

## **Report to IAMRECON**

**The Women's meeting was attended by 59 participants from 19 countries, with the participation of regional leaders and the president of the PSI WOC, Juneia Batista. The meeting discussed 4 important items: Violence against women, collective bargaining, PSI's work at the UNCSW and the balance between equity and gender policies.**

Violence against women exists in all countries and in all societies. It happens in public and private places, and in physical as well as virtual online spaces. Violence is often driven by a deep-seated belief that devalues women and that assumes that a woman is not equal to a man.

It is a challenge faced by all countries in the world and every type of society. Research by UN Women and other organisations shows that physical and sexual violence affects more than a third of all women in the world. The ILO and UN Women have also expressed concern about the continuing seriousness of this scourge and have called on governments to use a range of mechanisms to stop violence against women.

A new ILO convention that addresses violence at the workplace, will be tabled in 2016 if all social partners are committed, that would require participating countries to develop and implement public policies to stop violence at work, especially gender-based violence.

PSI and its affiliates are ready to respond to this challenge and are working with civil society organisations to break the silence and take action against discrimination and violence at the workplace and everywhere it occurs in society. Wherever violence takes place and whatever form it takes, it has an impact on women's capacity to exercise their rights and live a dignified and free life.

For years now, Inter-American affiliates have been accumulating experience in combatting violence against women through initiatives and alliances with social movements that fight discrimination and sexism. They have constantly denounced the deep-seated sexism that prevails in our society, especially in the labour market, where women workers are subjected to ill-treatment, sexual harassment and, in many cases, are exposed to violence and even killed.

At the meeting, we heard from affiliates from Paraguay, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Trinidad and Tabago, Brazil, United States, Columbia and others, that violence at the workplace can be addressed by trade unions through

collective bargaining, providing assistance to victims of violence, improving working conditions for women and constructing an environment of respect and cooperation, instead of conflict and discrimination. This of course includes the struggle for equal pay.

Our affiliates shared information on the development of trade union guides, visuals, campaigns and legislative initiatives, in order to visibilize violence as a priority issue. The PSI action plan on the elimination of violence against women at the workplace in the public sector, developed after the regional meeting on ending gender violence in Santiago de Chile, was approved, taking into account proposals from each sub-region. Converging proposals will be included in the action plan, in case of conflict they will apply only to the sub-region. An updated version of the plan and a full report of the meeting will be finalized shortly.

The intense discussion on violence against women was followed by a panel on collective bargaining, with a focus on Columbia, Argentina and the US. Real change can be achieved through collective bargaining with a gender focus, but we also need more women negotiating these agreements. There was a strong call for defending collective bargaining rights in the public sector and more work on collective bargaining clauses and the exchange of best practices.

Mainstreaming gender issues in PSI's sector work should be ensured. In that respect we could reflect on the sequence of sectoral and transversal meetings. At this year's PSI GLOBAL WOC at the end of May, specific gender strategies for each sector will be discussed, which will ensure that in the coming years mainstreaming will become part and parcel of PSI's sector work. Through the intensification of advocacy, continuing research and making sure that gender work is sustainable – we have to move forward!

As every year, PSI participated in the UNCSW. The trade union delegation at the UNCSW is growing every year, as is interest among PSI affiliates to participate. The main theme of the UNCSW was the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption. Instead of allowing for open discussion on the way forward for gender equality policies during the UNCSW, UN WOMEN opted for a closed negotiation process that took place in the month leading up to the meeting with hardly any opportunities for civil society to contribute to this process.

The outcome document, a declaration that was adopted on the first day of the UNCSW, is generally regarded as weak and not innovative. Another issue of major concern was the very prominent involvement of the private sector at UNCSW, which is hailed as the main motor for gender equality. However,

decent work, living wages, social protection and public services are often left out of the equation in the policy debates organized during the official sessions. A final straw was the announcement of UN Women's partnership with UBER for the creation of 1 million jobs by 2020. We fail to see how a million precarious, informal jobs could contribute to women's economic empowerment. Indeed, it represents exactly what the women's movement has been fighting for decades. Uber economics is the most aggressive informalisation of an industry which was already deregulated three decades ago.

The next day, PSI, other global unions and civil society expressed deep concerns at the partnership announced between UN Women and UBER, asking UN Women to withdraw from this cooperation. The joint statement was shared among affiliates and civil society allies and 3 days after announcing its partnership with UBER, UN WOMEN withdrew from the agreement. Wide media coverage ensued, with clear references to PSI. This short but intense campaign has created an opportunity for trade unions to take leadership and be very visible among its civil society allies at UNCSW.

In addition, it exposed the dangers of one-sided partnerships with the private sector and strengthened earlier criticism of the political priorities pursued by UN WOMEN. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, a high-level meeting was organized to discuss these issues with UN WOMEN management, that resulted in an agreement on 13 action points for future engagement between UN WOMEN, global unions and civil society. We do hope that this is a new beginning for our engagement with UN WOMEN and a much stronger involvement of trade unions in the debate on the economic empowerment of women in the coming months and year leading up to next year's UNCSW. This also means a stronger engagement at the national level. These changes were noted and welcomed by the women's meeting.

The last point on the agenda should have deserved more time for discussion since it addressed the evaluation of the impact of gender policies on equity in PSI affiliates, which includes the number of women in leadership. We were the first global trade union that adopted a gender and equality policy. 13 years have passed since that historical fact and great results were achieved. However, we feel that progress has not been fast enough and that we need more and better actions in order to consolidate our progress and women's leadership inside PSI and its affiliates. More in-depth discussion is needed, as well as the compilation of data to make more substantive conclusions.

Finally, we hope that in the future a full day will be foreseen for this important committee.

Women workers and trade unionists – stand up! Strengthening the trade union movement and fighting for social justice!