

## **Launch of the Africa Domestic Workers' Network, 16 June 2013**

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On 16 June 2013 the Africa Domestic Workers' Network (AfDWN) was launched in Cape Town, South Africa, exactly two years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers' Convention (C189) and at the very time when a diplomatic bag containing South African Government documents ratifying C189 was *en route* to Geneva for official lodging at the ILO.

The launch Conference of the Africa Domestic Workers' Network took place on 15-16 June 2013. The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU), with the support of the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) hosted the Conference. 95 domestic worker representatives from 17 organizations in 17 countries, with a total membership of 95 572, participated in the Conference, and were joined by Steering Committee members and coordinators of the IDWN from Asia, Caribbean, USA and Latin America, as well as supportive organizations from South Africa and from Europe.

Day one kicked off with songs from SADSAWU and a welcome by its General Secretary, who is also the Chair of the IDWN, Myrtle Witbooi. Vicky Kanyoka, IDWN Africa Coordinator, followed and after giving an overview of developments in Africa, she introduced the many guests and supporters who were given time to speak. These included WIEGO, IUF, COSATU, the Belgian CSC Food and Services Union and many others. A very special guest in the house was Mr. Virgil Seafield, was the chief negotiator for the South African Government and spokesperson for Africa at the ILC 2010 and 2011. His role in securing the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention was appreciated by everyone present. Mr. Herbert Mkhize, the official representative of the Minister of Labour (herself unavailable because she was at the ILC in Geneva) then spoke on her behalf, and especially commended the role of SADSAWU in ensuring that the SA Government ratified C189. Elizabeth Tang, International Coordinator of IDWN then gave a round up of global progress in ratifying C189. After this, domestic worker representatives presented an update on campaign activities and progress in each of their countries.

In the afternoon Elizabeth Tang and Vicky Kanyoka presented reports on the IDWN globally and on IDWN in Africa. Then the work of the domestic workers' representatives began in earnest. As the network was to be launched the next day, it was important to agree the name, objectives, operational guidelines and leadership. Facilitated by Chris Bonner of WIEGO, groups examined a draft document and made amendments to its content. The next morning the Guidelines were unanimously adopted (see attached), and the leadership of the AfDWN, in the form of an interim steering committee (ISC), was elected. The ISC then elected from amongst its members the Chair (Asmaou Bah from Guinee), Vice-Chair (Hester Stephens from South Africa) and Secretary (Raimi Fatou from Benin).

Barbro Budin from the IUF explained the relationship between the IUF and the IDWN and the role played by IUF in supporting IDWN. Steering Committee members and coordinators from the IDWN- Marcelina Bautista, Jill Shenker and

Fish Ip- then took the floor to share their experiences of using different communication tools and methods. As a new network finding effective means of communication will be important, and especially so in Africa where in many parts connectivity is not strong. Whilst this was taking place a drafting committee set to work to prepare a conference declaration. This was unanimously adopted by the Conference (see attached).

And then came the official launch of the AfDWN. To much singing and dancing a banner was unfurled proclaiming: "Launch of the Africa Domestic Workers Network. Domestic Work is Decent Work!" This was followed by short speeches by the new office bearers. Finally, that evening we all celebrated the launch of the AfDWN and the International Domestic Workers Day, June 16<sup>th</sup>. We danced, and ate a specially prepared meal in a beautifully decked out hall- thanks to SADSAWU and COSATU.

It was an amazing two days. The high spirits and strong cooperation amongst participants made this a special event. IDWN in Africa has shown remarkable growth and development over the past five years. This was truly a celebration of that achievement by the domestic workers of Africa. It was a privilege to be part of this.