



THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF THE IDWF



Montevideo, Uruguay, 26-28 October 2013

From October 26-28, the Founding Congress of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) took place at the City Hall in Montevideo, Uruguay gathering nearly 200 participants including representatives from the ILO, Human Rights Watch, national trade centres, supporting organizations, and domestic workers' unions from 42 countries around the world. Representing the ILO delegation was Anna Biondi (deputy director of ACTRAV), Maria Elena Venezuela from the International Migration branch at the Headquarters in Geneva, and Marie-Jose Tayah from the Beirut office. This 3-day event marked the kick-off of the Founding Congress of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) and the joint meeting among domestic workers organizations who gathered for the common purpose of improving working conditions of domestic workers worldwide.

The Congress was opened on the 26th of October with a panel chaired by Myrtle Witbooi, the president of IDWN, and speeches from the Mayor of Montevideo Ana Olivera, the head of the National Institute of Women, Beatriz Ramirez, the Chair of the National Institute for Social Security, Ernesto Murro, and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Eduardo Brenta. Following the opening speeches, domestic workers had an opportunity to share their testimonies highlighting the challenges and successes they continue to face in organizing domestic workers' organizations in their respective countries and regions. Testimonies were given by Gillian Atwell from Trinidad and Tobago, Josephine Zongo from Burkina Faso, Adelina Diaz from Peru, Antonia Peña from Colombia/USA, and Sonu Danuwar from Nepal.

Furthermore, presentations were given by organizations that have been providing continuous support to IDWN including ITUC, IUW, WIEGO, and the ILO. It was recognized through these presentations that the recently active involvement of the IDWN in mobilizing domestic workers worldwide has been spurring workers in the informal sectors to voice themselves and their demands to the ILO. Ms. Biondi reminded the attendees that eight years ago in the same city of Montevideo, the first call for a Convention had been jointly launched by the Latin American Domestic Workers Confederation (CONLECTRAHO) and representatives of workers organizations from the



City Hall, Montevideo, Uruguay

region at the “Declaration de Montevideo.” This meeting had been organized by the ILO (Santiago Office, ACTRAV and MIGRANT).

On the second day of the Founding Congress, workshops were held for participants to discuss how to promote domestic workers rights. A workshop on how migrant domestic workers can further organize was facilitated by Ms. Valenzuela and Ms. Tayah from the ILO. The workshop was held in three languages including Spanish, French, and English. Each of the groups addressed two questions: “what is the meaning of *organizing* for migrant domestic workers?” and based on the movement’s slogan of “yes, we can,” what are the actions that can be taken by migrant domestic workers moving forward? During the workshop, participants shared and discussed their experiences of building domestic workers’ organizations at regional and global levels, national campaigns for ratifying C189, how migrant domestic workers can be included in the domestic workers’ agenda in receiving countries, and innovative strategies to collective bargaining.

The 28 of October, the last day of the event was especially momentous in signifying the formalization of the international network of the IDWN into the creation of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). Elections were held for the new Executive Committee of IDWF for a five-year term. Myrtle Witbooi, previous chair of IDWN, was elected as president and Ernestina Ochoa, was elected as the Vice-President. Elizabeth Tang, former IDWN International Coordinator, was elected as the new General Secretary and six titular members with alternates for each were

nominated and elected for each region by a show of voting cards. The new IDWF Constitution including minor amendments and an explicit mention to migrant domestic workers was unanimously agreed upon by a show of voting cards and with ceaseless clapping, cheering “Si Se Puede (Yes We Can), and singing of the popular union song, “Solidarity Forever.”



The event finally closed with concluding remarks from the President of Uruguay, Jose Mujica. He expressed his pride for the progress his country has been making in recognizing and improving the conditions of domestic workers. He further encouraged all who were in attendance of the meeting to never cease fighting and to continue to work collectively, which he deemed to be the biggest strength of this movement.



