



Statement

Women Trade Unionists: at the Centre of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution:

Bukavu, South Kivu, DR Congo

14 & 15 October 2010

The ITUC and ITUC-Africa, recalling the central role played by trade unions in conflict prevention and resolution, insist on the distinct role of women trade unionists in this area and especially with regard to the violence perpetrated against women during conflicts. The ITUC and ITUC-Africa are convinced of the need to strengthen women's participation in social dialogue, a key tool of the trade union movement in conflict prevention and resolution.

The ITUC and ITUC-Africa express their horror at the persistent rapes and other forms of violence suffered by women in this conflict that has been ravaging eastern DR Congo for several years. According to official sources, over 10,000 cases of rape were recorded in 2009 in the provinces of North and South Kivu alone, and the figure is rising. The ITUC and ITUC-Africa regret the powerlessness of the Congolese authorities and the International Community to tackle the violence perpetrated against the women in this region, in spite of the numerous high-level missions and official reports.

Concrete and effective measures must be urgently taken to eradicate the violations of women's rights and the brutal and blatant violations of the bodies of women and young girls.

The ITUC and ITUC-Africa:

REAFFIRM

That conflicts are the result of fundamental problems such as the unequal distribution of wealth, corruption, impunity, bad governance, the neo-liberal policies imposed by international financial institutions and the WTO, other economic, political, social and cultural inequalities and human rights violations in general.

That trade unions are experienced actors in the field of conflict management, as witnessed by the signing of millions of collective agreements around the world negotiated by workers' organisations to improve their and their families' living and working conditions. That any effective action requires unions that are independent, democratic and representative, and that such unions will be strengthened by a greater involvement of women.

- EXPRESS their conviction that the equal participation of men and women in all areas of economic, social and political life constitutes a prerequisite for democracy and sustainable development in Africa and the world over;
- CONSIDER that whilst some progress has been registered in Africa, considerable efforts are still required to meet the objectives of gender equality, the empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming in all areas of economic, political, social and cultural life;
- INSIST on the fact that social partners and governments must commit to fully and effectively implementing the decisions taken by the international community with regard to gender equality, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995, the Millennium Development Goals and especially Goal III on gender equality, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ILO Convention 100 on equal remuneration, Convention 111 on discrimination, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000;
- NOTE that violence against women is a phenomenon affecting all countries and is present in all aspects of daily life, within the family, in the workplace and in society at large. They insist that the trade union struggle against violence in the workplace cannot be dissociated from the fight against violence within society;
- REGRET that armed conflicts of varying intensity are affecting people in over 20 countries and territories around the world, and underline that women are extremely vulnerable to the violence generated by armed conflicts and occupation. The growing number of collective rapes, used as a weapon of war, particularly in ethnic conflicts and so-called "ethnic cleansing" operations, is one of the consequences.
- EXPRESS their solidarity with women victims of violence throughout the world and particularly in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Iran, Iraq, Guatemala, Pakistan, Sudan, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Palestine;
- DENOUNCE one of the main causes of the armed conflict in eastern DR Congo, that is the fight for control over the natural resource wealth, which is in turn used to finance the war as well as fuelling and trivialising sexual violence on an unprecedented scale and thus also accelerating the spread of HIV/AIDS. This conflict has led to a considerable increase in extreme poverty in the region. Although the armed conflict remains localised, it affects transnational economic interests. The workers of Kivu, exploited in the gold, cobalt or cassiterite mines, are the first link in a long supply chain of minerals with multinationals at the end. Every year, thousands of men and women see their lives ended, broken or torn to pieces by this deadly trade.

The ITUC, ITUC-Africa and its affiliated organisations, the prime vocation of which is to promote and defend workers' rights and interests, are firmly committed to the fight for social justice, freedom, democracy, peace and equality. Given their role and presence in the workplace and in society, trade unions have a unique capacity to work for peace and towards preventing the development of conflict and dealing with its aftermath. The trade union organisations undertake to:

- A. Work together within the ITUC and ITUC-Africa to expose the workings of the mineral trade and to publicly denounce the economic interests driving the armed conflict and that have been devastating the DRC for several years;
- B. Promote and strengthen social dialogue with a view to preserving peace and social justice and contributing to the creation of decent jobs and sustainable development. Integrate issues linked to armed conflicts in social dialogue processes, with a view to genuinely involving the social partners in tackling the social and economic consequences of these conflicts as well as in their prevention and resolution, and the establishment of peace. The issue of good governance in the management of natural resources must be urgently placed on the social dialogue agenda. The ILO is responsible for ensuring that social dialogue be placed at the centre of national development programmes and strategies;
- C. Take every step, in accordance with the decisions adopted by the 2nd ITUC World Congress (Vancouver, 21-25 June 2010) and the 1st ITUC World Women's Conference (Brussels, 19-21 October 2009), to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women, be it in the workplace, within the family or within society. Place violence on the social dialogue agenda, campaign to eradicate it, reject its trivialisation, and firmly condemn the violations of women's trade union rights and violence against women trade unionists;
- D. Mobilise to ensure that concrete action is taken to protect women and young girls from the ravages of war and to ensure that they play a greater role in conflict prevention and resolution. To achieve this, it is essential that women be included in the trade union delegations taking part in social dialogue, that their negotiating and conflict management skills be strengthened, that their access to decision-making posts be promoted and that the gender issue be placed at the top of all our organisations' agendas;
- E. Strengthen cooperation with the United Nations and, in particular, the Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- F. Lobby, mobilise and campaign to ensure that rape and other forms of sexual violence be recognised as crimes punishable under criminal law and that the victims be offered access to specialised help, particularly medical, social and psychological support. Press for the implementation of UN Resolution 1820 stipulating that rape and other forms of sexual violence constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity and constituent part of the crime of genocide. Press for the exclusion of crimes involving sexual violence from amnesty measures taken within the framework of conflict resolution processes;
- G. Support the progress made by the International Criminal Court regarding the recognition of rape as a crime against humanity;

- H. Lobby, mobilise and campaign against the impunity enjoyed by those directly or indirectly involved in acts of violence against women. Governments must meet their obligation to prosecute those ordering and executing such acts;
- I. Demand, in cooperation with the ITUC and ITUC-Africa, the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the establishment of concrete measures for its enforcement. Press for half the posts in UN peacekeeping missions to be occupied by women. Encourage and recognise the value of women's and women's organisations' participation in conflict resolution processes;
- J. Develop and encourage joint trade union actions and alliances between women trade unionists, civil society and feminist organisations that share the same concerns and values as the trade union movement, with a view to meeting common objectives, such as this meeting here in Bukavu, with the World March of Women, an international movement of women working to eradicate the root causes of poverty and violence.

Done in Bukavu, 15 October 2010
