



Women at Work

No. 2 - 2006

International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations

- Unions for women, women for unions -

PepsiCo Poland - Sexually Harassed women in court hearing on March 8

The eight women who were dismissed at the end of 2004 from PepsiCo's Frito Lay Plant in Grodzisk, near Warsaw, have still not been rehabilitated. PepsiCo is clearly demonstrating that its worldwide code of conduct is a meaningless paper product. Contrary to its commitment "to providing a workplace free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual and other forms of harassment" the company has intensified its union hostile actions at Frito Lay. On 14 December 2005, the union shop steward who has defended the eight women was sacked.

The Polish Food Worker' Union and its central organization, Solidarnosc, have recently filed a complaint to the ILO for violation of freedom of association. Furthermore, the IUF and Solidarnosc have requested an observation from the ILO regarding non-respect of Convention 111 on Discrimination.

In the meantime, the legal process is continuing at a snail's pace. On 8 March, the victims and witnesses of sexual harassment at the Frito Lay plant were called to yet another court hearing.

In conjunction with that, many solidarity messages were sent to the Polish sister union. Among those letters were one from the ICFTU Women's Committee. Another came from the IUF Eastern Europe and Central Asia Women's Committee, which held its constituent meeting on 8 March. These messages read as follows:

"On this symbolic day, International Women's Day, we would like on behalf of the Women's Committee of the ICFTU, which represents 60 million women workers around the world, to express our solidarity with your struggle for respect of your dignity, your physical integrity and your right to work in harassment-free workplaces. Sexual harassment at work is a violation of fundamental human rights and an obstacle to development.

We would also like to confirm our support to all the trade unionists who were victims of sexual harassment by the managers of PepsiCo as well as the union officials who were intimidated and forced to resign from their employment for carrying out their trade union functions. The issue of sexual harassment is a legitimate concern for the unions and the behaviour of PepsiCo constitutes a fundamental violation of trade union rights.

We should also like to extend our warmest greetings to the women workers of Poland and around the world, among them many women trade union activist and leaders who will mark 8 March to re-launch the "Unions for Women, Women for Union's" Campaign to demand the right to organise and form trade unions, and to live in a society that respects their dignity and is free of all discrimination and violence.

Yours in solidarity,

*Helen Creed
Chair, ICFTU Women's Committee"*



IUF Eastern Europe and Central Asia Women's Committee

Solidarity letter

Brothers and Sisters!

We, members of the IUF Eastern Europe and Central Asia Women's Committee, express our solidarity with the trade union of Frito-Lay in Grodzisk, Poland, in your justified protest against discrimination of women.

We point out that the tendency to use violence is inherent to defective and inferior personalities.

We are outraged and feel with the women who have suffered, and wish you endurance and firmness in securing your rights.

We denounce the behaviour of Frito-Lay's management and call on the administration of the company to reasonably and well weighted regard the situation, enter into negotiations with the union, reinstate the fired women-workers and to stop the tolerance of mass violations of union members.

Dear sisters! We support your legitimate demands and call on you not to step back, to insist into the unconditional restoration of your rights that have been trampled on.

We, together with all IUF member organisations, say "No!" to discrimination against women and call for the end of such flagrant violations of Human Rights.

Moscow, March 8, 2006.

Returning March 8 its original sense: New IUF Women's Committee in Eastern Europe/Central Asia Region formed

Women activists of IUF affiliates in the region from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine took an important decision on March 8 2006: They formed a permanent Women's Committee, which will ensure information exchange and co-ordination on gender questions and women's rights between affiliates. Daria Bostan from Agroindsind Union in Moldova was elected chairwoman.

It was not by accident that March 8 had been chosen for this event. In the Soviet period, the traditional International Women's Day had been transformed into an official holiday when women got flowers and nice words mainly. At the same time, difficulties to reconcile household obligations and salaried work, and certain limitations on "female" and "male" professions, contributing to a traditional wage gap, continued to exist in the Soviet Union despite official declarations that "the women's question had been solved".

After the demise of the Soviet Union economic crisis and ideological backlash hit women especially hard. With capitalist transformation advancing, women had to realize that not only their old problems in the workplace were not solved, but also instead new ones were added. While in the Soviet Union full employment for women was a state objective, now women are the majority of unemployed, discrimination on the labour market is rampant, especially for women in child-bearing age, and at the workplace many women face prejudices and stereotypes. Care for children and the elderly is being re-privatised and falls on women in addition to salaried work. Women migrants are especially vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation.

In this situation, the necessity to join efforts of counteraction for equality was obvious to women in the unions. After discussing women's questions and possible answers and actions at a workshop in Chernigov, Ukraine, last year, the women's committee will now be the platform for this joint action. Women's job

safety was chosen as a first priority topic which is important to women from such different sectors as catering, food processing and agriculture, all represented at the meeting. Affiliates plan to produce and exchange information material, educate women in promoting and negotiating health and safety regulations at women's workplaces and tailored to women's needs, and plan joint action on the topic for March 8, 2007.

The Women's committee will also be the body responsible for establishing contact, exchange information, and build solidarity with other women activists through the IUF Women's Committee. Therefore it was logical to the participants of the meeting to jointly express their solidarity with the women fighting for justice at Frito Lay in Poland. March 8 for the IUF women activists has renewed its meaning as international women's day of action.



Women in new positions

Colombia

In December 2005, **Adela Torres** was elected general secretary of the agricultural workers' union SINTRAINAGRO. The union, which joined the IUF in 1997, has today over 16 000 members, mainly in the banana sector.

Adela Torres has for several years been in charge of the union's training and education program. As a keen defender of equal rights she has also headed the women's department.

When she was first elected to the national union executive, she felt it was an excellent opportunity to continue to improve the participation of women in the union without forgetting that she now had a responsibility for both male and female workers.

The women banana workers are, as their male colleagues, suffering from health problems, including reproductive problems, due to the use of pesticides in banana production. But women are also suffering from discrimination in employment, particularly with regard to access to stable employment, dismissals related to maternity and sexual harassment by managers and co-workers. The Women's department has therefore launched the campaign "We accept women" addressed both to the employers and to the union. The situation of the women banana workers in Urabá has been documented in the book "Derechos y reverses" (Rights and reverses) and which has been widely used in the campaign.

The union is faced with a social context that goes far beyond bananas. The women have played a fundamental role to take up the struggle for political rights and influence on a local, regional and national level.

UNAC, the agricultural and food federation grouping 120,000 members, also elected a woman general secretary in 2005, **Sonia Pérez**. She has for many years led an organization of small producers, Semillas (Grains) which is affiliated to UNAC and whose core membership consists of women. Biodiversity, food security, concrete poverty alleviation are some of the priorities of Semillas, which furthermore has done a remarkable job of reducing the mortality rate related to maternity.

Sonia Pérez is a member of the IUF Women's Committee and Executive Committee.

Indonesia

The FSPM Hotel Federation already had a woman vice president, Sister **Yanti Irawan**. Two more sisters have recently joined her in the union executive board **Marganingsih** and **Yanti Priyanti**, the new chair of the National Women's

Committee. Women's representation has now reached 30% in the executive board.

Pakistan

At the founding congress of the National Federation of Food, Beverage and Tobacco Workers of Pakistan, which was held in Karachi 21 November 2005, **Mehak Butt** was elected vice chairperson. Two other sisters were elected to Executive Committee: one as first vice president (out of four) and one as first Assistant Secretary (out of four) There is also a seat reserved for the Secretary of Women Affairs. With 21% women on the Executive Board it is probably the highest representation of women in an industry federation in Pakistan.

The promotion of women's participation in trade unions has been one of the objectives within an IUF organizing project in Pakistan. Hopefully, other unions will soon follow the example of the new food federation.

Sweden

With the election of **Eva Karlsson** as second vice-president by the union congress in May 2005, the Swedish Food Workers' union has, for the first time in its 110 years' history, a woman in its top leadership.

The Congress also amended the rules to include a feminist perspective. The 1 article of the rules now stipulates that the "union shall safeguard the interests of its members in the labour market and in society from a socialist and feminist basic view". The rules change was only adopted after a long and heated debate, with the new president, Hans-Olof Nilsson, as one of its strongest advocates. He pleaded that it was necessary to supplement the current analysis of society with an analysis of gender power. "I cannot accept that men always are superior to women regardless what position they have in society. It is important that we have a policy to tackle this", Nilsson concluded.

Birgitta Kihlberg, who was the first woman president of the Swedish Hotel Workers' Union, retired at the *HRF* Congress in May 2005. Another woman, **Ella Niia**, who previously held a position as national officer in charge of negotiations, succeeded her.

ICFTU Equality Department

Elsa Ramos, who has led the ICFTU Equality Department since 1998, has taken up a position as a senior specialist for workers at the ILO regional office in Bangkok. Her successor at the ICFTU is sister **Kamalam**, who has a long experience of working with gender and equality issues on a national, regional and international level.

An interview with Kamalam can be found on the ICFTU web site (www.icftu.org).

Organizing campaigns in West Africa

A women's seminar grouping representatives from affiliates in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger was held in Bamako, Mali, 4-9 July. In addition to training sessions in communication and bargaining skills, participants exchanged experiences on organizing and recruitment of women workers.

Each national delegation developed an activity plan for 2005/2006 for recruitment and organizing, and so far the implementation of these plans have given the following results:

In Burkina Faso, three conferences were held in August and October on the theme "Women, Environment and Health". The conferences attracted large audiences and good press coverage. In conjunction with the conferences, 40 new women members were recruited.

In the beginning of January 2006, the five IUF affiliates in Burkina Faso established a joint IUF Women's Committee.

In Mali, the activities organized by the Women's Committee and the IUF project co-ordination, also related to health and safety and environment issues that are important for women both from a professional and a community point of view (prevention of malaria, desertification). Furthermore, the union carried out a membership census and recruitment campaign in the capital and in two regions at the end of July. The ten-day campaign resulted in 195 new members, whereof 75 women. Study circle leaders, who have been trained in the ongoing IUF

project, assisted local union committees to organize meetings, distribute leaflets, posters and questionnaires in the work places. Local radios were used to reinforce the impact.

In Niger, women leaders and members of the national IUF Women's Committee expanded the recruitment and organizing campaign initiated in the capital in 2004. During two weeks in August 2005, women's teams travelled in four regions where they met with the local unions, visited work places and organized meetings with women workers. A special cloth with the logo of the IUF and the affiliates and the slogan "Women for unions, unions for women" was distributed to the local activists. The August campaign resulted in 173 new women members being recruited.

Safe work - good food

Since the last IUF Congress, Health and Safety has been one of the top priorities for the IUF Women's Committee. Repetitive strain injuries, RSI, constitute one of the biggest hazards for women in the food chain. Two of the IUF Latin American projects that have been developed with the support of the Swedish sister unions focus on RSI. In the framework of this project co-operation, two journalists from the Swedish Food Workers Magazine, Mål & Medel, visited Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Here below you can read their stories:

RSI makes life a misery

Greater awareness of occupational injuries in Latin America • New law comes into force in Argentina

The ever-increasing pace of working life is becoming a global scourge. The role of the unions in fighting this is more important than ever, not least in spreading awareness of the links between stress and the constant pain suffered by many. In Argentina, a union campaign has led to a law recognising RSI as an occupational injury.

[From Mål & Medel: 11/2005] We turn off the motorway about half an hour's drive from central Buenos Aires. The buildings

are smaller and more run-down. Crammed in between the apartment blocks is the La Nirva factory, a tiled construction that looks relatively new, although in fact it's 35 years old.

Here they make *alfajones*, a type of round biscuit coated in either white or brown glaze. This Argentine speciality is made at about 10 factories, of which this is one of the largest.

The premises are relatively light with high ceilings, but the noise is terrible. Only a very few of the machines are modern, most look as if they have been in use for a good while.

A total of 130 people work here on either the day shift or the evening shift. About 80 percent of them are women. The factory also employs about 160 seasonal workers during the winter, when it sells most *alfajones* – all for domestic consumption; there is no export market. The work they do on the two parallel production lines is manual and strikingly monotonous. The tempo is fairly high. This is work, which in time will lead to repetitive strain injuries.

It is now five years since these injuries came to the attention of the Argentine trade union movement. And in June 2004, Argentina became the first country in South America to adopt legislation recognising RSI as a professional disease.

Silvia Villaverde, who joins us on the visit to La Nirva, has been highly active in this campaign to have RSI recognised. She is an elected representative of the FAOPCHPyA union, which organises the workers at La Nirva, and also chairs the women's committee of the IUF.

Clear connection

Silvia describes how the work began in 2000 at a conference in the province of Cordoba, organised by the IUF's regional office in Latin America. One of the guest speakers was Dr Roberto Ruiz, who shared his insights into RSI and what happens to people given monotonous, repetitive jobs under stressful conditions.

"The fact that RSI was caused by work was news to us in Argentina. We did not realise there was such a clear connection, before that we had thought in terms of stretched tendons and so on," she says.

When the union representatives returned to Buenos Aires, they began to discuss how they would take this further. All of them worked in industries where repetitive work was common. They discussed the issue both with the regional office of the IUF and with representatives of CASIA, the umbrella organisation of unions in the Argentine food sector.

“They encouraged us to get to grips with the issue and that’s how we came to set up Grupo LER Argentina (LER is the Spanish abbreviation for Lesión por Esfuerzo Repetitivo, RSI).

Gabriella takes a stand

An information campaign to raise awareness of the problem was started. Attending one of the meetings was Gabriella Caro from the packaging line at La Nirva.

“It was when the experts said that they often talked about RSI without hearing anything from those afflicted that Gabriella Caro first spoke. She stood up and said that she was a sufferer, that she started work when she was 18 and was now 23. She recounted how the constant pain she was in had changed her entire life. She couldn’t even hug her fiancé, Silvia said:

“That was brave. Before then, we hadn’t heard anyone discussing his or her problems. And after Gabriella, several people in the audience began to speak. This was a big step for many. Owing up to suffering from RSI is something a lot of people will avoid.”

Gabriella Caro then became active in the work to increase awareness among both employers and colleagues on how to prevent the occurrence of RSI. A number of steps have been taken, including an increased level of task rotation and a slightly slower speed on the production line.

These are important changes, although the workers are still wearing themselves out.

Among the youngest employees at the factor is Vanina Becorta, 21, who is working flat out packing biscuits. With a familiarity born of routine she takes one pile at a time. She can’t stop work to talk

to us, but we manage to snatch a few words.

Vanina has worked at the factory for almost two years. She works nine hours a day, between 6 a.m. and 3 p.m. She says they swap tasks every hour – more frequently than in the past.

“I haven’t felt any pain yet,” she says, “but I know many people here who have problems.”

You can tell that this is a frequent topic of conversation at the factory. This is a major success – a lot of energy has been devoted to spreading information on the subject.

But at the beginning it was an uphill struggle for Grupo LER, Silvia Villaverde says. They had to battle long and hard to get any understanding of the problem. Many employers and doctors were reluctant to admit the existence of RSI in Argentina – it was a Brazilian problem, they said. Another common reaction was to maintain that the pains the workers were reporting had psychological roots, and that this was to do with home or social life.

Things were looking really bleak by the spring of 2003, but a turning point came at the end of March when working conditions at a the national car component producer Yazaki came to public attention. Young female workers were carrying out identical tasks 1,000 times a day. If someone couldn’t keep up, a deafening alarm sounded until the person who was falling behind got back up to speed.

These inhumane working conditions meant that 20 female employees between 22 and 30 years of age incurred such serious injuries that they were unable to continue working. In effect, they were crippled by their work. Not only could the women no longer work, they could not accomplish even the simplest of everyday tasks in the home.

Workplace conditions in focus

The story was splashed in the mass media, and the dreadful conditions also became the subject of a court case.

“This came as a terrible shock to society at large,” Silvia Villaverde says.

Public interest was aroused, and after this the work of Grupo LER became much easier.

“That was great. Before then, we were beginning to think that we would never get anywhere. The group held so many meetings, so much time passed and we had tried so hard to get in contact with those responsible.”

And things became even easier after Dr Carlos Tomada was appointed Labour Market Minister. Tomada had a good understanding of the problem, and was a well-known name in the trade union movement. Grupo LER was given a positive reception and had no problems gaining acceptance for their demands.

“We now have a law that recognises RSI as a professional disease, but we now need to get this message out there. Another challenge will be to work in a preventive way to stop these injuries from occurring,” Silvia says.

And that’s what is really needed. RSI is now the biggest occupational environment problem in industrialised countries. Women are hit hardest – they are the ones who carry out monotonous jobs under stressful working conditions with frequent repetitive tasks. These are the least valued and thus the worst paid jobs.

Painkillers

And at La Nirva, women are still wearing themselves out despite the improvements that have been made. Further down the workshop floor in the packaging department, I encounter 29-year-old Gabriella Beatriz Sanabria, packing small red biscuit packets into white cartons. It’s a rapid process, even though the speed of the production line has been reduced.

She is one of those who are in a great deal of pain. But then she’s been working here for eight years.

“I have pains in both my arms. When things get really bad I take painkillers,” she said.

There is a scar on her right wrist – she has had an operation in an attempt to alleviate the pain. But it hasn’t helped.

“I’ve been to see the doctor but he says he can’t do anything. He encouraged me to

go back to work,” she says with a smile of resignation.

Alongside the pain she has lost strength in her arms and hands, resulting in a variety of problems in her everyday life. She lives alone, without any real interests. She mostly sleeps in her spare time, she says.

The new law means some degree of security. If you have to seek help more than three times in the same year for this type of problem it is counted as an occupational injury, and the patient has the right to both medication and sick pay.

Medical help

Valeria Lopez is the same age as Gabriella Beatriz Sanabria, and has worked for just as long. She works in packaging on the other line. The problems are the same.

“It started with problems in my shoulders, then in my arms, and now the pain has reached my wrists.”

Valeria is married but has no children. She describes how the pain is with her whatever she does; not only here at the factory but at home too. It might be when she’s cleaning or doing the washing up, and brushing her hair or her teeth are also a source of pain.

She has seen a doctor but was told only that it is difficult to do anything when she has been suffering for so long. There are no other types of job at the factory. Even though they rotate the tasks, it’s really the same thing all day long.

“The only alternative for me is to change jobs, but that’s not easy when there are no other jobs to be had.”

Note: FAOPCHPyA, the union that the La Nirva workers belong to, stands for Federación Argentina Obreros Pasteleros, Confiteros, Heladeros, Pizzeros y Alfajoreros. The union organises workers in bakeries, patisseries, pizzerias and fast food restaurants throughout Argentina. It has about 30,000 members.

Malin Klingzell-Brulín

The chair of the IUF Women's Committee honoured on 8 March

Silvia Villaverde, FAOPCHPyA, Argentina, and president of the IUF Women's Committee, received the Women Workers'

Silver Rose (Rosa de Plata a la Mujer Trabajadora) on 8 March at a ceremony in the senate. The Silver Rose is conferred by the staff union of the Argentinean parliament to women who have promoted women worker's interests in an outstanding way. Silvia's successful struggle to get RSI recognized as a professional disease is one of the main reasons for this distinction.

The price of cheap chicken

Brazilian trade unions attack the high work pace in the export industry

Her hand has stiffened into a grotesque shape. Sara Odete Plake has to learn to use her left hand instead. To eat lunch she needs help with everything, help with getting the food from the buffet, help with cutting up the meat, everything is a problem.

[From Mål & Medel, December 2005]

After lunch, she visits the union office in the city of Encantado for a talk. Sara is one of many people with occupational injuries who is testifying about her employer's treatment. She used to work at the chicken factory Penasul Alimentos.

"I worked there for six months," she says. "I was in pain but carried on working. When I asked the supervisor about it he said it was normal. People usually got sore in the beginning, but they got used to it."

Her hand became inflamed, but she continued working anyway, forcing herself to carry on. For two months she worked like that, with her hand shaped like a claw.

When she went to the company doctor he said her fingers were broken. Later, another doctor who was not employed by the company told her they weren't broken at all. It was a specialist in Porto Alegre who x-rayed her arm and hand.

She has practically no circulation in it and it feels cold.

No help from the "yellow" trade union

In order to get compensation for her occupational injury she needed a certificate from the company, but she didn't dare ask for one, and the yellow

(company-affiliated) trade union did not offer any help.

Sara was fired and now has to live on social security. At home she has three daughters, aged 6, 14 and 18. She has to take painkillers to get to sleep and can only lie on her side, which keeps going numb. She is 41 years old.

The meeting with Sara and other people with occupational injuries is part of a campaign initiated by the Brazilian food industry workers' union, Contac, with the aim of introducing a regulation of the work pace in the Brazilian chicken industry.

Together with Contac's chairman, Siderlei de Oliveira, I am travelling round Rio Grande do Sul to visit the industrial townships that depend on chicken exports for their income.

The factory where Sara worked is in the small town of Roca Sales. It is situated in the middle of town, in an old, dilapidated building. A Maersk Sealand container truck is parked outside. The actual building does not have a factory logo. Trucks bearing the previous company name, Pena Branca, drive in and out.

I have tried to get an interview with the company management of Penasul, but they don't want to talk to me.

Three years ago, the American major food corporation OSI Group bought the Brazilian company, which has a fully integrated production, from fodder production and chicken breeding, to culling, quartering and refining. Exports go to more than 30 countries, including Sweden.

Global workshop for farming

In the past decade, chicken production in Brazil has rocketed. Transnational companies have bought up the domestic industry, expanded it, invested in facilities and turned it into the world leader in the field.

Brazil is now to farming what China is to manufacturing: a global workshop. The country has enormous expanses of arable land for meat and fodder production, a near-perfect climate and cheap labour.

2.5 million Brazilians are employed in chicken production.

Sara comes with us in the car. She lives ten kilometres outside Roca Sales, along the road to Porto Alegre.

“One third of my work mates have RSI,” she tells us. She relates how her immediate boss helped her a little when she was injured, but not the site manager; he did nothing.

One third of the 850 workers, i.e. nearly 300 people in that one factory that exports chicken to Sweden, have injuries caused by the high work pace. The chicken concerned is served in Swedish lunch restaurants. It is marketed by ICA Meny and is imported by the farmer-owned company Annerstedt.

“I love fishing,” says Sara, “but I can’t do that any more, with just one hand. I can’t get the maggot on the hook.”

Nevertheless, she has not lost hope. If she gets the right help she might be able to use her left hand more, and could even learn to write with it. That is her hope.

Meeting with the UN Commission

Siderlei de Oliveira’s mobile rings and he parks along the curb. The call is from a Member of Parliament in Brasilia, Luci Choinacki, who says she is organising a meeting in the capital to discuss the problem of work pace and occupational injuries among women with the UN Commission on human rights in the workplace.

“You’ll have to go to Brasilia,” Siderlei tells Sara, who is in the back seat.

“Me?” she asks. “Will I have to go by coach? It’s a long way.”

“No, no” says Siderlei. “You can go by plane. You don’t have to take the coach all the way.”

Brazil is a vast country, covering half of South America, and with a population of 175 million. It is a republic, and the president is Lula, who comes from the Workers’ Party, PT, and was formerly a trade union leader.

At this point there is potential for change. Siderlei has been talking to ministers in Brasilia. He has mustered support from the national organisation CUT for the campaign to introduce work pace regulations. If everything goes according

to plan the campaign will result in a large meeting in the capital with 2,000 chicken workers from all over the country.

Their principal demand will be for national work pace regulations.

European immigrants

The landscape is green and billowing and looks like Europe. The majority of the population in this region comes originally from Italy and Germany. They still speak their original languages at home.

The French food giant Doux has a huge chicken factory with 2,000 employees in Montenegro.

Some 100 workers, mostly women, turn up at the meeting organised in the city by the food workers’ union. Asked if anyone has repetitive strain injuries, nearly everyone puts their hand up.

A lawyer from the national union CUT is there to inform them of the possibility of going to court with their claims.

The high work pace is a serious problem, along with the long working hours. The women say that they often have to work much more than eight hours. Their shifts sometimes last for 12-13 hours.

They are angry when they show us scars from unsuccessful surgery to restore limb mobility. Their stories are similar to Sara’s. They have also been sacked without any documentation of their injuries and now have to live on social welfare.

Inflammation spreads

One woman, Pedrinha Pereira, has muscular inflammations in her arms and shoulders that have spread down into her leg so that she can hardly walk.

How can the injuries grow this serious? Roberto Ruiz, MD and expert on RSI, who has been consulted by the global union IUF, says that it is due to the company doctors. Instead of putting people on sick leave, they prescribe painkillers and tell them to go back to work. In that way, the injuries gradually get worse, until they have reached a stage where they become chronic and incurable. Many of the women I meet have injuries of this kind.

In Serrafina Corrêa, a town with 3,000 inhabitants, the large Brazilian chicken company Perdigao has a plant with 2,000 employees.

Workers are bussed in from the surrounding countryside. The union has documented that 20 per cent of the town population suffers from RSI.

Along the long production line workers cut up the chickens by hand.

“The line sets the work pace,” José Modelski and Geni Dalla Rosa, two of the leaders of the food workers’ union, explain. “We prepare chicken breasts for export. Those who can’t keep up get a warning. Three warnings, and you’re liable to get fired. You simply have to work as fast as the belt is moving.”

Economic dependence

In the larger town of Marau, with a population of 35,000, half the economy depends on Perdigao, and union president Clovis Spenassto receives us and shows us around the town after a meeting with some 40 women suffering from RSI.

There are two sides to the chicken industry. One is all these injured women, whose lives are completely ruined by the inhuman working conditions.

The other is the obvious prosperity that followed in the wake of the chicken export industry. Co-operative housing for workers has been built on the hillsides in Marau. The union runs a school and dental and medical health services. The company has built a big indoor arena where the union female football team played in a tournament the previous weekend.

The fact that Perdigao has been certified for export of chicken to Sweden is something the local management mentions proudly when I visit their offices.

But they refuse to acknowledge any problems to do with women with work-related RSI or the work pace.

“We have job rotation and exercise during breaks, and those who nevertheless experience problems are moved to other tasks,” says the director, Milvo Mittanack.

That’s as far as they can get with Perdigao, with whom the union

representatives feel they have a working dialogue.

Siderlei de Oliveira comments that what they need are national regulations concerning the work pace throughout Brazil, not just in the individual companies. That is what the campaign is striving for.

In order to succeed, consumers need to become more aware and trade unions more supportive in the countries that import the chicken.

Gunnar Brulin

Women and environment - Burkina Faso

In line with the organizing and recruitment plan for women workers established by the five IUF affiliates in Burkina Faso, two conferences were held on the theme “Women and Environment”, one in the capital Ouagadougou and one in Bobo Dioulasso in the southern part of the country.

They focused on the desertification, which is progressing in the Sahel countries. Among its adverse effects are impoverishment of the people, food insecurity, an increase in uncontrolled migration, phenomena linked with climate change and the loss of bio-diversity.

These consequences have affected women much harder than men, especially in rural areas.

Illustrations of the work of women in the fight against desertification include agro-forestry practices, water and soil conservation, deferred grazing, the popularization of energy saving techniques (improved hearths, solar ovens, etc.), product processing (shea butter, soumbala, various drinks, etc.), and improvements in bee keeping.

The impact of actions by women in the fight against desertification has resulted in a visible improvement in the living conditions of women, an intellectual awakening, the struggle against poverty through increased revenues and improved financial autonomy, and finally the development of partnerships.

The difficulties and constraints include the continuing degradation of resources, the

lack or insufficient sources of water, the land issue, overworking, illiteracy and insufficient technical and organisational capacity, the persistence of poverty and the weight of social and cultural traditions.

The lessons learned include the participation of women in managing the environment, which is real but limited by constraints.

Social Forum in Bamako

The president of the IUF Women's Committee in Mali, Sister Aïssatou Soumaré, represented the IUF, together with the IUF co-ordinator, Brother Bréhima Diarra at the Social Forum that took place in Bamako, Mali, 19-23 January 2006.

They participated in a number of workshops organized by Femnet - a communication network of African women - such as:

Feminism in Africa - ideology and practice in the African movement

Integration, the neoliberal world order and militarism: Autonomy and choices of African women

Follow up to the millennium commitments +5

but also by "*Education without borders*" which highlighted the increasing poverty among women and their low participation in public life in spite of several programs trying to redress the situation. The IUF delegation also attended the conference on decent work that was organized at the University of Badalabougou in Cupertino with ICFTU and the WCL.

A video from the Social Forum has been prepared by Sister Soumaré.

Women activists in Argentina and Uruguay

[From Mål & Medel November/2005]

Daisy Tourné, MP in Uruguay

"That's excellent," says Daisy Tourné when she hears that the Swedish Food Workers' Union has added feminism to its statutes.

We are sitting in her office in the parliamentary building in Montevideo, the

capital of Uruguay. Daisy Tourné is an MP for the socialist party that is part of the Broad Front, a left-party coalition that took over government after winning the latest election.

Daisy Tourné has a background in the trade union movement. She was the chairman of the teachers' union.

During the military dictatorship, 1973-1985, when union activities were banned, she had close contacts with the IUF, and also with the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, and the Swedish Social Democratic Party.

The portrait of Olof Palme fits in well in the bookcase.

She is involved in many different causes, especially women's rights issues. She is in favour of gender quotas and would not have been in the position she is in today if the Socialist Party hadn't decided to give precedence to more women.

"The result was excellent. It forced men to think in new ways and in that way they discovered qualified women in their own environment whom they had previously overlooked."

She has been engaged in three vital battles as an MP. She has fought for a law to prevent domestic violence, a law to increase female representation in politics and a law that allows abortion, among other things.

The last two she still has not managed to introduce. Male opposition has been too strong, she confirms. It doesn't help that the women MPs have joined forces to promote issues that are essential to gender equality.

Female representation in parliament is scandalously low. Out of 99 MPs only eleven are women, out of 31 senators only four are women. The bill advocating more female representation, which was not passed, would have entailed that no sex should represent more than 60 per cent.

"We haven't given up, and the issue of increased female representation will be brought up again as soon as we have the opportunity," she adds.

This also goes for free abortion. The bill has been brought before parliament and

was passed by the first chamber but not by the second chamber. This struggle has received a lot of press coverage since it is the first time in Latin America that a bill advocating free abortion has received such strong support.

Elena Fonseca, early feminist

There are several women's organisations in Uruguay that are promoting this issue. One of these is **Cotidiano Mujer**, Spanish for Everyday Woman. The organisation was started in August 1985, and is among the oldest women's movements in Uruguay.

"We eventually defined ourselves as feminists. That was a big step in those days. This wasn't something you proclaimed too loudly. It was unusual," says Elena Fonseca, one of the founders, and continues:

"We concentrated on the struggle for human rights. That meant that we didn't just engage in women's issues but all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, race, sexual preferences or creed."

Elena Fonseca is 74, but that's hard to believe. She seems so much younger, both with regard to appearance and behaviour. She says herself that she is not a typical Uruguayan woman. Married early, had six children, was a housewife for many years, lived here and there, since her husband was a diplomat.

She got involved in women's rights thanks to the French author Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*.

"It felt like I could have written that book myself, because everything she wrote about was things I had been thinking."

The organisation *Cotidiano Mujer* meets in a beautiful old house in central Montevideo. The posters on the walls tell of the women's issues they have championed over the years. And so do the piles of magazines on the table in the middle of the room, especially the ones with the same name as the organisation. This was the first feminist magazine in Uruguay, and one of the first in Latin America.

Elena Fonseca has also been broadcasting an hour-long radio show every weekday over the past 12 years.

"I comment on current events in society. I keep informed through letters from listeners and by reading international newspapers. Often they deal with issues that our domestic media don't write about."

Graciela Camaño, MP in Argentina

The same is true in Sweden. Few people here would know that in the early 1990s Argentina was the first nation in the world to introduce a law on **gender quota for political posts**.

"When we voted on this bill, 14 out of 257 MPs were women. Now we are 80 women," says Graciela Camaño, an MP for Partido Justicialista, which means that she is a Peronist.

Graciela meets me in her office high up in the parliamentary building in Buenos Aires. Although the number of female MPs has gone up, she is far from pleased with the way the law has been modified over the years. In her view, it has been watered down.

She is much happier with the law she herself initiated, which introduced **gender quotas for trade union representation** – an issue she feels strongly about, since she has a background as a trade union activist (in the hotel workers' union, UTGHRA). She got what she wanted. The law was adopted in 2002.

At the time, she was already an MP, but she was made labour market minister when the new law was implemented. She says it was hard going, and that the quota annoyed many people. The male trade union leaders were especially avid in their opposition. And a lot remains to be done. Graciela wants trade unions to develop a strategy to encourage women to get more involved in defending their rights.

"The top priority is the wage issue, that women earn less than men."

She concedes that laws and CBAs state that women and men should get equal pay, but the trade unions can't just sit back and be satisfied with this. Because there are still great inequalities between men and women.

"That's why it's so important that women get involved in the unions. The union doesn't consist of laws but of union struggles."

Carolina Llanos, equality officer UATRE

That's something Carolina Llanos agrees with, being in charge of women's issues at UATRE, the agricultural workers' union in Argentina, with some 200,000 members of which 30,000 are women. Carolina Llanos is the organisation's female network officer. A network that has grown rapidly over the past year. The purpose is to organise women and involve them in trade union activities. One vital issue is fighting illiteracy.

She reports that the fight for equality is quite successful within their own organisation, where there is male support for women's issues, whereas progress within CASIA, an umbrella organisation for Argentinean food workers' unions, is much slower. Apart from Carolina Llanos, all the trade union leaders in CASIA are men. This needs to change.

Silvia Villaverde, chair of the IUF Women's Committee

She is strongly backed by Silvia Villaverde, president of the IUF's women's committee and in charge of women's issues within the organisation FAOPCHPyA.

Together, they are fighting to get more women participation. The new law on gender quotas could help them achieve their aim.

"We'll know how effective the new law is when the time comes to compile the election lists for new union representatives," says Silvia Villaverde.

Currently, there are no women among the negotiators for the collective agreements.

"They claim it's hard to find women."

The construction workers' union, which hardly has any female members, may have problems, but not the other unions, according to Silvia Villaverde.

Malin Klinzell-Brulin

Pay equity - NECIC

The working group that has been set up to deal with pay equity within the Nestlé European Council for Information and Consultation, NECIC, met regularly in

2005. After having agreed upon the methodology, wage mapping started in five countries: France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The first results of the mapping clearly confirm that there are wage differences between men and women that cannot be justified. In France, the wage gap at the Nestlé headquarters is even bigger (37%) than the national average (20%).

Other aspects that are important to look at are the representation of men and women in various job categories and the job promotion for women workers.

The study conducted by the Swiss affiliate, UNIA, shows the relatively rapid promotion of male workers, while the majority of women workers are stuck in the lowest category.

Activity plans accompanied by suggested measures to deal with the inequalities should be presented at the next NECIC meeting, and progress reports should be made at each meeting.

ILO/PSI/GUF Discussion Forum on Pay Equity

The fourth Pay Equity Forum took place on 16 February 2006. Presentations were made on:

Recent trends in the application of ILO Convention 100,

Cost benefit analysis of pay equity: Issues and challenges;

Wage inequity by sex and occupation

Promoting pay equity in the tourism sector in Portugal

Update on PSI Pay equity campaign

The ILO will publish a *manual on Convention 100, Equal remuneration*, in June. National *fact sheets on Equal remuneration* has started to be produced and are so far available with regard to Chile, Poland, Sweden and the UK. The study that professor Marie-Thérèse Chcicha from the University of Montreal has done on Cost benefit of pay equity will be published in March. At the end of 2006, she will publish a *Comparison of job evaluation methods* and a *Guide to evaluation and wage comparison*.

Unions for women, Women for unions

**For more information about the campaign, please go to www.icftu.org*

More articles on Women Workers can be found on the web sites of IUF regional offices:

Asia and the Pacific:
www.asianfoodworker.net

Latin America:
www.rel-uita.org

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