



International
Labour
Organization

► Responsible business conduct and human rights due diligence: Case studies from trade unions



Responsible business conduct and human rights due diligence:

Case studies from trade unions

© International Labour Organization 2026.

First published 2026.



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International. See: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0. The user is allowed to reuse, share (copy and redistribute), adapt (remix, transform and build upon the original work) as detailed in the licence. The user must clearly credit the ILO as the source of the material and indicate if changes were made to the original content. Use of the emblem, name and logo of the ILO is not permitted in connection with translations, adaptations or other derivative works.

Attribution – The user must indicate if changes were made and must cite the work as follows: ILO, *Responsible business conduct and human rights due diligence: Case studies from trade unions*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2026. © ILO.

Translations – In case of a translation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This is a translation of a copyrighted work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This translation has not been prepared, reviewed or endorsed by the ILO and should not be considered an official ILO translation. The ILO disclaims all responsibility for its content and accuracy. Responsibility rests solely with the author(s) of the translation.*

Adaptations – In case of an adaptation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This is an adaptation of a copyrighted work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This adaptation has not been prepared, reviewed or endorsed by the ILO and should not be considered an official ILO adaptation. The ILO disclaims all responsibility for its content and accuracy. Responsibility rests solely with the author(s) of the adaptation.*

Third-party materials – This Creative Commons licence does not apply to non-ILO copyright materials included in this publication. If the material is attributed to a third party, the user of such material is solely responsible for clearing the rights with the rights holder and for any claims of infringement.

Any dispute arising under this licence that cannot be settled amicably shall be referred to arbitration in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The parties shall be bound by any arbitration award rendered as a result of such arbitration as the final adjudication of such a dispute.

For details on rights and licensing, contact: rights@ilo.org. For details on ILO publications and digital products, visit: www.ilo.org/publns.

ISBN: 9789220433737 (print); 9789220433744 (web PDF)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54394/00033950>

Also available in Japanese: ISBN 9789220433713 (print); 9789220433720 (web PDF)

The designations employed in ILO publications and databases, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the ILO concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. See: www.ilo.org/disclaimer.

The opinions and views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions, views or policies of the ILO.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the ILO, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Printed in Japan

▶ Content

▶ Introduction	1
▶ Messages	3
▶ The role of trade unions in business and human rights	9
Business and human rights initiatives by UA ZENSEN	13
Common opportunities and challenges for enterprise-based unions	17
Future outlook and implications	18
▶ Practical examples of promoting Responsible Business Conduct	21
Federation of AEON Group Workers' Unions	22
The Osaka Gas Workers Union	28
Komatsu Matere Workers' Labour Union	34
Takashimaya Labour Union / Takashimaya Group's Labour Union Confederation	38
Toridoll Group Union	44
Mizuno Workers' Union	49

► Introduction

This compilation of case studies was prepared as part of the “Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations (Phase II)” project, implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with support from the Government of Japan (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry). The programme aims to foster an enabling environment for the realization of decent work by systematically supporting enterprises’ compliance with national laws and respect for the principles of international labour standards and by promoting cooperation between government, workers and employers to address structural challenges.

UA ZENSEN (the Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service and General Workers’ Unions), Japan’s largest industrial trade union, brings together workers engaged in a wide range of industries and occupations across manufacturing, distribution and services. UA ZENSEN drafted the “*UA ZENSEN’s Initiatives to Promote Corporate Respect for Human Rights in the Supply Chain*” in August 2022 and has been actively promoting human rights due diligence.

The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration)¹ states that, in the process of human rights due diligence, enterprises “should involve meaningful consultation with [...] relevant stakeholders, including workers’ organizations”, and “should take account of the central role of freedom of association and collective bargaining as well as industrial relations and social dialogue as an ongoing process”. The day-to-day activities of workers’

1 ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration), 2023, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/tripartite-declaration-principles-concerning-multinational-enterprises-and-3>

organizations, as well as the initiatives accumulated by workers and employers, are closely linked to the business and human rights framework.

This collection of case studies has been prepared with the aim of presenting concrete examples that will serve as a reference for workers and employers seeking to further advance initiatives in this field. In compiling the case studies, with the support of UA ZENSEN, the ILO conducted qualitative interviews with UA ZENSEN's affiliated enterprise-based unions and their respective managements, and on this basis present practical examples of responsible business conduct, including human rights due diligence. The publication also outlines UA ZENSEN's initiatives to promote respect for human rights as an industrial trade union, together with their historical background.

We hope that, through these case studies, lessons on responsible business conduct and human rights due diligence will be widely shared, leading to further initiatives across domestic and international value chains. We also hope that this collection of case studies will help strengthen respect for international human rights and labour standards, including the fundamental principles and rights at work and the uptake of (the MNE Declaration), as well as help strengthen constructive social dialogue between workers and employers.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the workers' organizations and enterprises that graciously agreed to be interviewed in the preparation of this collection of case studies. We also received invaluable guidance and support from UA ZENSEN and other related organizations. We wish to express our sincere gratitude for their contributions, which enabled us to successfully compile this collection of case studies.

Nozomi Tomita

*Director
ILO Office for Japan*

► Messages

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has pursued the promotion of workers' rights and interests through the strengthening of international solidarity, the implementation of global campaigns and advocacy vis-à-vis major international organizations. It has also continued to issue calls for compliance with ILO international labour standards, including through the publication of trade union (Labour 20 (L20)) statements in preparation for the Group of 20 (G20) Labour and Employment Ministers' Meetings² and through recommendations made in connection with the development of a United Nations treaty on business and human rights.³

To ensure that these efforts achieve tangible and effective outcomes, it is essential to advance initiatives at multiple levels, both nationally and internationally. Enterprises are called on to reaffirm their social responsibilities, address structural factors underlying human and labour rights violations in supply chains – such as the inadequate reflection of fair pricing – and establish constructive labour management relations with workers' organizations. Enterprise-based unions are encouraged to regard violations of workers' rights occurring among business partners and within overseas supply chains as issues affecting their own members and fellow workers.

Furthermore, industry-level trade unions are expected to play a key role in translating international solidarity into concrete action, including by encouraging the conclusion of global framework agreements (GFAs) with individual enterprises and by building networks that complement enterprise-level initiatives. I sincerely hope that this collection of case studies will

2 As an example, ITUC, *Fostering Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability through a New Social Contract: L20 STATEMENT TO THE G20 2025*, L20, 2025, https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/en_l20_statement_2025.pdf

3 ITUC, *Global unions reaffirm support for a binding UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights*, 30 October 2025, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/global-unions-reaffirm-support-for-a-binding-UN-Treaty-on-Business-and-Human-Rights>

serve to reinforce proactive engagement by both workers' organizations and enterprises and will contribute to the further dissemination of practical measures aimed at the realization of decent work.

Akiko Gono

President, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
Adviser, Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-RENGO)
Adviser, UA ZENSEN

We wish to express our sincere respect for the International Labour Organization's proactive efforts on business and human rights across supply chains.

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) *compiled* the *JTUC-RENGO's Views on Business and Human Rights* in 2023. In this document, we regard trade unions as special stakeholders in corporate activities, and we have been actively engaged in initiatives, such as policy advocacy to the government and the organization of study sessions.

Additionally, since 2024, RENGO has incorporated initiatives related to business and human rights into its "Spring Labour Offensive" policy, and related activities have been gradually expanding among industrial and enterprise-based unions affiliated with RENGO.

Meanwhile, in advancing efforts on business and human rights, we often hear voices expressing uncertainty about how to proceed in practice. We are confident that this compilation of case studies will significantly assist industrial and enterprise-level trade unions facing such concerns. Through each individual case, readers can reaffirm that many issues related to business and human rights are closely connected to the day-to-day activities of trade unions. Moreover, by addressing and responding to these issues, readers should be able to understand how such efforts lead to the creation of workplaces in which human and labour rights are respected and work is fulfilling, as well as to the development of constructive labour relations.

We sincerely hope that this collection of case studies will be widely used by those involved in trade unions.

Masashi Jimbō

General Secretary

Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-RENGO)

Business and human rights has become a critical management issue that determines sustainable growth of enterprises today.

We believe that its core principle of protecting workers' rights directly connects to the fundamental purpose of trade union movements: building a society where all workers can live with dignity and have a fulfilling life.

UA ZENSEN has long advanced efforts to ensure respect for ILO core labour standards and other principles through GFAs and global trade union networks. In 2022, we developed the UA ZENSEN's Initiatives to Promote Corporate Respect for Human Rights in the Supply Chain and have been implementing specific activities related to business and human rights.

This collection of case studies documents workers and employers engaging in continuous dialogue to address human and labour rights issues amid changing economic and social conditions. We express our deepest respect and gratitude to the staff of the ILO Office in Japan, who, through careful interviews with UA ZENSEN affiliated unions and management, identified practices that contribute to business and human rights.

Through industrial union activities and the international labour movement, trade unions possess unique networks that extend across enterprises, industries and countries. Continuous participation of trade unions in corporate human rights due diligence, grounded in the voices from the workplace, is essential for enhancing its effectiveness, credibility and sustainability.

We hope this collection of case studies will serve as an opportunity for both trade unions and enterprises to re-examine their day-to-day activities through the lens of business and human rights and advance labour management practices.

Tomoko Nagashima

President
UA ZENSEN

Business and human rights, together with the promotion of responsible value chains, constitute a key international priority for the realization of decent work. The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), as the main entry point within the ILO for trade unions and workers' organizations, works to strengthen the capacity of trade unions and to promote policy dialogue so that they can act proactively on the basis of international labour standards.

In the context of the project Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations (Phase II), implemented with the support of the Government of Japan (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), ACTRAV has engaged in continuous dialogue with trade unions across Asia, with a focus on the practical implementation of human rights due diligence in line with the MNE Declaration. Through these discussions, it has become clear that while many trade unions recognize the importance of business and human rights, they are seeking concrete examples of how these principles can be translated into practice.

In Japan, the national centre, RENGO (the Japanese Trade Union Confederation), has positioned business and human rights within its strategy and has articulated specific guidance on responsible business conduct and respect for human rights throughout supply chains. The existence of such clear guidance at the national level enables industrial unions and enterprise-based unions to advance their actions in a coherent and consistent direction, based on shared objectives and understanding.

This case study illustrates, through the initiatives of UA ZENSEN, one of RENGO's affiliates, how trade unions can engage concretely with responsible business conduct by building on their day-to-day activities and social dialogue. By systematically documenting Japan's experience, this publication offers valuable insights for trade unions in other countries, and ACTRAV will share it widely. We hope that this case study will encourage

proactive engagement by workers' organizations and contribute to the advancement of decent work across global value chains.

Oliver Röpke

Director

The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)

1

The role of trade unions in business and human rights



► The role of trade unions in business and human rights

Workers and their representatives play a central role in the development and implementation of responsible business practices. Through social dialogue, they contribute to shaping enterprise policies on human and labour rights, support the effective implementation of human rights due diligence, and help ensure the availability of credible and accessible remedy mechanisms. Trade unions provide essential information about workplace realities, enabling enterprises to better identify, assess and address risks of adverse human and labour rights impacts. They also serve as trusted channels through which workers can raise concerns, seek remedy, and engage constructively with management.

The **MNE Declaration** emphasizes social dialogue and sound industrial relations as core elements of responsible business conduct and decent work. It is the only international instrument on responsible business conduct ⁴ that was developed through a tripartite process, with the participation of governments and employers' and workers' organizations. It provides guidance to tripartite constituents and enterprises on inclusive, responsible and sustainable business practices in such areas as

4 "The three main instruments that have become the key reference points for responsible business, and which outline how companies can act responsibly are the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (ILO MNE Declaration), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD MNE Guidelines) and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles). They are aligned with, and complement, each other. The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy provides guidance to encourage the positive contributions companies can make to economic and social progress [...] and in their operations. [...] The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights focus on avoiding and addressing adverse business-related human rights impact". OHCHR, OECD, European Union and ILO, *Responsible Business Key messages from international instruments*, 2019, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40asia/%40ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_724747.pdf

employment, training, conditions of work and life, industrial relations as well as general policies. As an example, *the ILO MNE Declaration: What's in it for Workers?*⁵ offers a forward-looking view on approaches and pledges on how workers and trade unions can successfully use the MNE Declaration in practice.

Aligned with the **United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**, the MNE Declaration affirms that enterprises should undertake due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their actual and potential adverse impacts on human and labour rights. To gauge human and labour rights risks, enterprises should draw on internal and/or independent external human rights expertise and involve meaningful consultation with potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders. With respect to labour rights, the MNE Declaration highlights that the human rights due diligence process should take account of the central role of freedom of association and collective bargaining as well as industrial relations and social dialogue as an ongoing process.

In the Japanese context, the role of trade unions has been historically exercised through processes in which workers organize collectively to improve working conditions, such as wages and working hours, to ensure effective realization of three fundamental labour rights – the right to organize, the right to collective bargaining and the right to collective action – in line with the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up,⁶ and its Follow-up, and as guaranteed under Article 28 of the Constitution of Japan.

5 The ILO MNE Declaration: What's in it for Workers? International Labour Office, Bureau for Workers'Activities (ACTRAV) - Geneva: ILO, 2017, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/ilo-mne-declaration-what%E2%80%99s-it-workers>

6 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/ILO_1998_Declaration_EN.pdf

At the same time, the expansion of global supply chains has increasingly highlighted the importance of trade unions in protecting workers' rights beyond the enterprise level. As enterprises are expected to address labour and human rights risks throughout their supply chains, the role of workers' organizations has expanded accordingly, including in relation to business partners and subcontracting arrangements. In this context, the MNE Declaration's operational tools on company–union dialogue aim to support constructive dialogue between multinational enterprises and workers' representatives, and trade union engagement in global value chains.^{7,8}

International trade union organizations, including global union federations in cooperation with the ITUC, support enterprise-based unions in engaging with multinational enterprises across supply chains. A key instrument is GFAs, which establish commitments to respect internationally recognized labour and human rights principles and provide a structured framework for ongoing dialogue, information-sharing and the resolution of labour-related issues across borders.⁹ Initiatives undertaken by affiliated trade unions that have concluded GFAs facilitated by UA ZENSEN, a

7 ILO Multinational Enterprises and Enterprise Engagement Unit, *ILO Company-Union Dialogue: An operational tool of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) – Questions and Answers*, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40emp_ent/%40multi/documents/publication/wcms_795270.pdf

8 Mathews, R. Trade Unions, *Labour Governance and Economic Upgradation in Value Chains: Framing Intervention Amidst Emerging Human Rights Due Diligence Frameworks*. ILO Working Paper 127. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024., https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/127_web.pdf

9 The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights also explicitly recognize the existence of GFAs. In the commentary to Guiding Principle 30, it is stated that “Human rights-related standards are increasingly reflected in commitments undertaken by industry bodies, multi-stakeholder and other collaborative initiatives, through codes of conduct, performance standards, global framework agreements between trade unions and transnational corporations and similar undertakings” OHCHR, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework*, 2011, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/reference-publications/guiding-principles-business-and-human-rights>

Japanese level trade union, are introduced in this collection of case studies.

In an increasingly complex global economy, efforts to promote decent work are expected to go beyond improving domestic working conditions to also address labour and human rights risks in supply chains. Such initiatives strengthen the role of trade unions and support multinational enterprises in upholding internationally recognized principles on human and labour rights.

Business and human rights initiatives by UA ZENSEN

Background

UA ZENSEN is Japan's largest industry level trade union, organized through the collective participation of workers belonging to affiliated enterprise-based unions across industries closely connected to daily life, including textiles and apparel, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, chemicals and energy, ceramics and construction materials, food, distribution, printing, leisure and services and the welfare and medical care sectors. UA ZENSEN is affiliated with the ITUC through the national trade union centre, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO), and is also a member of four global union federations, thereby participating in the international labour movement: IndustriALL Global Union, UNI Global Union, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations and Building and Wood Workers' International.

Even before the concept of business and human rights became widely established, UA ZENSEN, as a core organization of the Textile Workers' Asian Regional Organization, has supported enterprise-level and local trade unions in addressing labour rights challenges arising in global supply chains. For example, there is a case in which, following information received from a local industrial trade union regarding alleged violations of

freedom of association in the overseas supply chain of a Japanese company, a joint site visit was conducted together with the enterprise's management. Through negotiations with the local operation, an election was held, subsequently leading to the establishment of a trade union. Such forms of cross-border trade union cooperation have helped address issues that are often difficult to resolve at the enterprise level alone, particularly in the context of multinational enterprises and complex supply chains. Such activities can be regarded as early evidence of the role of trade unions in cross-border collaboration in supply chains. These initiatives are also consistent with UA ZENSEN's mission to strengthen industrial trade union functions by complementing the enterprise-based unions while respecting their autonomy and diversity.

Overview of actions by UA ZENSEN

Building on the initiatives described above, UA ZENSEN has strengthened cooperation with domestic and overseas industrial and enterprise-based unions, as well as with the international trade union organizations such as the ITUC and global union federations. Through these efforts, UA ZENSEN has worked to promote the swift resolution of labour-management disputes and the conclusion of GFAs, and provided support for the formation of cross-country trade union networks within multinational enterprises. From the perspective of corporate social responsibility (CSR), in August 2013, UA ZENSEN drafted its "Guidelines for CSR Measures: Towards the Building of a Fairer and Ethical Society and Working Environment". In these guidelines, with regard to the responsibilities of multinational enterprises operating supply chains overseas, UA ZENSEN stated that while enterprises themselves are the primary actors in promoting CSR, there is also a need for trade unions to play a role in ensuring that CSR-related corporate practices are effectively implemented and sustained. UA ZENSEN further noted that the active involvement of trade unions in corporate CSR initiatives is directly linked to improvements in employment and working conditions for union members and,

ultimately, contributes to enhancing corporate value.

Subsequently, prompted by its involvement in formulating guidelines for responsible business conduct in the Japanese textile Industry by the Japan Textile Federation in December 2022,¹⁰ UA ZENSEN concluded that it should clearly articulate its position to enterprise-based unions by identifying business and human rights and human rights due diligence as topics that trade unions should address. This led to the formulation of the UA ZENSEN's Initiatives to Promote Corporate Respect for Human Rights in the Supply Chain.¹¹ Based on the fundamental understanding that respect for human rights in supply chains is an essential management issue regardless of enterprise size, these initiatives place workers' rights, including based on the ILO core labour standards, at the centre of human rights due diligence and commit to ensuring their effective implementation. More specifically, affiliated unions are called on to actively engage in enterprise-level human rights due diligence and serve as the voices of workers who are more likely to be placed in vulnerable positions. Industrial trade unions are expected to make use of their own networks, developed through national centre, sectoral initiative, international labour movement and policy advocacy efforts, to help create enabling environments for enterprise-based unions and support the resolution of human rights violation cases that are difficult to address through labour-management relations at the individual enterprise level. From the perspective of building frameworks for human rights due diligence, these considerations have also been incorporated in its policy on working condition negotiations since 2023¹² and the UA ZENSEN priority

10 Published on the website of the Japan Textile Federation, <https://jtf-net.com/english/>

11 UA ZENSEN, *UA ZENSEN's Initiatives to Promote Corporate Respect for Human Rights in the Supply Chain*, December 2022, <https://uazensen.jp/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/UA-ZENSEN-Initiatives-to-Promote-Corporate-Respect-for-Human-Rights-English.pdf>

12 UA ZENSEN, “組合員の生活と雇用を守る!”第11回中央委員会で2023労働条件闘争方針を決定 (“Protecting the Lives and Employment of Union Members! UA ZENSEN adopts the 2023 Policy on the Fight for Working Conditions at its 11th Central Committee Meeting”) [available only in Japanese], 18 January 2023, <https://uazensen.jp/2023/01/18/78038/>

policy agenda.¹³ In addition to efforts to improve working conditions, including wage increases, compliance with international fair labour standards and the promotion of human rights due diligence have been positioned as ongoing priority issues, and related policy advocacy activities, such as participation in discussions within the government, have also been undertaken.

Moreover, to support responses to human rights issues by workers and employers at individual enterprises, UA ZENSEN operates a consultation service for foreign workers in Vietnamese, Chinese and Burmese, accepts inquiries broadly from both within and outside the organization, and responds according to the circumstances of each case. For serious cases, such as sexual harassment, UA ZENSEN intervenes immediately. For cases that are considered to be more appropriate for resolution at the enterprise level, it provides the person seeking advice with appropriate information and advice on how to proceed with discussions, aiming to achieve resolution within the workplace concerned.

To further advance business and human rights initiatives among its affiliated enterprise-based unions, UA ZENSEN actively encourages and supports such efforts. It begins by promoting understanding among affiliated workers and employers, including by conducting seminars, including those co-hosted with the ILO Office for Japan and other organizations, and preparing awareness-raising materials,¹⁴ while also holding interviews with the executive leadership of affiliated unions to identify diverse needs. In advancing joint initiatives by workers and employers, it is necessary to ensure that they truly understand the significance of following up on risks of human rights violations in supply chains beyond the framework

13 UA ZENSEN, 2025年UAゼンセン重点政策 (UA ZENSEN's Priority Policy Agenda for 2025) [available only in Japanese], <https://uazensen-gn-cp.com/policies/view/40>

14 UA ZENSEN, 労使ですすめよう人権デュー・ディリジェンス(Let's Promote Human Rights Due Diligence through Labour-Management Cooperation) [available only in Japanese], February 2023, <https://uazensen.jp/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/【解説パンフレット】労使ですすめよう人権デュー・ディリジェンス2023年2月版-1.pdf>

of individual enterprises and that, with an understanding of domestic and international trends, they consider measures for their own enterprises. From this perspective, UA ZENSEN strives to link business and human rights with the activities of enterprise-based unions by promoting a basic understanding of why human rights must be protected and providing timely information aligned with changes in social systems. The efforts related to GFAs, as described above, have also been an area of focus for UA ZENSEN within this broader approach. To date, workers and employers at Takashimaya Co. Ltd., the Mizuno Corporation and AEON Co. Ltd. have concluded GFAs, and UA ZENSEN plans to continue promoting the conclusion of such framework agreements going forward.

Common opportunities and challenges for enterprise-based unions

A common finding among the trade unions interviewed was their established practice of capturing and consolidating workers' voices and conveying these to management in order to improve working conditions, aligned with the principles of the MNE Declaration, even before the concept of business and human rights had become established. Another shared feature was management's recognition of these union activities as essential to the smooth functioning and sustainability of the enterprise, with initiatives frequently advanced on the basis of mutual trust. When enterprises recognize workers as key stakeholders and, together with trade unions as their representatives, build constructive labour-management relations in line with the guidance of the MNE Declaration, positive outcomes can be expected for both workers and enterprises, including greater employment stability, improved working environments, enhanced productivity and the ability to attract and retain skilled workers.

Many trade union activities are undertaken without being explicitly framed as those contributing to responsible business practices and business and human rights. However, responding to workers' day-to-day

concerns and engaging collaboratively with management to address them effectively reflects the core elements of human rights due diligence and access to remedy in practice. By linking these approaches and activities more clearly to the principles of international labour standards and international frameworks on responsible business conduct, their effectiveness can be further strengthened and their visibility enhanced, including through greater transparency by enterprises and trade unions.

At the same time, a commonly identified challenge is the need to strengthen networks that go beyond individual enterprise-based unions. While some unions have established forums for dialogue and information-sharing among trade unions across business partners or within the same industry, and sometimes involving the respective management, such arrangements remain limited. Establishing networks that extend beyond enterprises, sectors and national borders would yield substantial benefits, such as addressing common human and labour rights challenges within supply chains and promoting fair pricing practices. In this context, industrial trade unions have a critical role to play, and there is a growing expectation for them to promote such coordination, including through the further development and use of GFA-based approaches.

Future outlook and implications

Trade unions are increasingly expected to look beyond their own enterprise boundaries to address labour and human rights risks across supply chains, including overseas operations and suppliers, and address labour and human rights issues in line with international standards. In this context, the trade unions interviewed have highlighted a renewed commitment to strengthening their efforts through practical measures, including accompanying enterprises during audits or site visits to overseas operations, conducting worker interviews, establishing contact with local trade unions, and using the framework of GFAs to facilitate continuous information collection and sharing to assess human and labour rights risks in the supply chains. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to advancing

the labour-dimension of business and human rights in practice. However, a common feature across the trade unions interviewed is their use of constructive labour-management relations to promote workers' rights and decent work. For trade unions and enterprises seeking to establish or strengthen such mechanisms, we hope this collection of case studies will serve as a useful reference. We also hope that these initiatives will continue to expand by recognizing that ongoing efforts aimed at protecting workers' rights and realizing decent work are, at their core, the very essence of business and human rights, and by drawing on the support of industrial trade unions as needed.

2

Practical examples of promoting RBC



► Federation of AEON Group Workers' Unions

As the AEON Group expands its overseas operations, it is extending Japan's constructive labour-management relations to local subsidiaries.

Main products and services: Retail businesses including general merchandise stores; health and wellness; comprehensive financial services; property development; services and specialty stores

Head office location: Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

Union membership: Approximately 310,000 members

Background

From the 2010s, the enterprise's business strategy increasingly focused on expanding overseas operations, and its 2012 medium-term management plan set out a policy of an "Asia shift". In light of a corporate vision that places Asia at the core of the business, expressed in the phrase, "without success in Asia, there is no success for AEON", the union also decided to advance initiatives with a particular focus on the Asia region. When the union conducted consultations at overseas workplaces from 2011 to 2012, it observed there were signs in favour of establishing trade unions in some locations, while management sought advice regarding the lack of information about local trade unions and the potential risks associated with weak industrial relations in some countries across the region. This prompted the union to seek information from UA ZENSEN, UNI Apro (UNI Global Union Asia Pacific Regional Organization) and ITUC-Asia Pacific. Subsequently, the trade union engaged in continuous social dialogue, involving management and sectoral trade unions in Asia.

This growing recognition of the importance of cooperation between enterprise-level labour-management relations and the sectoral trade unions

ultimately led to the signing of a GFA in 2014 by four parties: AEON Co. Ltd.; the Federation of AEON Group Workers' Unions; UNI Global Union; and UA ZENSEN. From 2014 onwards, AEON continued opening stores in South-East Asia, including Viet Nam, Indonesia and Cambodia. Alongside business expansion, the union also encouraged the establishment of local trade unions, with the aim of realizing Japan's constructive labour-management relations overseas as well. Global business expansion can give rise to various risks of human and labour rights violations. However, by promoting constructive labour-management relations overseas and by using the GFA framework to ensure rapid information-sharing in the event of incidents, the parties have contributed to employment stability and reduced legal risk.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

As part of its approach to responsible business practices, the AEON Group has established ways to continuously consult with workers' representatives to identify and address labour-related issues. Since 2022, under the collective agreement between AEON Co. Ltd. and the Federation of AEON Group Workers' Unions, the group-level labour-management council meetings are held four times a year to deliberate on and make decisions regarding issues of common concern across the group. In order to enable timely discussion, a group labour-management expert committee is convened once a month, with the vice president in charge of human resources for the AEON Group and the president of the Federation of AEON Group Workers' Unions serving as the responsible officers. In addition, with the participation of workers and management from individual AEON Group companies, four subcommittees have been established: the Work Fulfilment and Life Fulfilment Subcommittee; the Future Creation of Workstyles Subcommittee; the Future-Oriented Living Areas Promotion Subcommittee; and the Overseas Labour Relations Subcommittee. Throughout the year, these subcommittees discuss matters related to the improvement of working conditions and workplace environments in line with their respective topic areas. In some cases, employees' voices are gathered and discussions proceed on a bottom-up basis; in other cases, information on responses to

identified issues is shared with workers and management at each company on a top-down basis.

The Overseas Labour Relations Subcommittee was established, against the backdrop of a situation in which domestic labour issues tended to be prioritized, causing responses to overseas matters to lag behind, which was discussed at the GFA review meeting. The objective of this subcommittee is to gain an accurate understanding of working conditions at overseas business sites and share and adapt domestic labour-management practices to overseas, with a view to responding to supply-chain risks along with business expansion overseas. In practical terms, particularly at overseas group companies based in Asia where no trade union has yet been established, labour to labour support is provided from the initial stages of union formation. This includes explaining the principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the importance and benefit of forming trade unions and, fostering a shared understanding of labour-management dialogue by starting with accessible and relevant topics, such as occupational safety and health. By conveying the benefits of building constructive labour relations based on *Growing Smart Partnership: The AEON Labor Management Initiative*,¹⁵ efforts are being made to help foster a shared understanding of the benefit of unionization. Where trade unions have already been established, labour-related issues that are difficult to resolve at the individual enterprise level are taken up as agenda items at the group labour-management council, where appropriate responses are examined. Additionally, through initiatives described as workplace issue resolution seminars, follow-up support is provided on specific issues raised, leading to the realization of labour-management dialogue at the individual enterprise level.

¹⁵ As used here, the term “Smart Partnership” refers to an institutionalized form of collaboration and cooperation between enterprises and workers and their representatives, which is concretized and implemented through specific structures, schemes and processes, and which integrates union and worker participation into workplace governance and responses to change in meaningful ways, enabling enterprises and unions to derive mutual benefits (Melisa R. Serrano, スマートパートナーシップの推進—イオンの労使構想 (*Growing Smart Partnership: The AEON Labor Management Initiative*) [available only in Japanese], Singapore: UNI Global Union Asia & Pacific, June 2020, p.13, <https://blogs.uniglobalunion.org/japan/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/04/スマートパートナーシップの推進—イオンの労使構想.pdf>).

In this way, solutions are developed tailored to the needs of each group company.

The enterprise conducts human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate, address and account for the adverse human and labour rights impacts on its operations and supply chains. While there are inherent hurdles for trade unions acting alone in collecting information directly from local business partners, there have been cases in which the GFA framework has enabled swift fact-finding of human rights issues. For example, when an international non-governmental organization (NGO) raised concerns about labour-related human rights issues at a private-brand supplier in the Philippines, the prompt sharing of local information by UA ZENSEN made it possible to coordinate with the enterprise's risk management division and carry out an on-site audit. As part of regular practice, reports on the results of human rights due diligence are also shared among the four parties at the annual GFA review meeting, functioning as a framework for reviewing the nature of risks of labour and human rights violations.

Positive impacts and future outlook

The development of a sound working environment based on constructive labour-management relations supports the enterprise in conducting overseas business operations in a stable manner. From the enterprise's perspective, in order to build such constructive labour-management relations at overseas business sites, it is reassuring to have a trade union as a strong counterpart, representing the voices of the workers, in responding to issues on an individual basis. When management intervenes in individual labour-management disputes, it is extremely helpful to have the local union act as a "guardian on site", as unions are able to grasp issues through the lens of local management and operations and respond with close attention. Even in terms of information gathering, it is extremely difficult for an individual enterprise to build an information-sharing framework from scratch. The enterprise recognizes the benefits of the GFA framework, which provides support from UA ZENSEN and UNI Global Union and establishes a mechanism for receiving timely information.

As for the challenges ahead, although the enterprise has established a hotline to raise grievances, including from business partners, regarding the risks of human and labour rights violations in overseas supply chains, it does not necessarily support local languages. Therefore, the enterprise wishes to strengthen grievance mechanisms in foreign languages with the cooperation of sectoral labour unions and others. In addition, the enterprise is working towards improving working conditions, including wage increases, while enhancing productivity, without distinguishing between regular employees and part-time staff. The trade union believes that the establishment of trade unions is essential to create such a virtuous cycle of wage increases and productivity improvement together with management.



Trade union:
Masamitsu Nishimura, Director, Policy
Department
Saori Mitsuhashi, Deputy Director, Policy
Department;
Naoko Fujiwara, Director, International Affairs

As a trade union that brings together group companies, our activities in Japan include establishing formal forums in which issues are broken down by theme and discussed in detail, enabling workplace-level awareness of issues to be reflected more precisely. Outside Japan, we support the establishment of trade unions from the outset so that the AEON group's distinctive smart-partnership approach can be realized. We take pride in the fact that these grassroots efforts have accelerated the development of mechanisms that enable us to grasp the issues in each company, both domestic and overseas across the group, and we believe that this contributes to stable group management.



Enterprise:
**Miho Arai, Labour Relations Leader, Human
 Resources Planning Department**

With the expansion of business operations not only within Japan but also overseas, identifying the issues faced by each group company and following through to concrete responses is no easy task. However, we recognize that, because constructive labour-management relations based on the Japanese model build the foundation of labour relations at each company, smooth communication between workers and employers is achieved, leading to the swift resolution of issues. We intend to continue sharing good practices and information on risks of human and labour rights violations through trade unions and the GFA network, working collaboratively between workers and management to address these issues and provide better workplace environments.

Relevant international standards:



UNGPs:
8, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 48, 53, 55, 56,
58, 61, 63 and 66

► The Osaka Gas Workers Union

Practising workers dialogue beyond the individual enterprise contributing to build sound labour relations

Main products and services: Energy businesses in Japan and overseas; real estate; information processing; fine materials; and other daily life-related industries

Head office location: Chuo-ku, Osaka

Union membership: Approximately 4,000

Initiative background

Through its headquarters and branch organizations, the union has long worked to improve employee welfare and personnel systems through the annual “Spring Labour Offensive”,¹⁶ as well as regular and ad hoc labour-management consultations. In 1978, with the aim of making use of the autonomy of its constituent unions to further develop their understanding of common issues, such as workers’ welfare in public services and participation in local communities, and to improve the lives and welfare of colleagues working across the Daigas Group¹⁷ while contributing to society through the group’s sound development, the union established: (1) the Gas

¹⁶ “the spring wage offensive – is a united campaign by the labor unions, led by Industrial Unions. It is launched every year between March and April, the main aim of negotiations being higher wages [...] provided a framework that surpassed internal individual corporate negotiations, instead creating a bargaining method whereby wage increases could be secured throughout the entire industry.”, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, *Labor Situation in Japan and Its Analysis: General Overview 2013/2014*, 2014, <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/lsp/general/2013-2014/4-3.pdf>

¹⁷ In 2018, after its many years as a corporate group familiar to the general public, the Osaka Gas Group became the Daigas Group

Group Labour Council (Group Rōkyō), a forum for consultations with trade unions at construction companies that do business with Osaka Gas; and (2) the Osaka Gas Affiliated Labour Unions Council (Kankei Rōkyō), comprising trade unions from the group companies. Given that trade unions engaged in the gas business tend to take similar approaches to addressing issues, these councils were launched to build a cooperative labour-management framework. They serve as a network for considering ways to address challenges that are difficult for enterprise unions to resolve on their own, as well as issues shared across the business.

In this way, even before the concept of business and human rights had developed, labour-management dialogue was being practised as a form of stakeholder dialogue, supported by horizontal links between trade unions. Based on this background, the union has worked to put in place practical mechanisms to capture workplace voices and ensure their steady operation.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

The union uses social dialogue as a mechanism for gathering and consolidating employees' views, especially when the enterprise proposes policy changes. In particular, when changes to personnel systems are under consideration, there have been cases in which the union headquarters first reviews and analyses the enterprise's draft proposal, provides explanations at branch level and then, taking employees' views into account, reaches a basic agreement, followed by agreement on the detailed system design. Where employees put forward views that differ from the enterprise's initial proposal during this process, the union seeks to understand the underlying reasons and context before aligning positions with the enterprise. Through such processes, the union has worked with management to adjust personnel systems and employee welfare arrangements. Such dialogue can serve as a means to identify and address human and labour rights issues and risks in the workplace.

Moreover, the Osaka Gas Workers' Union conducts outreach visits to enterprises whose unions are members of the two above-mentioned councils.

This includes attending meetings between the trade unions and human resources representatives of the enterprise to discuss workplace conditions and day-to-day concerns and, where requested by the trade unions, facilitating dialogue with management by setting agenda items on issues they wish to examine further with the latter. By participating alongside the council-affiliated trade union and the enterprise and by bringing in perspectives and practices from other affiliated enterprise unions, the Osaka Gas Workers' Union enables them to mutually understand their workplace conditions more deeply and consider the improvement of measures that would be difficult to achieve through one-to-one labour-management dialogue alone, thereby contributing to the promotion of labour-management communication. The existence of the aforementioned councils facilitates acceptance of such visits, and cooperation is pursued on the common understanding that workers, employers and each enterprise union stand on an equal footing.

Furthermore, as part of its awareness-raising activities, the councils organize joint labour-management study sessions. Approximately 40 participants from enterprise trade unions and company management attend each session, which provides opportunities for joint learning on topics such as key political and economic indicators, developments among labour and business organizations and specific themes; for example, preventing employee turnover and balancing work with caregiving responsibilities.

With regard to grievances, the fact that trade union consultations take place close to the workplace enables unions to build trust at the workplace level, where employees know the individuals they are speaking to. This proximity is the key to encouraging employees to bring their concerns forward to trade unions. From this perspective, the Osaka Gas Workers' Union has set up a dedicated telephone line for union officers under the concept of an "any-issue hotline", enabling union members to seek advice easily on any concerns they may have. The union has also partnered with a law firm so that its members can seek advice not only on work-related matters but also on issues affecting their day-to-day lives. With confidentiality ensured, the union receives a report once a year on the outline of consultations and the number of cases and confirms usage of around 50 cases per year.

In addition, the enterprise has established an internal reporting contact

point within its Compliance Office and accepts consultations and reports by telephone, in writing and by email. Depending on the content of the report, the Compliance Office conducts fact-finding and responds accordingly. There are also the cases in which employees (as the victim) consult the union before approaching the Compliance Office, especially in cases involving sexual harassment or power harassment. In order to identify risks relating to impacts on human and labour rights, the company has, since 2006, used systems such as the G-RIMS (Gas Group Risk Management System) to systematize risk-management self-assessment inspections across each organization, including affiliated enterprises, and to identify risks (including human and labour rights issues), check response status and carry out follow-up. The enterprise also conducts surveys of its business partners and obtains responses based on actual conditions, such as excessive working hours, forced labour and issues related to foreign workers. On the basis of these responses, it conducts audits of business partners, primarily focusing on workplace working conditions and occupational safety and health.

Positive impacts and future outlook

Beginning with its own Spring Labour Offensive, the union has created a wide range of opportunities for labour-management dialogue. It has done so by providing a community forum, in the form of the councils, not only for the group companies but also for enterprises involved in the gas business, including construction and real estate, and their enterprise trade unions. Building on the councils, the union has also diversified the channels for labour-management dialogue itself, such as outreach visits and study sessions. On these day-to-day practices of gathering and consolidating employee views and building practical labour-management relations, the employers have commented that “the presence of the trade union is extremely important when it comes to capturing voices from the workplace”. The union describes the reasons for these good labour relations as follows: “We are respected by the employers; at times, we can work cooperatively and always feel that we are recognized as an equal counterpart”.

From the enterprise’s perspective, one challenge they see is that the geographical location, scale and industry of business partners differ across

corporate divisions, making it necessary to provide awareness-raising activities tailored to different levels by the scope and actual circumstances of its business activities.

Given that initiatives undertaken by trade unions outside the enterprise, such as the above-mentioned councils, may also be referred to internally as reference cases and support understanding, the union will continue working to build sound labour relations both inside and outside the enterprise.



Trade union:

Daisuke Yamasato, Deputy Chair, Central Executive Committee; Takayuki Sago, Secretary-General

For the Daigas Workers Union, both workers and employers aim to maintain an equal relationship grounded in mutual respect. Within the councils, unions carry out their activities while sharing values through initiatives such as outreach visits. As colleagues working together across the Osaka Gas Group, efforts to foster a positive attitude towards work, build horizontal connections and promote communication are also positively viewed by the employers, from the perspectives of preventing employee turnover and improving productivity. We would like to continue these efforts and work to strengthen the network further.



Enterprise:
Katsuya Ichida and Naoko Yamazaki,
Human Resources Department (concurrent
appointments: Group HR and Labour
Affairs Team / HR Planning Team)

From the standpoint of the enterprise's human resources function, based on the past interactions with the trade union, we have come to realize once again that its presence has a significant impact on the enterprise's business operations and policy decisions. We engage in various dialogues and labour-management consultations on a daily basis within a sound relationship. These activities extend not only to engagement with the enterprise itself but also to the group companies and other enterprises in the same industry, which indicates the scale of the union's presence. The enterprise also sees value in gathering voices from the workplace, resolving labour issues early and linking this to improvements in working conditions because this contributes to securing human capital and ensuring stable business operations. We would like to continue building a cooperative framework and working together.

Relevant international standards:



UNGPs:
18, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 38, 41, 53, 61,
63 and 66

► **Komatsu Matere Workers' Labour Union**

Using corporate social responsibility audits as an opportunity for proactive learning from an external perspective

Main products and services: Manufacture and sale of apparel and industrial fabrics, advanced materials and related products

Head office location: Nomi City, Ishikawa Prefecture

Union membership: Approximately 795

Initiative background

Since the founding of the enterprise in 1943, through periods of changes in management and strikes over wages, the role of the trade union as an organization representing workers' voices has grown increasingly important. Since around 2010, corporate social responsibility (CSR) audits conducted by global buyers have included interviews with the trade union as an audit item. This has fostered an understanding on the enterprise side that a constructive relationship with the trade union, premised on ensuring freedom of association, matters not only for improving the workplace environment but also in the context of maintaining business relationships with buyers. As a result, the trade union has come to be recognized as an important counterpart in the workplace, playing a role that is valuable not only for workers but for the enterprise. In addition to regular labour-management consultations, they also use these audit opportunities to confirm the standards for which the enterprise should aim and the responses required, including reviewing working conditions, checking the safety of manufacturing machinery and advancing work-life balance.

In this way, the audit experience is not considered as a negative event but is reinterpreted positively as an opportunity for proactive learning. After workers and management have jointly recognized third-party observations

of human rights issues at the enterprise and its business partners, they can work collectively to address them through mutual cooperation.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

CSR audits usually require the enterprise to submit an improvement report within a month after issues have been identified. In the past, some findings required action such as revising work rules to restrict consecutive workdays associated with long working hours, or revising internal occupational safety and health rules on the storage of chemicals. The union and management therefore discussed the issues and responded promptly. The number of audits is increasing year by year, and audit requirements are also becoming more advanced and complex, covering not only in-house labour-management issues but also fundamental human and labour rights issues that extend to business partners and subcontractors. This has made closer cooperation between the union and management increasingly necessary.

To underpin a constructive labour-management relationship, the union has several consultation forums: a safety and health committee that discusses the safety of manufacturing machinery; a production site committee, composed of plant managers from manufacturing sites, which discusses plant-level issues; and a labour-management consultative committee, which also includes the CEO, that discusses working conditions and welfare benefits. In addition, a specialized committee has been established to carry out project-based scheme design and monitoring, regarding labour-related matters raised through the labour-management consultation meetings held four times a year. This specialized committee is headed by the executive committee chair on the union side and by division heads across functions such as sales, administration and production on the enterprise side. For each topic area, specialists such as lawyers also participate, and the committee discusses how to build better systems that reflect employees' needs, drawing on arrangements already implemented by peer enterprises. After the scheme is established, monitoring is conducted. These initiatives can

also serve to identify and address human and labour rights issues and risks in the workplace. In practice, the enterprise has developed schemes aligned with workplace needs, including extending the retirement age, developing younger talent and balancing work with childcare and caregiving. Measures have included establishing a post-retirement re-employment scheme, implementing career strategies to support skill acquisition by younger technical staff and expanding remote work arrangements for employees with childcare or caregiving responsibilities.

A further advantage of the proximity between the union, employees and management is the speedy and careful approach to how issues are handled from a grievance perspective. When employees raise requests, the union can respond through one-to-one informal consultations, including matters that are difficult to raise in formal meetings and, where necessary, escalate them to the labour-management consultation forums. There have also been cases where urgent needs from the workplace were met swiftly, for example, a factory's request for winter clothing in a cold region. Provision to the factory was promptly made without waiting for the season. It has also helped that the union approached the current CEO, whose background is in sales, and invited him to visit factories in mid-summer and mid-winter, building a common understanding of extreme conditions in manufacturing environments.

In addition, as part of awareness-raising activities by the enterprise, training has been conducted for the past two years on the employee code of conduct, including forced labour, child labour and harassment, with external instructors invited to provide outside perspectives.

Positive impacts and future outlook

The trade union raises awareness of the employer about the human and labour rights issues and risks in the workplace to promote responses that reflect workplace needs and international standards, not only through labour-management consultations within the enterprise but also through CSR audits. For workers, this is likely to translate into tangible improvements at both the workplace and system levels, including better working conditions

and welfare benefits, as well as improvements in safety and health. On the enterprise side, the union's role in representing employees' voices is described as something only the trade union can do, and the enterprise has sought more social dialogue with the union to have a better understanding of the workers' voices on specific topics, indicating a high level of trust.

In order to reflect workplace voices more fully as society changes, the union is considering a mechanism to improve the specialized committees in operation. This is because, until now, these committees have been dissolved once system development and subsequent monitoring were completed, but the union is exploring arrangements for ongoing operational checks and for revising systems in line with issues that arise. The union is also considering involvement not only as a party subject to CSR audits but also to participate in the audits that are conducted on business partners and other entities. It aims to continue to demonstrate the union's presence while working with the enterprise to promote responsible business practices and business and human rights initiatives.



**Trade union:
Tatsuya Sone, Executive Committee Chair**

In the past, we did not have a cooperative labour-management relationship. However, with a change in management and growing recognition of the trade union's role in gathering employees' views, CSR audits in particular became a major turning point, and I feel that the significance of the trade union has finally been recognized. Trade unions exist, as labour specialists, to improve the workplace environment – including welfare benefits and human resources systems – based on employee input. Guided by the belief that working for the collective good also serves one's own interests, we remain committed to continuing our efforts by steadily doing what needs to be done.

Relevant international standards:



UNGPs:
18, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 41, 44, 46, 47,
63 and 66

► Takashimaya Labour Union/ Takashimaya Group's Labour Union Confederation

Implementing people-centred policies and solving challenges through bottom-up approaches

Main products and services: Department store operations, corporate business, mail-order business and group businesses

Head headquarters location: Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Union membership: 5,952 members (Takashimaya Group's Labour Union Confederation: 6,813) as of June 2025

Initiative background

A union social responsibility policy was established in the belief that promoting responsible business conduct is essential and that trade unions themselves are key actors in promoting responsible business practices. Based on a common understanding that jointly advancing social responsibility through labour-management cooperation contributes to an enterprise's sustainable growth, in 2008 four parties: Takashimaya Co. Ltd., the Takashimaya Labour Union, UNI Global Union and the Japan Federation of Service and Distributive Workers' Unions (JSD, now part of UA ZENSEN), concluded a GFA,¹⁸ the first labour-management agreement of its kind in Japan concerning a corporate code of conduct. Through this agreement, workers and management reaffirmed their respective commitments across three areas – labour, human rights and the environment – and expanded the scope of their activities globally. In today's more complex social

¹⁸ Takashimaya Group, *Takashimaya Group Integrated Report 2024*, Nov 2024, https://www.takashimaya.co.jp/base/corp/integrated_report/Taka-Integrated%20Report-2024_Eng.pdf

environment, with increasing pressure to address the risk of human and labour rights violations in supply chains, the parties are strengthening co-operation with overseas stores and local trade unions, while making use of information shared by international industrial labour organizations and Japan's industrial trade unions.

The GFA serves as a set of behavioural guidelines, and its significance lies in each individual taking leadership and actively promoting its implementation. Based on this, and in line with the agreed priority action items, the enterprise is advancing initiatives through a group action plan (an internal mechanism for CSR internal control), while the trade union is making progress in its efforts through a practical programme.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

A central management council is convened regularly as a main forum for labour-management consultations. Participants include the CEO and other senior executives on the employer side, and the central executive committee chair and the rest of the executive leadership on the union side. They discuss matters such as wages, as well as the steps taken by both workers and employers with a view to achieving management targets. In addition, management councils are held every month at each store and business-division level. Separate thematic forums are also held around once a month, such as labour-management meetings on sales and corporate management, a productivity study group and a comprehensive welfare study group. These forums routinely examine the confirmation of policies and directions grounded in management strategy, as well as planning various measures related to employees' working conditions, including work-life balance and the personnel system. In addition, as an initiative symbolizing worker-employer co-creation, the Takashimaya Group, whose management philosophy is always "putting people first," and the union, whose action philosophy is "people first," work together to build a proprietary mechanism for bottom-up problem-solving called "SAY activities". Specifically, workers and employers at each of the four levels identify issues and hold discussions:

workplace level (for example, meetings among workplace members), department level (department heads and workplace members), store and business-division level (store and division heads and union officers) and central secretariat level (head office officers and central union officers). This mechanism not only strengthens social dialogue but also systematizes continuous engagement with each employee as a rights-holder, for the purpose of the identification of human and labour rights issues such as workplace safety and health and the response to those issues. The SAY activities enable workers and management to discuss day-to-day operational topics on an equal footing and jointly address the issues, resulting in these activities becoming embedded among union members. Recently, as part of the SAY activities, a dialogue opportunity was created to deepen mutual understanding of “incivility”, a problem behaviour that can lead to harassment if not addressed, and to encourage corrective action. These initiatives can also serve as a means to identify and address human and labour rights issues and risks in the workplace.

As part of the enterprise’s initiatives in its relationships with business partners, in response to the formulation of the government guidelines¹⁹ in 2022 and the 2024 revision by the Japan Department Stores Association of its *Guidelines on the Corporate Conduct of Department Stores*,²⁰ the enterprise developed a human rights commitment. Later, it carried out a questionnaire survey among workers across the supply chains, including identifying human and labour rights violation risks, and extracted priority issues. Additionally, the enterprise is continuously conducting employee training using original materials, striving to deepen understanding on human and labour rights risks in the supply chain.

As the union’s initiatives, the role played by the GFA has also grown

19 Inter-Ministerial Meeting for the Promotion and Coordination of Policies Related to the Implementation of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, *Guidelines on Respecting Human Rights in Responsible Supply Chains*, September 2022, <https://www.meti.go.jp/policy/economy/business-jinken/guidelines/provisionalenglishtranslation.pdf>

20 Japan Department Stores Association, 百貨店の企業行動指針 (*Guidelines on the Corporate Conduct of Department Stores*) [available only in Japanese], revised March 2024, <https://www.depart.or.jp/sustainable/guidance/index.html>

with the expansion of overseas operations. At one point, maintaining and continuing each element of the practical programme became an end in itself, creating a drift away from the GFA's original principles and ideas and, in some cases, the programme content was not updated. The union has therefore returned to the GFA's starting point and is taking steps to make it a more meaningful mechanism. These steps include preparing guidance for planning the practical programme, holding seminars to learn the GFA's principles and convening information exchange meetings with other unions that have concluded GFAs. More recently, in the human and labour rights domain, the union received direct inquiries and consultations from sales staff employed by department store suppliers, as well as from employees of group companies who do not belong to a union about business partners' working environments and employment issues. As colleagues working within the same corporate group or at the same workplace, the union serves as an accessible point of contact, coordinating as needed with the enterprise's human resources department and sales divisions.

Positive impacts and future outlook

As an organization engaged in a labour-intensive industry centred on department stores, workers and employers share a common culture that places importance on people. Through the framework of the GFA and independently developed SAY activities, workers and employers have implemented initiatives while pursuing the same direction, resulting in a strong relationship of mutual trust. From the enterprise's perspective, the presence of the union was described as contributing to the effectiveness of various initiatives in that, by taking into account the company's direction while conveying voices from the workplace, the union helps ensure that initiatives are shaped in ways that reflect realities on the ground, which ultimately enhances their effectiveness. For its part, the union noted that, in observing the company's actions, it perceives a qualitative focus and commitment to enhancing corporate value in society and the market that clearly goes beyond numerical targets pursued merely for investment purposes or for inclusion in integrated reports.

In the future, as overseas operations continue to expand, efforts will

continue to gather local information and build networks by creating opportunities for information exchange with overseas industrial union organizations and overseas offices, with the support of UA ZENSEN and UNI Global Union. Moreover, with a view to achieving effective problem-solving, trade unions from Japan will help identify and address the potential and actual issues in the supply chain, including through collaboration with the local trade unions regarding issues that are difficult to resolve locally. Simultaneously, initiatives will be advanced to raise union members' awareness of laws, social norms and relevant rules, through training and awareness-raising activities.



Trade union:
Tomohiro Okuno, Central Executive Committee Chair;
Shinya Imai, Deputy Central Executive Committee
Chair and Director of International Affairs;
Misaki Otaka, Deputy Central Executive
Committee Chair

From the trade union's perspective, a close and robust relationship between the enterprise and the union is beneficial, in terms of earning the trust of union members by securing members' benefits. Through working collaboratively with the enterprise based on workers' voices, actions and accomplishments, the trade union can contribute to enhancing corporate strength and improving working conditions, thereby increasing the significance of union activities. Taking the SAY activities as an example, the process began with encouraging each individual to speak up. It then progressed to strengthening the quality of their opinions and the level of their problem-solving actions. Now, the initiative is entering a stage where each union member is seeking to further enhance their ability to identify and resolve issues through labour-management relations that are closer to their own workplace. As the challenges facing enterprises and labour-management relations become increasingly complex, sophisticated and global, the union aims to further enhance its presence and develop its activities to raise the corporate value in society and the market through co-creation with the enterprise.



Enterprise:

**Rie Kasahara, Head of the ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) Promotion Office, Corporate Planning Department;
Satoshi Saito, Deputy General Manager for HR Operations, Human Resources Department**

Investment in human capital, which directly underpins an enterprise's sustainable growth and value creation, is an essential strategy for reconciling social sustainability with the generation of corporate profits. From this perspective, the enterprise is implementing initiatives across the group to improve working conditions and workplace environments, give due consideration to occupational safety and health, enhance human resources systems and employee benefits, foster a sense of fulfilment at work and, on the basis of protecting workers' rights, draw out diverse values to the fullest extent. In this process, the role of the trade union in capturing the voices of employees on site is indispensable. Meanwhile, the trade union also plays an important role in integrating policies decided by the enterprise into action at the workplace level. The enterprise intends to continue working in close cooperation with the trade union to realize these various initiatives.



UNGPs:
18, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 44, 46, 53, 63
and 66

► Toridoll Group Union

Inclusive union organizational management based on mutual understanding among a multinational union membership

Main products and services: Operation of food service businesses in Japan and overseas

Head office: Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

Union membership: Approximately 38,516

Initiative background

The union formed in May 2004, starting from one of the group's local stores. This coincided with a period of rapid company growth, during which there was an increasing need for a mechanism that would properly reflect employees' voices in management decisions. With the mission of "fostering happiness in work for everyone involved and creating the joy of life together", the union includes foreign workers who support frontline operations in the food service business. The number of foreign union members continues to grow, exceeding 2,000 members as of 2026. Language barriers and cultural differences give rise to a wide range of workplace concerns, and the union treats them without distinction as the voice of each member and works to resolve the issues.

The union also listens to the needs of other workers who may face particular challenges, including women, sexual and gender minorities, persons with disabilities and older workers. Where necessary, workers and management work together to address individual issues. These efforts give concrete form to business and human rights by identifying human and labour rights issues and working to address them.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

In developing the enterprise's human rights policy, the company interviewed the trade union so that workplace views could be consolidated from the perspective of protecting employees' rights and reflected in the policy.

To identify human rights risks and issues at the workplace, the Occupational Safety and Health Committee and the Labour-Management Council are held monthly. The former includes the occupational physician and participants from the human resources division, the enterprise's department heads and other senior management, and the latter is attended by board directors and other senior management. These meetings provide an opportunity to share employees' concerns with senior management, including problems related to long working hours and communication with supervisors. To engage in dialogue in the area of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity, a number of committees related to women's empowerment, the promotion of employment and work fulfilment for persons with disabilities and the support of foreign national employees have been established, and various initiatives are being implemented. In particular, a committee for foreign national employees holds networking events known as "World Cafe" meetings, in which both foreign workers and Japanese workers participate. The sessions begin with a discussion to increase understanding of what a trade union is, and then, while participants introduce each other to their respective cultures and food and deepen rapport, they discuss their concerns in their day-to-day work, together in a welcoming atmosphere. As opinions are expressed not only by foreign workers but also by Japanese workers who work with them, differences in understanding become clearer. These insights are helpful to improve communication on both sides.

Furthermore, when workplace environment surveys are conducted by the union, it is conducted in Vietnamese, English and Japanese. The survey also offers an easy Japanese version, as many foreign employees have a background in studying Japanese as international students at language schools in Japan. At the same time, taking account of the feedback that

some members cannot read *kanji*,²¹ the union uses questionnaires that are written in *hiragana*²² and *kanji* with phonetic guides and also holds briefings to increase understanding. In 2024, responses were received from approximately one in three foreign national union members. As a result, the union has succeeded in capturing the voices of many foreign workers. Such refinement in how to consolidate employees' views can lead to improvement in systems and problem-solving by better alignment with employees' needs.

Positive impacts and future outlook

Within the union, a range of topic areas are addressed, and the union works to resolve issues after giving due consideration to how employees' voices can be captured and reflected. In addition to supporting foreign workers, it also places emphasis on employment for persons with disabilities, supported by the deployment of trainers assisting persons with disabilities, as well as the promotion of women's economic empowerment, including through conducting study sessions for female managerial candidates. In combination with enterprise measures, these efforts have also produced positive effects, including a lower staff turnover rate.

Looking ahead, issues and responses under consideration include career development. For example, the union is considering measures to enable workers to build and maintain sustainable careers across major life events by reforming a career handover system that has been fragmented by individual stores. These measures would address situations such as transfers linked to a spouse's relocation, as well as re-employment following career interruptions due to childcare or caregiving responsibilities. As this understanding of the issues is shared with management, both sides plan to continue to work together in addressing them where necessary.

²¹ *Kanji* and *Hiragana* are two of the three main scripts used in Japanese. *Kanji* (thousands of characters, typically 2,136 for daily use) are complex Chinese characters representing meanings, ideas, or words.

²² *Hiragana* (46 characters) is a phonetic script used for native Japanese words.



Trade union:
Toshihisa Ueda, Chair, Central Executive Committee

Depending on the nature of the consultations with employees, there are cases where the union works with management and responds together. There are also cases where the union communicates the issues to management, leading to projects that the enterprise implements. The union shares the same recognition of the issues as the enterprise but, in practice, there may be differences in the pace of reaching solutions and in how issues are prioritized within the organization. What matters is not an overly cosy relationship but both having their own stance and the structure to cooperate when necessary. In that sense, I believe we have been able to establish constructive labour-management relations.



Enterprise:
Masayo Furukawa, Director of the Happiness and Culture Promotion Department (Happiness and Human Support Division) and General Affairs Department;
Chiaki Ui, Section Manager in charge of ESG information disclosure, Sustainability Promotion Department

As an enterprise, we continuously align perspectives with the trade union on the issues we face. At the same time, we recognize the value of management and the union approaching these issues from different but complementary vantage points. Taking the promotion of women's empowerment as an example, measures the enterprise considers for career-building across life events primarily focus on a company-wide perspective, on increasing the number of women in management and providing physical and psychological support during child-care leave. In contrast, measures devised by the trade union encourage career continuity in response to diverse needs, including those of part-time and casual workers. When considering measures that broadly incorporate workplace needs and requests, the trade union's perspective is indispensable. The union also works to create an environment in which employees can speak up more easily, and we believe that these efforts contribute to the enterprise's growth.

Relevant international standards:



UNGPs:
18, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 30, 63 and 66

► Mizuno Workers' Union

Resolving issues in overseas supply chains through labour-management cooperation under the global framework agreement

Main products and services: Manufacture and sale of sporting goods and health-related products; operation and management of sports facilities; research and development of industrial materials and related fields

Head office: Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

Union membership: 1,467 as of December 2025

Initiative background

Since the establishment of the Mizuno Corporation Ethical Standards during the “Play Fair at the Olympics” campaign held in connection with the 2004 Olympic Games, NGOs pointed out to sporting goods’ manufacturers that working conditions in their supply chains were not being adequately ensured. In response, with a view to establishing supply chain management, Mizuno drafted the Mizuno CSR Procurement Code of Conduct and established an audit process. In managing its supply chain, including overseas suppliers, the enterprise conducts second-party audits from the selection of new suppliers through to ongoing transactions. Based on global audit standards, it adjusts audit items to fit the content of each business relationship and conducts CSR audits either directly or through commissioned firms.

During a subsequent campaign directed at industry peers in connection with the 2008 Olympic Games, an international workers’ organization raised the possibility of collaboration. As a result, in 2011, four parties: the Mizuno Corporation, the Mizuno Workers’ Union, the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF, now the IndustriALL Global Union) and UA ZENSEN, concluded a GFA whose main content is based on respect for the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work.

In this way, while keeping CSR audits as the foundation, a framework

was established under which workers and management can jointly identify, assess, address and prevent adverse impacts on human rights and labour rights, including through making use of information shared by international sectoral workers' organizations and Japanese industrial unions.

Practical examples of promoting responsible business conduct

As part of the labour-management consultation framework to identify human and labour rights risks and issues in the workplace, a central labour-management council is held once every two months, with senior management and the human resources function participating on the employer side. In addition, regional-based labour-management councils to discuss labour-related issues have been established in three separate regions, with participation on the enterprise side at the section-manager level and below. To enable workers and management to identify a middle ground in a win-win relationship, the issues are presented in advance to ensure mutually constructive discussion.

As part of specific activities under the GFA, the Mizuno Corporation, Mizuno Workers' Union, IndustriALL Global Union and UA ZENSEN meet once a year to hold a joint consultation meeting. They share information on the status of CSR procurement activities, trends in the supply chain and initiatives for cooperation between multinational enterprises and trade unions in specific regions. Factory visits are also conducted, promoting mutual understanding of actual working conditions. This GFA framework is most effective in responding to contingencies, based on these routine initiatives.

For example, in 2017, when an NGO highlighted problems in the local working environment at a supplier supporting Mizuno's apparel business in Thailand, UA ZENSEN promptly verified that the problems might be plausible and shared information, enabling a calm assessment of the credibility of the allegations by the GFA parties. Due to the fact that the allegations raised were highly specific, with a report with photos alleging excessive overtime, non-payment of wages, harassment and dormitory hygiene issues, the enterprise, the union and an audit firm conducted a rigorous special CSR

audit. As the first audit did not identify the alleged issues, special audits were repeated. The supplier ultimately acknowledged the existence of the issues highlighted by the NGO and took corrective action. After the corrective measures, the four GFA parties visited the site and confirmed conditions. However, additional issues were raised by the NGO, and the enterprise temporarily suspended sourcing from this supplier. Even while transactions were suspended, the enterprise and the union took the view that adverse impacts on workers should be avoided. Therefore, they continued dialogue with the NGO and worked together to provide follow-up corrective guidance to the supplier. In 2020, the NGO notified the parties that it had confirmed the status of the corrective measures, and the series of issues at the supplier reached a certain milestone.

Subsequently, in 2022, given the enterprise's procurement needs, the four GFA parties considered whether to resume transactions. UA ZENSEN shared information, including introductions to the local embassy and other contacts, and information on the local political situation. An analysis was carried out on region-specific human rights risks, such as careful handling required when conducting employee interviews as the supplier was located in a conflict-affected area. The enterprise and the union carried out another on-site investigation and confirmed that audit nonconformities had been corrected. Transactions have now resumed on the condition that the supplier commits to maintaining the corrective status and continuing compliance with the Mizuno CSR Procurement Code of Conduct. This example demonstrates that the involvement not only of the enterprise and the union at the individual enterprise level but also of international sectoral workers' organizations and Japanese industrial unions, rapid and reliable information-sharing, and contact with key stakeholders, was possible, and that solutions are being pursued even for the difficult issue of labour problems within overseas business partners.

From the perspective of improving overseas working environments, the union also undertakes its own initiatives, including visits to local sites and factories and monthly online meetings. Through direct communication with employees, it listens to their requests and uses these to inform improvements in treatment and working conditions.

As another domestic initiative, reflecting growing interest in advancing

work-life balance and well-being, an app has been introduced that distributes information on events and programmes aimed at promoting the physical and mental health of union members and fostering organizational cohesion. As a tool connecting the union and its members, it is used to disseminate information from the union executive leadership and is also expected to play a role in broadly capturing employees' voices.

Positive impacts and future outlook

The Mizuno Corporation and the union have achieved improvements to the human resources systems and expanded employee benefits through ongoing dialogue grounded in labour-management cooperation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they introduced a GLTD insurance scheme (group long-term disability income protection) as a new benefit to provide for employees in the event they are unable to work for an extended period due to illness or injury. As corporate performance improved, they also implemented base pay increases. At the same time, they revised the wage structure by reducing person-specific allowances (allowances for personal circumstances, such as family status) and increasing the base pay, making careful adjustments so that employees would not be placed at a disadvantage as a result of the change. Management has expressed the following words of encouragement regarding the union's efforts: "When business results are strong, we want to distribute those gains, and when they are not, we want everyone to endure together. By doing so, we want to raise employee motivation and engagement. Ultimately, human capital is what drives the company's growth. We look forward to its continued progress along the path of cooperation between the union and the company".

This constructive labour-management relationship also aligns with the way to engage with overseas supply chains through the GFA framework. Rapid information-sharing, stakeholder dialogue and effective audits cannot be achieved without a constructive labour-management structure. Both sides plan to make proactive opportunities to share supply-chain issues between workers and management and strengthen horizontal connections with unions of other enterprises that have concluded a GFA, thereby making full and effective use of the GFA.

**Trade union:****Hideyuki Oota, President, Central Executive Committee;****Hitoshi Seko, Executive Director, Central Secretariat**

We consider high-quality labour-management dialogue to be the foundation of the labour-management cooperation framework. Many workplace issues arise over the course of ongoing work; therefore, while examining solutions, we focus not on one-off discussions but on continuous labour-management consultations. By considering policy design in light of past developments and future assumptions and working towards solutions acceptable to both workers and management, we feel the executive leadership can also earn the trust of union members. With the GFA framework, the scope of activity has broadened, including joint labour-management visits to local suppliers to encourage improvement actions. In the future, we want to continue working to improve the workplace environment for all union members, including those stationed overseas, through continuous social dialogue, based on constructive labour-management relations.



Enterprise:
Tomoyo Matsuda, Manager, Sustainability Initiatives
Section, Corporate Legal Affairs Office;
Ko Hasegawa, Senior Manager;
Chika Shibata; Akio Ashino; Takashi Ishido,
Senior Manager, Global Human Resources
and General Affairs Department

We have been advancing human and labour rights in the supply chain by establishing systems such as formulating the Mizuno CSR Procurement Code of Conduct, supplier self-assessments and CSR audits. The existence of the GFA also enables rapid local information-gathering and emergency response by workers and employers. Furthermore, when gathering and consolidating voices from workers, the union is indispensable. By carefully reflecting union members' perspectives and mutually confirming the overall direction of Mizuno, the enterprise and the union engage in dialogue and negotiation to determine company policies. We believe this process runs smoothly because of the efforts of the union's executive leadership. We hope to continue implementing win-win measures on the basis of such constructive labour-management relations.

Relevant international standards:



UNGPs:
18, 29, 30
and 31



OECD Guidance:
2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,
3.1, 4.1 and 6.2



ILO MNE Declaration:
10(e), 22, 41, 63, 65
and 66



From
the People of Japan

This document was developed with funding from the Government of Japan through the Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations (Phase II) project.

ILO Office for Japan

5-53-70 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001 Japan

UN House, 8th Floor

Email: tokyo@ilo.org

<https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/asia-and-pacific/japan>