



Permanent Conference for
Working Women



Center for Trade Unions
and Workers Services

Final Statement of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign against Violence against Women
In which the Conference addresses Independent Trade Unions regarding the Role Independent
Trade Unions should play in Issues of Women Workers and Unionists

Based on the interest of the members of the Permanent Conference for Working Women in issues of importance to women workers and unionists (non-discrimination in general and gender-based discrimination in particular – equality in labour relations law – violence and harassment at work – supporting and empowering women unionists to participate in union activities and assume leadership positions in their unions), the Permanent Conference addresses a message to all independent trade unions whether they have previous cooperation with the Conference or not. This message comes at the end of the activities of its 16 days campaign organized in cooperation with the Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Services (CTUWS) as part of its continuous efforts against violence against women. It proposes some ideas and calls for a broad dialogue on the role of unions regarding issues of working women. Since the establishment of the Permanent Conference in cooperation with independent trade unions in 2013, it is quiet noticeable that unions still don't include working women's issues among their priorities although the ranks of the trade union and labour movement are full of women unionists in the frontlines of defence of workers' rights who have remarkable role in their unions. Unions still don't consider women's issues as priorities in union activities, and don't pay adequate attention to issues like violence and harassment against women at work. Moreover, they rarely interact with events related to women at work or outside work. They don't adopt stances that express their belief in empowering and supporting women via a platform of demands that include fighting all forms of discrimination at work (for example in wages, promotions, and trainings to raise their capacities and skills, as well as recognizing the peculiarity of women's issues and their problems at work). This is reflected in the internal regulations of unions as they don't stipulate how to adopt strategies and policies to mainstream notions of gender, equality, parity and non-discrimination. Based on this vision, we ask the question that this message started with: **“What is the role that unions should play in issues of women workers and unionists?”**

Is it enough for unions to merely include women as members and speak positively in meetings about their role? Or, should the role of unions be embodied in their contribution to creating positive and meaningful changes in the environment of work to protect workers from all forms of gender-based discrimination in the world of work by engaging in collective bargaining over their rights and demanding the enactment of legislations that impose specific criteria for fair labour relations. These criteria should include gender-equality; empowering and supporting women workers whether they are union members or not; and conducting campaigns to fight all forms of violence and harassment based on gender. Moreover, they should strengthen the principle of equality in all union rights starting from the empowerment of women in holding leadership positions in unions and their representation in administrative boards and organizational structures. In this framework, the Permanent Conference for Working Women proposes its vision aiming at launching a broad dialogue that includes all independent unions interested in defending their men and women members. We aim at the participation of all unions believing that women's rights are an integral part of human rights, which should include the following unionist principles:

- Commitment to empowering women workers in their right to participate in union activities and to engage in collective bargaining and labour agreements in order to achieve their demands at work or in practicing union activities.
- Commitment to developing procedures, practices and policies of unions aiming at achieving actual equality and abolishing discrimination inside unionist organization.
- Including issues of working women, especially violence and harassment at work, among the priorities and concerns of unions.
- Eradication of cultural and social traditions existent among men and women unionists that consider that the public sphere, including union activism and politics, is limited to the participation of men rather than women.
- Implementation of policies inside unions that aim at achieving equality of opportunity in union work and enabling women to practice all internal activities, taking into consideration their conditions and responsibilities when determining the dates and places of activities for the enhancement of the efficiency and skills of women unionists at work.
- Contribution of unions to supporting women unionists and workers in cases of sexual harassment in the workplace and all forms of violence they face.
- Working on the establishment of detailed database for unions' members that show the ratio of women members therein and in different unionist positions in order to persuade decision makers of issues related to working women.
- Targeting the engagement of men in all courses related to women's rights so that they become aware of women's conditions and the challenges they face in the trade union movement and support their women colleagues.
- Conducting extended campaigns related to issues of priority regarding legislative protection of the most marginalized categories of women who work in the informal sector, like domestic workers, in order to make them reach decision makers in state institutions.

➤ Based on the above, the Permanent Conference for Working women proposes an “initiative” that may be a first step towards sensitizing unions to respond to the above mentioned recommendations. We call for organizing a broad meeting that includes all independent unions that work according to the democratic principles and values of freedom of association in order to discuss the role of unions in supporting and empowering women workers and unionists, and to discuss to what extent it is possible to elaborate on and implement proposals being discussed to make “**a code of conduct**” that independent trade unions abide by. Such code of conduct would put criteria that aim at achieving values of equality and non-discrimination based on gender, and building the necessary preparations and capabilities for implementation and practice. It is worth mentioning that this code of conduct is different from the internal regulations of unions in that it is a voluntary moral commitment on the part of signatories, and this commitment is not contradictory with the right of any union organization to write their own principles and their own code of conduct based on the nature and conditions of its work.

The Permanent Conference for Working Women
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