

ITUC Statement on UN Women and Uber

The ITUC is dumbfounded at the partnership announced between UN Women and Uber. Uber is not creating jobs. It is replacing existing jobs with lower paid, informal work.

Women's economic empowerment relies on access to decent work – this means fair wages, job security, safety at work, social protection for families, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Uber's employment arrangement denies workers basic protections, from minimum wage pay to health care and other job benefits. Women already make up a huge part of the precarious workforce, and this kind of informal, piecemeal work contributes significantly to women's economic marginalization across the globe.

We fail to see how turning a million jobs into precarious, informal and exploitative work could contribute to women's economic empowerment. Indeed, it represents exactly what the women's movement has been fighting against for decades. Uber's business plan involves the most aggressive informalisation of an industry in existence today.

Second, we note with alarm the proliferation of news stories and reports of passenger assaults, including sexual assaults, by drivers (according to ITF research, there were nine cases in the US alone last year), customer frustration over surge pricing, complaints of union busting, and questions around breaches of privacy for users and drivers, as well as some journalists. These amateur drivers in their private vehicles will be unprotected in an industry where risks to health and safety are already high.

Respect for the laws and regulations that govern industry and employment standards, including workers' rights, security of work and health and safety, should underpin job creation and growth. Yet Uber claims itself to be a third-party taxi app provider and accepts no responsibility as a taxi operator.

Uber says it operates in 55 countries around the world. According to research by the ITF, almost 40% of the national or local governments in these countries have said "no" to Uber one way or another. Specific reasons may vary from city to city and country to country, but in short, there is firm evidence of Uber not respecting laws and regulations that govern the taxi industry.

Global unions, including the ITF and unions which operate in the taxi sector are not against innovation. But we firmly believe that nobody is above the law if they want a share of the taxi business. We reject shallow public relations exercises citing gender equality and women's empowerment from any group or corporation which simultaneously undermines those goals with their business and employment practices. .

As Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, puts it "Uber is all about cutting standards and reducing income for women and men who drive proper taxis and who have enough difficulty making ends meet as it is. It is hard to believe that a UN body could even contemplate cutting a deal with such a corporation, which lines its pockets by making formal jobs informal, replacing existing workers with people on even lower pay. UN Women has to reverse this decision right away to avoid further embarrassment."

'Jobs at any cost' will not secure women's economic empowerment, nor advance the cause of gender equality. As a leading custodian of the mandate to promote and protect women's human rights, UN Women needs to rethink the way it 'does business'. Engaging the private sector is, of course, a key part of fulfilling its mandate. But the nature of that engagement is just as important. Above all UN Women must never be seen to be acting in a way which undermines its responsibility for protecting and promoting the economic, social and political rights of women, including women's labour rights. This extremely poor initiative underlines just how vital it is that UN Women comprehensively reviews its relations with corporations.

Note: More detailed information on ITF research relating to government opposition to Uber and scandals involving the company is available from the ITF.

The ITF and global employers association, the IRU (International Road Transport Union) have also made a joint statement in November 2014.

Respecting the law, protecting customers

<http://www.itfglobal.org/en/news-events/press-releases/2014/november/respecting-the-law,-protecting-customers/>

Please find information below regarding the new partnership between UN Women and Uber which was announced on 10 March 2015:

"As part of our commitment to this goal, Uber will create 1,000,000 jobs for women as drivers on the Uber platform by 2020."

<http://blog.uber.com/un-women>

<http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBNOM60RH20150310?irpc=932>