



# *International Advocacy Reports and Statements*

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## STATEMENT TO THE ILO COMMITTEE 99<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE

**Geneva, 15 June 2010**

*Delivered by Katherine Hagen, IFUW UN Representative*

We are pleased to see that the work of the Committee on the Recurrent Discussion on Employment has produced a set of conclusions that incorporate a gender-sensitive perspective on the immediate concerns of employment in the global economic recovery process as well as the longer-term strategies for advancing the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fairer Globalization. Gender auditing is important for addressing the differential impact of the financial and economic crisis on women and men.

In some cases, as in many developed countries, we note that the employment of women has gone up while the employment rate of men has gone down because of the significant job losses in heavy manufacturing, where there has traditionally been a higher proportion of working men than of working women. The interpretation of this data would suggest that a heightened unemployment rate for men has meant that more women have had to seek employment, typically in lower paid positions, in order to support their families. In general, too, one sees that the higher growth sectors for jobs in these developed economies are in health care, elder care, education and public safety, where the average wages are indeed lower.

Elsewhere women are excluded from full participation in the formal labor market and are subjected to precarious employment in the informal economy. Even as they enter the workforce, they are thereby disproportionately denied access to the benefits and social protections of the formal sector. The Committee on the Recurrent Discussion on Employment has duly noted this concern and has recommended targeted efforts for both women and youth and other disadvantaged groups to adopt strategies to deliver appropriate education, skills and job opportunities. We also commend the Committee for raising the importance of maternity protections against employment discrimination of women and the merits of promoting work/family balance for both men and women.

Entrepreneurship training is also mentioned, and we wholeheartedly endorse the recognition of this avenue. The catalytic and creative role of women as entrepreneurs merits significant emphasis in any and all of employment-intensive recovery strategies. We also believe that special attention should be directed to women's opportunities in any Green Jobs Initiatives. In fact, the forum on macroeconomic policy options for rapid high quality employment generation should have a specific gender mainstreaming component that considers how entrepreneurship can be effectively integrated into national strategies.

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The ILC 2010 is also addressing two other major subjects of concern to women's empowerment. In most countries, domestic workers are over 90% women and girls, often subjected to hidden abuse and exploitation. A lack of regulation for domestic workers, coupled with the overwhelmingly large percentage of female representation, can quickly lead to forced labor and human trafficking. Thus, we strongly endorse the ILO's commitment to setting international standards for domestic workers, as this group has historically faced unique disadvantages in a labor market that largely operates behind closed doors. In many developing countries facing high unemployment, the domestic work force is a significant part of the national work force, and standards are necessary to balance potential human rights abuses with the understood right to privacy to which every household is entitled. The standard-setting exercise is a welcome initiative to create better systems of decent work and social protection for domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers or domestic workers provided through employment agencies.

We agree with the recommendation for a convention and a recommendation and urge the strengthening of those provisions prohibiting child labour in domestic work, especially since it is mostly the girl child who suffers from isolation and abuse. We also encourage attention to provisions for the effective empowerment of domestic workers through literacy, education and training opportunities. We support solutions and recommendations that protect workers' health, safety, and well-being, while also recognizing that domestic work can serve as an important opportunity for productive employment and economic self-sufficiency.

Similarly, the new recommendation on HIV/AIDS in the world of work should help combat the stigma and discrimination that are especially harmful to people affected by the epidemic and raises the status of the excellent work done by the ILO in implementing its Code of Practice on HIV and AIDS in the World of Work. Women's empowerment is a crucial element of this campaign, and we welcome the provisions that are oriented to addressing the difficulties women encounter in protecting themselves effectively, on strengthening women's sexual and reproductive rights and on gender equality in the workplace. While HIV and AIDS affect all demographics, girls and young women are at greater risk, more vulnerable to HIV infection and are disproportionately affected by the HIV pandemic compared to men.

We support the recommendation that calls on Members to reduce the transmission of HIV and AIDS and to alleviate its impact by protecting fundamental freedoms and gender equality and promoting the active participation of both men and women in protecting their human rights and reproductive health. Furthermore, we commend the committee on its call for nations to respect international guidelines on confidentiality, counseling and consent regarding HIV testing and treatment, while collecting statistical data and research on HIV/AIDS. Encouraging prevention, promoting intervention and combating stigma while advancing research techniques strengthens our battle against a disease that leaves no nation untouched.

Finally, the IFUW has regularly raised concerns about gender bias in the ILO Constitution, and we are pleased to note that a significant review process is now underway to introduce inclusive language for the purpose of promoting gender equality. We will follow this exercise with interest as the Legal Office prepares a report for the ILO Governing Body in November 2010, and we commend the exercise as a commitment to the implementation of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and the recognition in the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008) that gender equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting issues. This is especially pertinent to the principle of gender equality in the composition of delegations to the International Labour Conference, for which the specific provision of article 3, paragraph 2 will benefit from the application of the principle of gender equality rather than the presumption that it is sufficient merely to “have at least one woman adviser” only in those circumstances when “questions specially affecting women are considered by the Conference”.