

“Decent Work for Domestic Workers” Campaign

In March 2008, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) decided to begin a standard-setting discussion on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” at the 2010 International Labour Conference (ILC) with the possibility of adopting a Convention and/or Recommendation on domestic work at the 2011 ILC. The IDWN decided to mount a campaign, in consultation and collaboration with the ILO and International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to prepare for the 2010 and 2011 standard-setting negotiations. The IDWN held regional workshops in Africa, Asia, and Latin America at which it collected the concerns and demands of domestic workers from the three regions: see the IDWN “Platform of Demands” on the WIEGO website. To help domestic workers argue their case, WIEGO produced fact sheets with information on the status of domestic workers worldwide and data on domestic workers in Latin America based on a paper prepared by Victor Tokman (former Regional Director of the ILO for Latin America) for IDWN.

The historic first discussion on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” took place at the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2010. The IDWN was represented at the Conference by members of its Steering Committee and other domestic workers, some of whom were on the official national trade union delegations from their respective countries. In addition, a number of allies, some under the auspices of WIEGO, were there to provide technical support to the IDWN delegation. Karin Pape, the Interim International Coordinator of IDWN and WIEGO Regional Advisor for Europe, coordinated the work of the delegation, together with Barbro Budin, the Gender and Equality Officer of the IUF and a new member of the WIEGO Board.

The main important outcome of this year's International Labour Conference (ILC) was the decision taken by the Committee “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” on 4th June 2010 on the form of the instrument, which was taken by a vote. The vast majority of the Committee members rejected the amendment by the Employers' Group that the instrument should only take the form of a Recommendation.¹ This decision cannot be reversed in 2011, when the second reading of the draft Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation, will take place. However, in order to be adopted, the instruments need a 2/3 majority in the Plenary Session at the ILC in 2011.

During the International Labour Conference in June 2010, Marty Chen (WIEGO International Coordinator) requested a meeting with the Director General, Juan Somavia, of the ILO for the International Domestic Workers' Network delegation and their allies. This meeting took place on the afternoon of June 4th. Over 25 domestic workers and their supporters met with the Director General at his office in the Palais des Nations. When he

¹ Details can be found in the Provisional Record No. 12 of the 99th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 2010, p. 12 (No. 107); In this document also the outcome of this year's negotiations (“proposed conclusions”) can be found (p. 124ff); Download under: http://www.ilo.org/global/What_we_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/pr/lang-en/docName--WCMS_141770/index.htm

arrived at the meeting, the Director General shook hands with each of the domestic workers who told him her name and country.

Marty Chen introduced the International Domestic Workers' Network and mentioned that the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF) and WIEGO were providing support to the Network. Karin Pape, Interim Coordinator of the Network and Regional Advisor of WIEGO, introduced the three officers of the Network - Myrtle Witbooi Secretary General of SADSAWU (South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union), Ernestina Ochoa of SINTRAHOL (National Domestic Workers Union of Peru) and Sonu Danuwar President of Nepal Independent Domestic Workers Union (NIDWU) - each of whom made a short statement. Nalini Nayak of SEWA then presented the three requests of the Network to the ILO, namely: for better statistical data on domestic work; documentation of good practice examples of policies, laws, and practices in support of domestic workers; and cooperation with the ILO in preparing for the 2011 ILC discussion and vote on the convention on domestic work. Juan Somavia stated that he had a deep personal commitment to promoting decent work for domestic work, praised the Network on its organizing efforts, and encouraged the Network to contact the ILO regional office in Bangkok to explore the possibility of convening a regional workshop on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” before the 2011 ILC.



Photo Jennifer Fish