

# Congress Report for the Period 2014 - 2018

## ITUC Frontlines and Priorities

**Region:** ITUC Asia Pacific

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### Highlights: 2014 - 2018

The paying membership of the ITUC - Asia Pacific stands at 23,345,975 of 59 affiliates in 34 countries and territories. The effective membership is over 60 million.

ITUC-AP Priorities of Action are set by the ITUC-AP Regional General Council on the basis of the ITUC priorities and the ITUC-AP Regional Conference Decisions. The ITUC-AP Action Plan and the Calendar of Events, organised and participated by the ITUC-AP are available on request made to [gs@ituc-ap.org](mailto:gs@ituc-ap.org).

Support to affiliates in defending and promoting Workers' Rights, and realising Decent Work continues. Outline reports of activities are uploaded on the ITUC - Asia Pacific Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/ITUC-Asia-Pacific-459205360928675/](https://www.facebook.com/ITUC-Asia-Pacific-459205360928675/).

The ITUC-AP has also revamped its homepage at: <https://www.ituc-ap.org/>.

### Frontlines: 2014 - 2018

#### Climate Justice and Industrial Transformation

The ITUC-AP increased its engagements in and supports for actions against climate change. This is a response to the fact that adverse impacts of climate change on social and economic conditions, including employment and the livelihoods of working people, in Asia and the Pacific has been significantly intensified.

The ITUC-AP organised regional activities, in collaboration with the ITUC, in order to strengthen the understanding of workers and trade unions on the Paris Agreement and ongoing negotiations within UNFCCC, and to incorporate 'Just Transition' into trade union policy and action at all levels. It was also facilitated to share best practices and to increase solidarity among affiliates.

Further, 'Just Transition' was incorporated into various activities related to the Decent Work Agenda, especially on social dialogue and social protection, as well as on the 2030 Agenda and the Future of Work Initiative.

#### Corporate Power in Supply Chains

Global supply chains and multinational corporations are key drivers of globalisation. In the Asia Pacific region also, they are powerful entities who can control and dictate policy and regulations. A majority of production and services are dependent on these enterprises. Poverty wages and insecure or precarious work, in all too often unsafe working conditions, are the characteristics of supply chains. One of the major causes of widening inequality is the spread of supply chains that foster increasing numbers of the working poor and as well as economic stagnation. The decline in workers' rights, wages and secure work are closely

linked to the rise in corporate power. Under the slogan of “End Corporate Greed”, unions are organising for minimum wages and collective bargaining, secure and safe employment relationships, formalising informal work in supply chains, purging supply chain slavery and universal social protection.

The ITUC-AP has organised several activities on workers’ rights in global supply chains and multinational corporations. Regional workshops were held to develop action plans for protecting and promoting workers’ rights in supply chains with emphasis on organising. The ITUC-AP extended solidarity support to organising initiatives within supply chains. The ITUC-AP was involved in instances of industrial disputes by bringing together unions in the host and origin countries. Organising workers in the supply chains is gaining momentum.

### **Eliminating Slavery**

Along with migration there is an alarming increase in human trafficking and slavery which is a distressing emerging issue, closely linked to migration. Millions of workers from the region are working under conditions of modern slavery. The acute desperation of people to find a livelihood leads to human trafficking and slavery. The region witnessed thousands of workers from Bangladesh and Myanmar left high and dry in the Andaman sea. Finally, they ended up in make shift camps with deplorable conditions. Thousands of migrants are fleeing ethnic persecution in some countries in the region. The Khafala system in Gulf countries, coupled with requirements for exit permits, traps large numbers of workers in slavery.

The ITUC-AP has been organising regional workshops on human trafficking, forced labour and slavery to draw the attention of trade unions to the existence of modern-day slavery in various forms. We have also been taking up cases of slavery and forced labour with the authorities concerned.

## **Priorities: 2014 - 2018**

### **Countries at Risk**

Workers in the Asia-Pacific region face serious repression due to their trade union activities including dismissal, harassment, threats and discrimination. Trade unionists in some countries were arrested, often in connection with protests and strikes. In Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and South Korea, where the number of strikes continued to increase, protests were often violently dispersed by riot police and hired thugs. The difficulties to form a union are further aggravated by the fact that workers who try to organise are commonly reprimanded. The authorities in several countries also have the power to unilaterally end a strike. Employers also try to bust existing unions in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines. Labour laws in many of the region’s countries are also a cause of concern, as trade unions and their members are often not adequately protected.

The ITUC-AP coordinated solidarity actions and international campaigns and supported the affiliates in preparing their input to the ILO supervisory mechanism.

### **Global Coherence and Development**

Development cooperation has been one of the pillars of the Asia Pacific regional organisation. International solidarity assistance helps trade unions in developing countries to strengthen their capacity to meet the challenges and solve the problems through shared experiences, knowledge, resources, values and principles. Development cooperation aims at promoting a coherent global network and shared ownership of development both at

bilateral and multilateral levels within the trade union players. There is need for international organisations and governments, trade unions and other stakeholders of other countries to jointly work for development. With a view to give impetus to trade union advocacy and capacity in this domain, the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN) was created. The ITUC-AP is part of the global network. In line with the TUDCN structure, we have established the Asia Pacific Trade Union Development Cooperation network. ITUC-AP regularly participates in the TUDCN meetings as well as in multi-stakeholder platforms such as like EC Platform for Development, CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness and Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. Our affiliates also have space in these organisations.

The annual ITUC-AP Coordination meeting with Global Union Federations (GUFs) and Trade Union Solidarity Support Organisations (TUSSOs) is held regularly. This provides an opportunity to exchange best practice, coordinating activities and building common strategies among organisations active in the region through the ITUC-AP and promote solidarity support to the ITUC-AP affiliates.

The ITUC-AP continued its dialogue with the Asia Development Bank (ADB) at the regional and national levels to advocate sustainable and inclusive development by the increase in ADB's investment in social infrastructure while promoting strong labour market institutions and the Decent Work Agenda as core to achieving inclusive development. The ITUC-AP was also actively involved in consultations on ADB's new long-term strategy, 'Strategy 2030'.

### **Global Governance of Migration**

The number of people who work and live in countries outside their country of birth is expected to grow for several reasons including population growth, poverty and economic under-development, alarmingly increases in unemployment, rising inequality within and between countries, increasing connectivity, trade, demographic imbalances and climate change. Several activities on migrant labour were undertaken during the period. These include regional workshops, sub-regional activities and national programmes. The ITUC-AP is encouraging and facilitating partnership agreements between unions in origin and destination countries. After the adoption of ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers, several activities were undertaken to familiarise actors and implement changes for those most neglected and exploited segments of working population. Many unions are now seriously engaged in organising migrant workers both in origin and destination countries. The ITUC-AP has facilitated the setting up of a Migrant Resource Centre in Amman, Jordan, in partnership with the SARTUC, the ASEAN TUC and the Arab TUC.

Union movement has now recognised the role of trade unions in improving the lot of migrant workers. Many of them have established migrant labour desks in their offices to cater specifically to the needs of migrant workers. Several partnership agreements have been signed between unions in origin and destination countries.

In a welcome development the Qatar government abolished the Khafala system in August 2018, including the need for an exit permit to leave the country. This is a victory for the trade union movement. But Khafala system continues in other Gulf countries. Hence, we will have to continue our campaign for abolition of these inhuman systems wherever they exist. The establishment of the Migrant Resource Centre is a concrete initiative by the union movement to provide information services to empower vulnerable migrant labour, particularly migrant domestic workers and extend legal assistance to them.

## Count Us In!

Women's participation and leadership in trade unions in the region started slow but gradually picked up the pace. With a combination of policy support, campaigning and targeted capacity building and awareness programmes, visible progress has been made in the following:

**Mainstreaming gender in affiliates' programmes, policies, operations and practices through cooperation with national gender equality units / bodies / committees / focal points; promoting the use of mainstreaming tools, and specific capacity building, policy and awareness-raising activities:**

- *produced the 2015 edition of ITUC-AP Workplace Gender Equality and Pay Equity Verification Manual;*
- *contributed to building affiliates' capacity to mainstream, track and assess progress in gender equality through participatory gender audit training using the ITUC-AP manual;*
- *increased attention, support and resources devoted to gender equality both at the regional and national levels as evidenced by the variety and continuity of gender equality-focused programmes, projects and initiatives;*
- *gender equality related events are getting "viral" on the ITUC-AP social media page indicating renewed interest and attention on women's rights and gender equality. Starting with just an average 200 coverage in 2014, articles now reach a larger audience up to an average of 1000 and as high as over 4,000 hits.*

**Accelerating women's equal participation and leadership in unions and elsewhere and the ITUC-AP's broad areas of work, through targeted efforts to include women participants and gender issues into mainstream programmes and other similar activities:**

- *increased participation of women in the ITUC-AP programmes at all levels (from just 20% in 2014 to 39% in 2018 while peaking at 41% in 2015);*
- *expanded the network of supporters of gender equality within the ITUC-AP and affiliates by ensuring men's participation in gender equality-specific programmes;*
- *assisted affiliates with fine tuning their action plans to achieve the goals of the Count Us In! campaign;*
- *12 percentage points increase in the average representation rate of women in affiliates' highest decision-making bodies (24.9% in 2017 vs. 12.1% in 2012)<sup>1</sup>;*
- *collaborated on a project proposal which successfully acquired funding to carry out a three-year (2019 - 2021) project fostering structures and activities that will mainstream the participation and leadership of women and youth in trade unions in ASEAN in partnership with ASEAN Trade Union Council (ASEAN TUC).*

## Domestic Workers

ITUC-AP, working with partners, supports affiliates in securing rights and decent work for domestic workers. Our key contributions are the following:

- *supported activities of affiliates to monitor implementation of domestic workers-related laws and policies and raise the profile of domestic workers*
- *mobilised affiliates' engagement in several calls for action*

<sup>1</sup> 2017 ITUC Gender Equality Survey - although the data is not entirely comparable, it does provide an indication that progress is being made

- *consolidated affiliates' position and agenda on improving rights and protection of domestic workers in law and practice*
- *advocated with governments on the importance and urgency of ratifying C189<sup>2</sup>*
- *contributed to the international knowledge base and support for evidence-informed union work on decent work for domestic workers*

## Organising

Organising all working people into free and democratic trade unions is the most important challenge facing the trade unions in all countries today. Organising and recruiting are the key to our future and the means to our very survival. A survey commissioned by the ITUC at the time of the last Congress showed that only 7% of working people are democratic independent trade union members. Few unions in the region represent more than 10% of their national workforce. We are also concerned at declining union membership. Declining membership is attributed to the hostility of governments or employers, often engaging in vicious union-busting campaigns to prevent workers, including in the public sector, from exercising their fundamental workers' rights. Many categories of employment, including the informal economy, migrant workers, EPZs are normally "non-union".

There are many countries which have failed to ratify the fundamental ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining. Even in countries that have ratified these conventions, they are not implemented effectively. Only 6% - 8% of workers in the region are covered by collective bargaining agreements. There is no substitute for trade unions. The ITUC-AP accords top priority in all areas of work to support the organising activities and capacities of trade unions including recruitment, obtaining recognition and the conclusion or strengthening of collective agreements, resulting in the strengthening of trade unions as mass organisations. We have several activities on organising at various levels. We are also actively participating in the ITUC Global Organising Academy.

## Other Regional Issues: 2014 - 2018

### Informal Economy

The informal economy continued to be one of the top priority areas of action during the period under review. As a majority of workers in the region work within the informal economy, several activities targeted it specifically. The union movement is striving to transition workers from the informal to the formal economy. This means either obtaining a formal job or formalizing existing work, with a secure contract, worker benefits, social protection and freedom of association and collective bargaining. Focus, of course, was on organising these workers into trade unions. Hence, the emphasis on collective bargaining. We have also been facilitating affiliates in launching pilot projects on organising informal economy workers in identified areas/sectors. Field visits were undertaken in some selected areas where decent work deficits are rampant. The ILO Recommendation 204 of 2015 concerning the transition from the informal to the formal economy is a significant tool in this work.

Thanks to the vigorous campaign by affiliates led by the ITUC-AP, there is increased understanding and prioritization of issue linked to the informal economy among trade unions. Previous efforts to extent trade union coverage among informal economy had limited results.

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<sup>2</sup> The ITUC-AP Women's Committee sent a letter to Philippine President Aquino urging him to encourage leaders of AP countries to ratify C189. The Philippines' Department of Labour, in its reply, assured ITUC-AP that the leadership of President Aquino supports our advocacy towards encouraging leaders of other countries to adopt the principles of the ILO Convention 189.

Now however, many affiliates have taken effective steps towards more tangible results and this is paying off for the workers. Informal economy unions are now being accorded recognition by many governments and are included in the social dialogue process. Organizing campaigns have aimed to bring these workers under trade union protection. The ILO Recommendation 204 on formalization of informal economy is itself a product of joint efforts by trade unions. Furthermore in some countries, social protection systems are being extended to informal workers.

### **Occupational Health and Safety**

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is a fundamental human and workers' right, which is clearly recognized in international instruments. Also, OHS is an integral part of social and national development. Therefore, along the resolution on "Better OHS Standards for Just Society and Decent Work" adopted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ITUC-AP Regional Conference (August 2015, Kochi, India), we have made constant efforts together with affiliates to establish an OHS committee at all levels, to priorities OHS in trade union policies and actions. There has been an intensified effort to focus on OHS against vulnerable workers including women, youth and old workers.

As a decision made by the ITUC-AP Regional General Council (15<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 16 - 17 August 2017, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), the ITUC-AP OHS Network was established. Affiliates were requested to nominate two representatives, including at least one woman, who are responsible for OHS activities. Currently, 46 members of 27 organisations from 16 countries are on the list. The first Skype meeting was organised on 24 November 2017 discussing on the concept and roles of OHS Network and action plans.

As a result of the discussion at the first OHS Network meeting, the ITUC-AP Regional Conference on Asbestos was held on 6-7 March 2018 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The aim was to improve prepared for national and global actions to prevent Asbestos related disease and stop the use of Asbestos in cooperation with ITUC-AP affiliates, ILO, WHO, GUFs and TUSSOs, receiving 50 participants from 30 organisations of 18 countries. The Conference endorsed the joint communique calling for "Realising an Asbestos-free World". After closing, the representatives of the Conference met members of Committee IX (Demography, Health, Manpower and Transmigration Affairs) of the House of Representatives of Indonesia for consultation.

Also, a survey on OHS audit tools & training modules was conducted through the OHS Network. The summary is undergoing.

### **Broader Gender Equality Outcomes**

Efforts to improve outcomes for women's equality in trade unions and elsewhere in the region started off with a clear gender strategy through the Platform of Action for Gender Equality (PAGE).

A variety of targeted policies, programmes and measures were put in place to transform plans into actions, actions into concrete results and to deliver better outcomes for women. The following examples highlight how women's improved leadership and specific measures taken helped bring about progress on two other key areas:

#### **(1) scaling up efforts and actions to combat gender-based violence at work**

- *a record number of affiliates are responding to questionnaires, surveys and calls to action, helping capture much needed information and improving engagement in gender equality issues*
- *swayed at least eight (8) governments to maintain support for a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation and/or change the stand from its original position of supporting only an ILO Recommendation*
- *mobilised five (5) delegates from Indonesia, Myanmar and Mongolia to attend the first standard setting discussion (ILC 2018)*

- *contributed to the international knowledge base and support for evidence-informed union work on gender-based violence*
- *initiatives against gender-based violence are increasingly being showcased in several studies and publications (e.g., University of Oxford Human Rights Hub Journal)*
- *experiences with securing rights for workers affected by domestic violence (DV), including the findings of affiliates-initiated national workplace surveys (i.e., Philippines, Taiwan and Mongolia) on domestic violence are starting to show positive results (e.g., CBAs integrating DV provisions)*
- *signed cooperation agreements with employers organisations (Philippines, Israel) on joint workplace prevention and assistance for victims of domestic violence*

## **(2) increased visibility of ITUC-AP work on gender equality issues**

- *three (3) new partnerships in promoting women's rights and combating gender-based violence established*
- *participated in many events, at different levels, in an expert capacity showcasing ITUC-AP's gender equality work*
- *expanded the network of game changers (both offline and online) in the region who break barriers to gender equality while amplifying each other's voices*

The union women movement has been a crucial driver for change in these areas and more - the ITUC-AP Women's Committee, core group of national campaign focal points, affiliates' gender equality bodies and thousands of game changers, including men, who are part of ITUC-AP's expanding social media network.

## **Youth**

Steady and concrete progress has been made in solidarity of the ITUC and ITUC-AP affiliates to support young workers. We have set up more youth structures in affiliates and more efforts have been made to attract and organise young workers over the last 4 years. However, the voices of youth remain under-represented in determining economy, society and even trade union policies. Youth has clear a voice and political will to achieve a favorable future of work for all. Youth must be involved in the decision-making process to shape the future. The ITUC-AP Youth Charter 2015 - 2019, which was developed by the ITUC-AP Youth Committee, expressed serious concerns and urged unions' attention and assistance to the challenges faced by youth. This is the voice of Youth. Along with the Charter, the ITUC-AP, affiliates and young workers have been taking actions and conducting campaigns to achieve decent work for all young workers, to realise social protections for workers in informal economy and gig economy, to protect workers' rights of short-term employment and also to organise youth events to nurture friendship and build strong solidarity.

Since 2014, the ITUC-AP Youth Committee representatives have participated in the ITUC-AP regional Programmes and the Youth Chair has represented at Regional Governing Bodies. Not only for young people but for trade unions, youth representation at the governing body meeting is very essential. Also, one of top priorities for youth is capacity building or education to get ready as workers and trade unionists. They need opportunities to know their rights and also skills to negotiate properly about their wages and working conditions. So, the ITUC-AP has conducted Young Leadership Course every year in interactive and creative manners including roleplaying of collective bargaining, press conference and organising, group work, case study among others. Since its first course in 1992, the total number of participants stands at 848.

## **IFIs and Regional Engagement**

The ITUC – Asia Pacific made an endeavour to increase its dialogue with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) at the global, regional and national levels, as the IFIs had been increasingly focused on inequality, labour market institutions and climate change towards

inclusive and sustainable growth. In particular, the ITUC-AP made efforts to facilitate more trade union engagement with the IFIs at the national level through regional and national consultation meetings. At the regional and national levels, the ITUC-AP had several high - level meetings as well as a series of national meetings with the ADB. A further regional meeting with the IMF and the World Bank took place.

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional grouping of the South Asian countries which bring together some of the emerging economies of Asia. National trade union centres from the SAARC countries affiliated to the ITUC/AP are members of this organisation. Established in 1988, it strives to unite the workers organised in free and democratic trade unions. One of the primary objectives of SARTUC is to maintain and develop a powerful and effective organisation at the regional level, composed of free and democratic trade unions and pledged to the task of promoting the interests of the working people and enhancing the dignity of labour while furthering the establishment, maintenance and development of free trade unions in the countries in South Asia. SARTUC is working hard to make its presence felt at the sub-regional level as the representative body of the working women and men in the region.

The SARTUC is very active on issues such as migrant labour and the informal economy. The organisation was able to push forward the issue of labour migration through SAARC Kathmandu Declaration, 2014 that has acknowledged migration as one of the emerging issues in South Asia. As majority of migrant workers from South Asia are in Middle East countries, SARTUC concentrates in that area. SARTUC is at present involved in the development of the Global Compact on Migration. SARTUC has prepared a pre-departure information guide on migration. SARTUC has signed MOUs with other sub-regional groupings - ASEAN TUC, Arab TUC and ITUC Africa and TUCA. Since its inception one of the priority areas has been to gain recognition from SAARC as the representative organisation of the working people in the region. Women and Youth Committees have been established.

Also, the ITUC-AP actively participated in events and programmes of G20/L20, ASEM, APEC and ASEAN.

### **Relations**

The ITUC-AP coordinated annual coordination meetings with various institutions and organisations such as Global Union Federations (GUFs), OECD TUAC, Trade Union Solidarity Support Organisations (SSOs) and ILO ACTRAV to exchange information on activities in the region, to coordinate solidarity support in the region through the ITUC-AP and to promote solidarity to the ITUC-AP affiliates.