workers' organizations with trade union centers in India, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Kenya.
- **December 2012:** IDWN Steering Committee meeting in Ghana, including a courtesy call to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Honorable E.T. Mensah, to ask for ratification of C189 there.
- **January 2012:** Launch of IDWN film: 'C189: Conventional Wisdom', a 20-minute documentary about the activities of domestic workers at the 100th session of the ILC in June 2011, ending with the victorious adoption of the C189.
- **May 2012:** Participation at the IUF 26th Congress and Women Conference in Geneva.
- **June 2012:** International meeting for the first Anniversary of C189 and first International Domestic Workers' Day, held in conjunction of the 101th Session of the ILC in Geneva.
- **September 2012:** National domestic workers' workshop in Guinea, addressed by the Prime Minister who gave open support to the domestic workers' union and the ratification of C189.
- **December 2012:** Africa Regional Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya: participants shared their experiences in campaigning for C189 and improvements in national legislation. They discussed forming a regional network, its objectives and activities, and agreed to launch it in June 2013.
- **December 2012:** Latin America Regional Domestic Workers Workshop, held in Peru, with participants from ENTRAHOGARP in Peru, plus domestic workers' leaders from Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Bolivia. They discussed strategies and actions to strengthen networks of domestic workers at national, regional and international level. They concluded that the regional federation CONLACTRAHO and the IDWN should provide mutual support to each other, and that participation in the IDWN should lead to strengthening of the members of CONLACTRAHO.

- **August 2012:** 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers: A Manual for Trainers' published, in collaboration with the ILO Asia/Pacific office, for trainers of trade unions and civil society organizations including domestic workers' organizations. It is available in English, Chinese and Indonesian, in hard copies and on the IDWN website.
- **September 2012-March 2013:** Baseline studies of domestic workers' situations and their organizations were carried out in Tanzania, Philippines, Indonesia and Nepal, to provide guidance to the domestic workers' organizations in those countries and to the IDWN in formulating its strategies and action plans.
- **January-June 2013:** IDWN Constitution consultation: a questionnaire was circulated (in English, French and Spanish) to consult IDWN affiliates on the proposed IDWN Constitution, and then discussed by the Steering Committee at their meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, in June 2013.
- **June 2013:** Launch of the African Domestic Workers Network (AfDWN), Cape Town, South Africa.
- **September 2013:** Participation at the AFL-CIO Congress in USA, where the IDWN received the George Meany 2013 Human Rights Award.

The IDWN also regularly produces and circulates e-newsletters, and keeps an up-to-date and lively website at www.idwn.info, FaceBook (idwn) and Twitter.

D. Key Lessons Learnt and Challenges

1. Imaginative ways to include informal workers in trade union structures

Domestic workers have been included in the membership of many IUF-affiliated trade unions for a long time. Examples are the CSC Service Workers' Union in Belgium, KUDHEIHA in Kenya, SEWA in India, and FILSCAMS in Italy. When the IUF decided to support organizing of domestic workers, it joined its efforts with those of WIEGO and the GLI to first help domestic workers' leaders to form a membership-based network of their own (i.e. the IDWN), providing it with an organization base and support of all kinds. This has paved the way for the IDWN now to formally become part of the IUF global union structure, as provided for within its Statutes.

The challenge for the IDWN is how it will use this opportunity to build strong and sustainable organization so that it can have meaningful participation in the life of the IUF as a worthwhile member. To the IUF, equally the challenge is in facilitating integration of the IDWN in its organization, not mentioning the challenge arises from straining of its already scarce resources.

2. When the labour movement and other stakeholders act in solidarity

Without doubt, the IDWN is a product of labour movement solidarity, in alliance with other stakeholders. I join my Chair in expressing, on behalf of our entire membership, our heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

Support from the ITUC has facilitated the integration of domestic workers into the wider trade union family in so many places of the world. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have a long history of providing support to domestic workers and their organizations in many countries. This has been expanded and contributed to our success in the areas of outreach to domestic workers' organizations, research and

advocacies for legal rights. International institutions such as the ILO, UN Women, funding agencies, the academia, and many more, have provided us with technical support and resources enabling us to reach something that previously seemed “impossible”.

In view of the organizing needs of domestic workers organizations that we now face, it is vital to strengthen coordination among all the partners and build synergies of efforts. There is a need to develop common strategies and longer-term action plans together with domestic workers' organizations – the IDWN - to maximize the potential for strengthening domestic workers' organizations.

3. *Direct participation by the workers*

“We speak for ourselves” – both as an objective and in practice - has allowed domestic workers to have direct participation in decision-making processes. The inclusion of some 20 domestic workers in the official trade union delegations, plus more participating as observers, at the ILC which adopted the C189 was historic and a showcase in point. Through this, the domestic workers gained first-hand experience of collective negotiation and the roles and functions of trade unions.

The challenge now is to develop the policies, rules and practices so that “we speak for ourselves” becomes a culture and an everyday life reality within domestic workers' organizations and elsewhere.

4. *From informal to formal: how?*

For generations, domestic workers have been informal workers. The adoption and implementation of the C189 will enable them to join the formal workforce.

However, many questions remain to be answered. Examples include: what kind of enforcement and implementation mechanisms will work for domestic workers? What would their collective bargaining model look like? Who should participate in it? Which social protections are essential for domestic workers, who is responsible for delivering them, and what are the best ways?

Obviously there is no ready-made model, and the challenge is to find answers to such questions.

5. *“Working together” - leadership by women*

Generally, domestic workers in trade unions or other organizations are perceived as low in capacity. This perception can be changed as domestic workers' leaders strengthen their own capacities, as workers' leaders and as women. In many cases, being women, the leadership of domestic workers' organizations is characterized by “working together” in style and practice. This has enabled many such organizations to survive for a long time, through great difficulties and with minimum resources.

There are many challenges. First, domestic workers leaders need capacity-building so that they will be empowered as workers' leaders and as women. The question is how best to do this. Secondly, domestic workers and other workers need to be sensitized on issues of gender and equality, and to develop policies to ensure equal participation of all workers regardless of their gender, race, ethnicities, nationalities, beliefs, occupations and positions.

E. The Way Forward

The IDWN Founding Congress is both an accumulation and an opening of a global domestic workers' movement. From now on, domestic workers have their own global, democratic organization. With this, we will speak at international forums as one, share experiences, campaign and mobilize to support each one's struggles within countries and across borders. A new force is joining the labor movement.

We will seek affiliation to the IUF very soon, to become one of its Special Groups as provided for in the IUF Statutes.

We will establish a Secretariat to provide administration and coordination of our programs of activities. We will develop and implement strategies and an action plan so that we will be able to achieve what we need to achieve in a long term and sustainable way. This will include active participation by our own affiliates at all levels, and vigorous fundraising activities.

What we have been able to achieve in organizing will only find meaning when it results in protection of rights and better working conditions of our members and all other domestic workers in every corner of the world. We will keep all the lessons we have learnt in mind and face all challenges as one.

We will continue our campaigns and actions to achieve the ratification of C189 in as many countries as possible, improving legal protection of domestic workers' rights, social protection, social dialogue and collective bargaining rights and mechanisms, and skills training and implementation of other programs to create a world which values domestic work as work, sees women and men as equal, and treats all workers – formal and informal, migrants and locals - with same rights and respect.