

In numbers

Global unions

1 The international trade union movement has its first ever woman leader. Sharan Burrow was elected general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation at its world congress in Vancouver, Canada, in June this year. A former school teacher, Burrow leaves her post as president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions to take over from Guy Ryder.

101 is the number of trade unionists murdered around the world in 2009, according to the latest survey of trade union rights by the International Trade Union Confederation. Forty-eight were killed in Colombia, 16 in Guatemala, 12 in Honduras, six in Mexico, six in Bangladesh, four in Brazil, three in the Dominican Republic, three in the Philippines, one in India, one in Iraq and one in Nigeria.

176,000,000 The International Trade Union Confederation brings together 312 trade union centres in 155 countries, together representing 176 million trade union members. The ITUC was founded in 2006 through a merger of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour.

240,000 is the number of workers in Latin America killed each year in accidents, according to the Trade Union Confederation

ITUC/Jacky Delorme



Sharan Burrow, the new general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation. See "1". Credit: ITUC/Jacky Delorme

of the Americas. This figure does not include those who die from occupational diseases or illnesses. The TUAC calculates that a Latin American worker is killed every two minutes of the working day.

1949 was the year that the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, forerunner of the ITUC, was formed when non-communist unions left the World Congress of Trade Unions at the height of the Cold War in 1949. The ITF joined the walk-out, objecting to the WFTU's plans to absorb the global union federations (then called international trade secretariats).

10 The ITF is one of 10 global union federations (GUFs) that unite unions from around the world in particular industrial sectors or professions. Together they form Global Unions, along with the International Trade Union Confederation and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD. Of the GUFs, only the International Metalworkers' Federation, founded in 1893, is older than the ITF, which was founded three years later.

Procedure for the election of ITF president

The executive board agreed at its meeting prior to Congress a set of procedures to be applied on Thursday (12 August) by the new board once it is elected, if there is more than one candidate for the position of president.

The positions of president and vice presidents shall be, according to rule VII, paragraph 1 of the ITF constitution, "nominated by the executive board from among its members and proposed to Congress for election."

The procedure will operate as follows:

- If there is more than one candidate, the board will proceed to a vote from amongst its members by secret ballot.
- The board will then make a recommendation to Congress for president and vice presidents reflecting the result of that ballot.
- This recommendation will then be put to Congress for approval.

Both the candidates who have currently expressed an interest in the position of president have agreed that they will accept the result of the executive board decision and that the unsuccessful candidate will withdraw.

Women transport workers meet

From front page

violence and the murder of women was a prominent issue in Mexico, and the state was not protecting them. "So much injustice and corruption has led to the killing of women; women are condemned to be outcasts."

Alison McGarry also emphasised the importance of tackling violence against women and said that the ITF would prioritise engaging unions in the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November. According to the United Nations, one in three women experience some form of physical violence during their lifetime.

Delegates adopted a motion rejecting all forms of violence against women in Mexico specifically.

In addition, they supported an emergency motion denouncing the death of a South African cadet at sea in suspicious circumstances. It is understood that she died after she alleged that she had been raped by a senior officer.

Capacity building initiative

Delegates heard how the ITF was trialling a new mentoring initiative with the maritime sections. This would link newly elected women leaders with established and experienced leaders. The initiative is designed to be a two-way process, providing both the experienced leader and the novice with useful insights.

Stereotyping women's jobs

There have been key improvements for women in the workplace, with more workplaces running equality programmes, but there was still more to be done, according to an ITF survey carried out in 2009.

Despite significant improvements, the survey also showed that there was a "maintenance of sexism in the workplace".

The ITF's women's department was challenging

this, said Alison McGarry. It had introduced a gender sensitisation chapter in the "Making Unions Stronger" pack, ensuring that the impact of women's campaigns were monitored in every section and region and that there were section-specific materials. Sections had also begun to develop women's networks.

Winning for women in India

"I feel proud to say that in each and every part of this country, you can find active women participants," said Deepti Ben Shukla from the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen.

Shukla explained to delegates at the women's conference that there were, however, still concerns about the position of women in the workforce; that is why the union put women's demands to the government's pay commission. As a result, childcare leave and flexible working hours were won for women railway workers.

Shukla also outlined the union's education programmes: "We are educating women to know the rules and regulations so that they can protect themselves against violence and sexual harassment in the workplace."

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ITF 42ND CONGRESS
MEXICO CITY 2010

What's on today

Plenary: Don Alberto, 9.30am-5pm.
Asia/Pacific electoral group: Don Diego 1 & 2, 5pm-6pm.
North American electoral group: Don Diego 3 & 4, 5pm-6pm.
European electoral group: Don Alberto, 5pm-6pm
Resolutions committee: Dona Socorro, 6pm-7pm.
Organising Globally workshop (Arabic): Don Americo, 6pm-8.30pm.

Congress Daily News



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Visit the ITF's Congress website – www.itfcongress2010.org – for all the news and background to proceedings in Mexico City, plus links to the Congress blog and ITF Flickr and YouTube sites.

Congress blog

Visit the lively Congress blog at www.itfglobal.org/congress2010blog/ Contributions and comments are welcome. Email: anderson_jeremy@itf.org.uk

DAILY NEWS

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Flag of solidarity

Delegates at the ITF women transport workers' conference sign a "solidarity flag" to support bus drivers in Hong Kong who started an ongoing campaign of strikes and industrial action yesterday. The dispute, over pay and working conditions, was raised at Congress by Becky Kwan of the Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants' Union. "Transport workers stand united for fair pay," said Kwan.

Concern over impact of financial crisis on women

"One of our key tasks ahead focuses on fighting the effects of the economic crisis on women across the globe," Alison McGarry, ITF women's coordinator, told delegates yesterday.

Speaking at the women transport workers' conference, she highlighted the importance of protecting women's jobs, many of which were precarious; their positions were likely to be among the first to go as cutbacks were implemented.

During the session, McGarry outlined the approach presented in the ITF document "Making a Difference", which prioritises a number of areas, including the fight against the impact of the crisis on women.

She said that the ITF would continue to ensure that it challenged the negative effects of the global crisis on women by working with global unions and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to promote alternative economic and political strategies.

McGarry added: "We have to make sure that how women are affected by the crisis is fed back to their unions and that women are properly represented at

bodies such as the International Labour Organization and the ITUC."

Research would also be carried out to show exactly how public sector cuts were disproportionately affecting women.

The implementation of equality programmes in transport unions and organising young and informal women workers and women in "new workplaces", such as call centres, were also key themes in the document.

The ITF had already made inroads into organising in call centres, for example in Africa, where a project to reach out to young women workers had been established, the conference heard.

Violence against women condemned

Women at the women's conference spoke out passionately against increasing levels of violence against them.

Rosa María Hernández López, of the Mexican bus, tram and light railway workers' union ATM, said that

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My Congress



has been amazing. I think people are very surprised that something like this could happen in Costa Rica, which has a reputation for being democratic. The president, Óscar Arias, is respected internationally, so the attacks on our union really jar with the country's image.

Have you received any international solidarity from other unions? We have received support from all over the world. The ILWU in the US has done the most. They took out a full-page advert in a Costa Rican newspaper condemning the attack on our union. They have sent letters to President Obama asking him to address the situation. They got 25 members of the US Congress to sign a petition demanding our reinstatement. And they also made a formal protest to the US government under the Central American free trade agreement. So the ILWU really has been a big help. There has also been much solidarity from unions in Central America. On 14 July, unions in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and El Salvador protested at their Costa Rican embassy. Unions in Mexico have also been very supportive and I must also mention the unions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, who have held protests at Costa Rican embassies.

What practical support would you like from Congress? We want the ITF to keep supporting us until we win. There is an emergency motion going before Congress which I hope passes. I also think the time has come for stronger action. We need to start considering boycotts of Costa Rican trade. Fresh fruit is a big export for us, things like bananas, pineapples, and melons. And it is often moved by ship, so other dockers' unions might be able to help. It's also very important that the ILO condemns the Costa Rican government.

“The ILWU in the US have done a lot. They took out a full-page advert in a Costa Rican newspaper condemning the attack on our union. They have sent letters to President Obama asking him to address the situation.”

José Luis Castilla is general secretary of Sintrajap, the Costa Rican dockers' union. In May this year, 60 police officers broke down the doors of Sintrajap's headquarters and seized control of the union. The Costa Rican government removed the democratically elected leadership of the union and imposed a government-backed, employer-run board of union directors. The government has tried to entice workers to leave the union and accept the privatisation of ports.

How difficult was it for you to come to Congress? Very difficult. Our union now has no legal status, so we are unable to collect membership dues. We have run out of money. It is also impossible now for our union leaders to get released for union work. This goes against International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on rights for shop stewards. Fortunately the ITF has stepped in and covered all our expenses and has even arranged our travel.

Have you spoken about your union's difficulties at Congress? Yes, I spoke at the dockers' section conference and at the human rights symposium on Friday. I also hope to speak at the plenary today. And of course I've been able to speak personally with trade unionists from all over the world. The response



Anti-privatisation campaign poster produced by Sintrajap. The new government-imposed union leadership supports the privatisation of the JAPDEVA Costa Rican ports authority.

In brief

Talks on US-Hong Kong alliance

US and Hong Kong unions are exploring joint union representation for US-based Cathay Pacific cabin crew. These workers are governed by US labour legislation but have their wages and conditions set by their Hong Kong employer. Pat Friend of the AFA flight attendants' union of the US and the Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants' Union's Becky Kwan, have met for the first time at Congress. They are looking into a "surrogate union" arrangement. The plan may follow a model already tested in Canada, where Cathay cabin crew formed a union under Canadian law and affiliated to the ITF, with the Hong Kong-based union holding the primary relationship with the employer. Pat Friend commented: "Cathay outsources to avoid the risks posed by a strong union in Hong Kong. We have to find a creative solution. These workers have the potential to undercut the Hong Kong-based crews."

From our blog...

Professor Greg Bamber, an industrial relations expert at Monash University, Australia, writes: "There is a myth that the success of new airlines is based on using cheap labour and being anti-union. We clearly refute this myth in our new book [*How Airlines Can Improve Performance by Engaging Their Employees*] by Greg J Bamber and others]. We show there is a direct link between having cooperative relationships with unions and good operational performance... Some legacy carriers like British Airways seem to have been sucked in by the cheap labour myth... But as we show, this is a short-sighted approach. It will create a race to the bottom and make the problems facing the industry even worse."

– For more Congress blogs, see www.itfglobal.org/congress2001blog

Unions can resist privatisation

Privatisation can sometimes be blocked or reversed: this has been a theme of discussions at Congress. Examples were reported at Sunday's urban transport committee meeting, including a successful campaign by the Maritime Union of Australia against the sell-off of the Sydney Harbour Ferry company. The MUA's Mark Champey explained how the union had organised a high-profile public campaign, raising concerns about safety standards as well as the cost of fares and service reductions. The union opened a website to enable information-sharing and lobbied local politicians and won their support. A catchy campaign theme song secured lots of air time, local newspapers were targeted and rallies were held. The government had called for private sector involvement in running the ferries in 2008 but, after a 20-month campaign, finally conceded defeat.

We can meet the challenges – but we need to be smart

By Stuart Howard
ITF assistant general secretary

Today begins the plenary debate on the main policy document of Congress. Strong Unions – Sustainable Transport is the outcome of many months of consultation with affiliates and discussion at the executive board.

We are having to address huge issues. Globalisation and deregulation continue to shape how our industries are controlled and run. The global economic crisis has hit the transport industries with fewer goods and people moving around the world, with thousands of jobs lost and pay and social benefits under attack. There is increasing worldwide concern about climate change and transport is under the spotlight in this debate. At the same time we are concerned about the desperate need to get young workers involved in trade unions and women workers still are all too often left feeling excluded. This can sometimes seem like a "perfect storm".

The ITF has to attempt to address all these major issues. It needs to respond to the concerns both of strong unions and very vulnerable unions, while at the same time not spreading itself too thinly. Good

“We must build coalitions not only between unions at the global and local level, but with other social justice groups.”

policies will mean little unless they are backed up by union strength. ITF activities should be directed to practical actions and programmes for international coordination which reach down to the workplace and make us all stronger.

The theme document highlights some of the key areas but, once Congress is over, the executive board will undoubtedly need to identify priorities and provide focus.

Here are some of the main challenges. In some countries unions have to function in extremely difficult circumstances. As we have seen in Guatemala and Iran and other countries, union leaders can be arrested or even killed for legitimate union activities. Unions face aggressive union-busting campaigns from employers and anti-union laws passed by governments. We must be able to give each other support against such attacks. Solidarity is still at the heart of the ITF and time and again we show we are good at it.

The global economy continues to rely on global distribution systems. Since the Durban Congress, ITF unions have begun the process of developing union coordination in global transport companies like DHL and Maersk and in the hubs and corridors



Howard: Strong Unions – Sustainable Transport is an opportunity to increase union leverage.

of freight networks. We must continue this programme to make sure we take full advantage of our position in the strategic industry of global freight logistics. This is a real opportunity to increase union leverage.

In the next few years we are going to see a massive attack on public services, including public transport. This is at the very time when the need to address climate change cries out for the increased development of public transport. Defending passenger services requires both an industrial and political strategy. This must build coalitions not only between unions at the global and local level, but with other social justice groups. The ITF is already working with other global union federations on preparations for the quality public services campaign.

But the Congress theme document not only identifies the issues confronting us, it also has a focus on delivery. We have already noted that the challenges are enormous. There is likely to be very increased pressure on ITF resources in the next few years. It is vital that we maximise these resources, working to specific priorities, coordinating our work across regions and across transport modes, developing practical projects and programmes with clear targets and goals. We can meet these challenges, big as they are, but we need to be smart.

A different format

After the last ITF Congress in Durban, the ITF sought feedback from delegates about how they thought we could improve the format of Congress. One common request was for a more structured form of debate on the Congress theme document. As a result, we will be introducing a panel discussion. Five delegates who have been involved in different levels of ITF activity for their unions in different countries have been invited to form a panel and to kick off the discussion. The discussion will use points raised by the panel speakers to take the debate out onto the floor of the Congress. We have invited Aidan White of the International Federation of Journalists to help facilitate this session.

ITF delegation raises concerns about Mexico's offshore sector

A delegation from the ITF Congress yesterday met Gerson Obed Vega Ibarra, deputy director of the General Office of Exploration and Exploitation of Hydrocarbons at Mexico's Ministry of Energy, to discuss ITF concerns about human rights violations and the lack of a proper health and safety regime in the country's offshore oil and gas sector.

ITF concerns were presented to the International Forum on Maritime Offshore Industry held in Mexico City in October last year.

The discussions yesterday took into account the conclusions of the international forum, which broadly reflected the findings of the ITF-commissioned report by Ana Lilia Pérez, "Campeche Basin: Paradigm of Labour Exploitation". In addition, the meeting examined mechanisms to improve local and international industrial relations and to develop a model which would bring about best global practice in the Mexican offshore oil and gas industry.

The ITF delegation, which consisted of Norrie McVicar, chair of the ITF offshore task force group, Ysmael García Muñoz of the OCPNRM Mexican seafarers' union and Roar Holtet of the Norwegian Industri Energi union, were informed that new structures were being put into place to deal with the current problems of the sector. The energy, labour, maritime and transport ministries would coordinate their activities to improve health and safety at work, along with the development of emergency response training and good labour practices.

The ITF delegation welcomed these new developments, but invited the deputy director general to give serious consideration to the involvement and views of the independent and democratic union affiliates of the ITF in Mexico.

Norrie McVicar said after the meeting that he was pleased with the positive response from the deputy director general and looked forward to continuing the dialogue in the interests of Mexican offshore workers.

He added: "We also underlined the importance of meeting the requirements of International Labour Organization instruments and its concept of social dialogue and decent work. The ITF agreed to submit its proposals on how this should work, using best practice from around the world."



Gerson Obed Vega Ibarra (right) with the ITF delegation: (from left) Ysmael García Muñoz, ministerial notetaker, Roar Holtet and Norrie McVicar.