

Trade Unions Reaffirm Support for Maternity Protection

Ms. Carmen Solinap, Chairperson of DAWN-TUCP, member of International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and member of WABA's Women and Work Task Force, shared with WABA an important move made by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) on prioritizing maternity protection and calling for amendment of legislations by governments to ensure that it is applied to women in the informal sector as well. The Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) guarantees, among other basic rights, the right to one or more breastfeeding breaks that are considered as working time and therefore compensated monetarily. Thus the ITUC Statement is a significant step towards securing women's and children's genuine and essential rights.

8 March 2007

For Maternity Protection

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Statement

Strong standards of maternity protection for all women workers

In recent decades women's participation in both the formal and informal labour markets has risen to 40 per cent. This unprecedented development has changed our societies and the labour market, and through both their visible and invisible work women have become a vital force in the global economy.

It is an accepted fact that today's labour market does not offer equal access to women workers. Globally, women earn 12-60% less than men, women make up 60% of the 550 million working poor and 35.8 million young women (aged 15 - 24) are out of work.

Maternity is one of the areas in which gender discrimination is most blatantly common. Too many women around the world do not enjoy maternity protection. They are subjected to numerous forms of discrimination, ranging from pregnancy tests at the recruitment stage, particularly in the export processing zones, to sackings during pregnancy and loss or withholding of wages that are vitally needed to ensure many households' survival. What is more, pregnant women and their children are exposed to many health risks.

Despite the fact that many countries have legislation providing for paid maternity leave, and many others provide health benefits and employment protection, the gap between law and practice remains huge. Not all women workers enjoy the same coverage and a large majority are excluded owing to their being in atypical employment, such as the informal economy, agriculture, home work, domestic work or part-time work.

A large proportion of women workers around the world are still subjected to unequal treatment in employment owing to their reproductive function. That function has not yet been recognised and correctly valued by society generally, by political leaders and by those who see maternity as an obstacle to profitability and the amassing of wealth.

Fully ensuring maternity protection is a way of recognising the major contribution made by women to the renewal of populations and the work force. Enhancement of this vitally important social function that women fulfil is on the ITUC's list of priorities.

As a trade union organisation, the ITUC is aware that equal opportunities is likely to remain an empty notion if the vital social function of maternity is not explicitly protected and supported by measures promoting an increased involvement of both parents in tasks related to caring for and educating children.

Six years after the adoption of ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection, only a minority of countries have ratified it (13) and the "developed" countries do not form a majority within that group.

The protection provided by the Convention meets the individual needs of mothers whilst fully recognising the vital social function they fulfil.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, and to ensure that the protection guaranteed under Convention 183 and its associated Recommendation 191 does not remain a mere statement of intent, the ITUC:

- reaffirms the vital and crucial importance of strong standards of maternity protection for all women workers.
- calls on governments and all the relevant players to make every effort to ratify and implement ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection and its associated Recommendation 191 which calls, amongst other things, for 18 weeks of paid maternity leave.
- insists that governments amend their legislation and put in place effective measures to ensure that all women workers are entitled to maternity protection and paid maternity leave. Given the expansion of the informal economy and of jobs in atypical sectors, it is vital that legislation is adapted and that maternity protection is also applied to the women working in those sectors of the economy.
- calls on employers to assume their responsibilities in this area by adopting appropriate policies and practices with respect to health matters, pay and employment. Ensuring that maternity is not a source of discrimination should be the guiding principle of these policies and practices.
- calls on all trade union organisations to prioritise maternity protection by negotiating the application of ILO Convention 183 and its associated Recommendation 191 in collective agreements and labour legislation. In addition to this, they should organise collective activities in their countries to raise awareness among political leaders, employers and society as a whole about the vital importance of maternity protection and paid maternity leave.

March 2007 a milestone for MX Meritlux (Philippines) and Bisig ng Meritlux Labor Union – PTGWO.



DEVELOPMENT ACTION FOR WOMEN IN TUCP
(DAWN-TUCP)
Trade Union Congress of the Philippines

MATERNITY PROTECTION for all WOMEN WORKERS

Two important events were jointly initiated by the management and the local union within the project – “Setting-Up Models of Mother and Baby Friendly Workplaces” carried out by the DAWN-TUCP in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In March 8, 2007, an immunization of Tetanus Toxoid for pregnant women was arranged with the Rural Health Unit of Barangay Malilit, Sta Rosa, Laguna. A representative from the Laguna Provincial Health Office joined to brief the workers. Eleven pregnant women were immunized with their first dose. This is just the beginning of this program. The next immunization schedule is set after five months for other pregnant women. By then infants and young children will already be included.



MX Meritlux (Philippines) - an enterprise of Top Form International (Hong Kong), produces underwear distributed in Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Malaysia, North America, China and the Philippines. The company is a member of Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP) and Garments and Textiles Export Board.



In March 10, 2007, a demonstration session for lactating mothers was organized with ARUGAAN (our partner mother-support group). Meritlux Industries, Philippines have agreed to apportion and arrange the company clinic to put up a lactation station for breastfeeding mothers. The nurse and the midwife will take turns to assist the mothers as well as maintain the clinic. Management has agreed to make available a refrigerator. There were eight mothers who returned to work after their maternity leave and continue to breastfeed their babies. They were given the Breastfeeding Starter Kit - to use in expressing and storing their breast milk. More mothers are expected to join especially those who have just given birth and ready to return to work and others who are challenged to re-lactate.



February 24 meeting of the project team with HR Manager Rosalie Bicocho, HR Officer Rowena Cariaga, RN Officer Jessiza Dalgonza, Union President Bro. Rolly Licup and Peer Counselor Sis. Lina Ramos to organize the two activities.

We advocate and lobby for maternity protection in labor legislation and negotiate better protection through collective agreements.

The Development Action for Women in TUCP, the women's committee of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, takes the lead in this pioneering work of establishing models for mother-baby friendly (breastfeeding friendly and immunization conscious) workplaces.

The project is also an intervention - a response to women who now combine having children while participating as a paid workforce - alongside with the desire of mothers to continue providing optimal care for their infants and young children. The workplace is an important setting to bring up maternity and work to the concern of trade unions and other stakeholders.

This is a workplace advocacy for Breastfeeding breaks, Breastfeeding rooms, Breast milk storage facilities or cribs and day-care centers.

The ultimate goal is that this benefit will be appreciated and understood by management and gets integrated in the workers' collective agreements.