

# Global Solidarity Newsletter

An ICTU Development Education Project

Issue 9 Autumn 2006



*Trade unionists from all over Ireland consider the impact of globalisation on workers*

## Summer School links Workers' Rights with World Poverty

The Global Solidarity project ran its annual Summer School this year at the Days Inn, Kilkenny, from 18th to 20th August, on the theme of "Global Ireland – Workers' Rights are Human Rights, the world over!"

There was an excellent turn-out of 26 participants – 11 from the North and 15 from the Republic, and nicely gender balanced, too! – as well as 5 speakers from 5 different countries – South Africa, Poland, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK. Modules looked at how workers organise themselves in poor countries such as South Africa, and all the participants were impressed and enthused by June Hartley's energetic, committed and impassioned contributions on the organisation work she is doing in various parts of Africa, from her home in South Africa. Nearer to home, we heard from Barnaby Dorda – a Polish trade union official helping SIPTU

organise Polish immigrants here in Ireland.

The particular vulnerability of women in the modern world was highlighted by Anneke van Luijken from the Netherlands, who has worked for almost 20 years on the plight of women workers in poor countries. A generation or so ago, it became normal for women here in Ireland to start taking on a job as a second income, to help the family buy even more goods and services, and enjoy an even better standard of living. But for millions of women in poor countries, going out to work is not a means of earning a few extra comforts but the means of ensuring their children will at least get some food and a roof over their heads.

We heard, too, from Cait Moran of Irish Aid about Ireland's exciting and expanding aid programme, and how

development education – the sort of work Global Solidarity is doing with trade unionists across the island – is an important part of the work that they wish to fund. And Annie Watson, who ran the Commonwealth Trade Union Council until 2005 and now advises the TUC in England on international development matters, gave us encouragement with her experience of strategies and tactics to organise ourselves, to learn about our comrades in poorer countries, and to lobby for effective change.

At the end of the three day event, everyone was keen to keep up the momentum and to carry back to their respective unions the message of Global Solidarity. Most people were keen to be able to dialogue with each other as well as with the GS project, so we look forward to hearing about more solidarity events and actions. And we're always ready to publish stories of exchanges, speakers, events and campaigns that individual unions send us – so give us a call!

*Campaigning for Workers' Rights in the Global Economy*

# LINKING WITH LESOTHO

## ICTU solidarity in action

At the end of August, it was announced that, over the coming 12 months, the Global Solidarity project will organise an international solidarity linking event with our fellow trade union confederation in Lesotho – LECODU (the Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions).

A major part of our ambitious work programme is to arrange international solidarity links between Irish trade unionists and those from one of the poorer countries of the Global South. With Lesotho being one of the key partner countries of the Irish Aid programme, and with our own strong contacts in the region through South African organiser June Hartley (see previous story), it is clear why that country has been chosen as our partner for this major event.

Please keep in contact with the Global Solidarity team for details as this event develops.

## Workers' and Farmers' Speaking Tour

In early October, ICTU and Oxfam hosted an important tour of speakers from poor countries to explain to the public the importance of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).



*Ivory Coast slum-dwellers are just some of the people suffering from EPAs* © ILO/Maillard J

The speakers who came over were Timothy Kondo from the Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRI) and Henry Wejja, a representative of MVIWATA, the main grouping of Tanzanian farmers. They are part of an international effort co-ordinated by the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) to bring to the attention of trade unionists everywhere the seriousness of the current crisis over the WTO (World Trade Organisation) talks.

After the failure of the WTO talks in Hong Kong in December 2005, and a series of failures to agree anything since then (see last issue of Newsletter), it has been tempting to believe that the WTO's failure is a success for poor people everywhere, including trade unionists. Unfortunately, this is not the case: if the WTO talks collapse completely, there risks being no international forum where trade

rules can be worked out openly and democratically. Instead, the poorer countries are already being tempted into bilateral talks with the larger trading blocs – the EU and the US – and it is clear that there will be no equality between such hugely different partners.

Henry and Timothy came to Europe as part of a wider initiative to bring to the attention of the media and the wider public the dangers of a world in which trade rules are not regulated or controlled in a democratic forum.

ICTU and Oxfam worked together to arrange an action-packed programme of events and speaking engagements that included addressing members of the Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont, guests at Queens University Belfast, and events in the Republic including a meeting with Michael Aherne TD and engagements in Cork and Dublin.



# Stand Up Against Poverty!

*Homeless children asleep under plastic bags in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*  
© ILO/Classet



ICTU and other agencies worked together to organise an event in Botanic Gardens, Belfast, on Sunday, October 15th, at which people came to express their solidarity with the world's poor, and to demand more progress in implementing policies which could change people's lives for the better.

By adding our voices to those of others, trade unionists and others were not only able to get the message out to the public and the media but – by aiming for a place in the Guinness Book of World Records – we were able to make sure that decision-makers, in our own countries but elsewhere too, are forced to take account of our demands that the world's poor must have a better deal.

October 17th was International Day for the Elimination of Poverty. It was also the day chosen by the Global Coalition for Action against Poverty (GCAP) as the day to campaign for more progress in the fight against poverty and, in particular, for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In the UK, GCAP decided to join in with many agencies and organise a major event designed to get into the Guinness World Record Book – a series of actions where people would stand up for at least 1 minute in a gesture of solidarity with poor people everywhere.



*Cotton spinner, Burkina Faso*  
© ILO/Deloche P





# MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

It is a year since the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaigns had millions of people in the streets in so many countries. But what has happened this year? In particular, what has the Irish Government done to fulfil its many promises about improving aid and cancelling debt for so many poor countries?

As October 17th was the UN-designated Elimination of World Poverty Day, the Global Solidarity project team decided to check out the progress made to date.

Over the last 12 months, the Irish Government has bowed to public pressure and has

reinstated its earlier aim to reach 0.7% of GNP (gross national product) as its contribution to overseas aid. This is a generally agreed figure that the UN originally proposed back in the 1970s and Ireland is now catching up on countries such as Norway, Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Luxemburg, which are the only countries to have reached the 0.7% mark. Ireland intends to devote 0.7% by the year 2012, one year ahead of the UK which is aiming to reach the target at the end of another seven years.

In 2005, Ireland's total contribution to international development work was \$690 million, which was an 11.4%

increase on the previous year. So on international development aid, the Irish Government is notching up quite some progress.

In terms of debt relief, Ireland has never been particularly onerous in its treatment of poor countries – mainly because it has never extended development assistance through the use of loans, and is therefore not owed money by the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC's). Indeed, Ireland has championed the "100% debt relief" that aid agencies have been calling for and it is not Ireland's fault that what has been delivered falls far short of 100% relief.

Low-income countries currently have a total of \$380 billion of debt and middle-income countries some \$1.66 trillion (which is \$1.66 thousand billion – a heck of a lot of money!). The \$40 billion that has been agreed as write-off since the G8 summit in Gleneagles last year is a very modest improvement indeed, but it is certainly better than nothing.

But the agreements arranged by the IMF and then – six months later – by the World Bank and the African Development Bank do not cover all countries that are indebted and do not cover all debts. For example, the InterAmerican Development Bank is not included in the initiative so Latin American countries have very limited relief. At the top end, Uganda will have about 79% of its multilateral debt cancelled, Ghana 76% and Tanzania and Zambia will each have 74% of their debts cancelled. But Mozambique only receives reductions of 48% and Mali of 54%, whilst in Latin America, the reductions are not significant: Guyana will see debt reduced by 21%, Nicaragua by 23%, Honduras by 28% and Bolivia by 31%. So all rich countries – including Ireland as an important lobbyist and diplomatic player – still have much work to do in improving the debt conditions of the world's poorest countries.

But it is in trade that Ireland has made least progress: at the beginning of 2005 a group of aid agencies petitioned the Irish Government to make the following improvements in its trade policy:

- Abolish export subsidies at home and in the policies of allies
- Abolish domestic support schemes that distort trade
- Stop pursuing Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)
- Avoid trade-restricting protectionism and restrictions
- Democratise the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Since there wasn't very much progress on trade over the last 12 months, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) teamed up with Dochas – the Irish development NGOs coalition – to submit a paper on "Aid for Trade" to the Department of Foreign Affairs' Irish Aid programme. This followed our earlier submission "An Agenda for Trade Justice". In the more recent paper, we argued for Irish Aid to pursue the following:

- Continue its poverty-reduction focus on all trade issues
- Ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed on all trade matters
- Emphasise value-added initiatives in poor countries' exports
- Ensure ownership of Aid for Trade initiative by recipient (i.e. poor) countries
- Focus on combatting inequality, by emphasising human rights and sustainable development, and highlighting gender and the empowerment of women

- Ensure funds for Aid for Trade are additional to all other development funding
- Ensure funds for Aid for Trade are given as grants and not loans
- Aim to encourage Irish companies to view firms in the Global South as partners for adding value rather than as access points for raw materials
- Prioritise job creation, consistent with Congress' emphasis on decent work

So there is still an awful lot that Irish Aid could be doing to help poor countries trade their way out of poverty – even if the Irish Government's support for Fair Trade and other initiatives is quite strong.

**Please contact David Joyce in the Dublin Office or Neil Alldred in the Belfast Office for further details about these ongoing campaigns.**



*GS' Gareth Keogh with Henry Wejja (left) and Timothy Kondo: fighting EPAs together*



## EPAs – the latest jargon!

We have got used to hearing about the ILO (International Labour Organisation) or the WTO (World Trade Organisation) and the IMF (International Monetary Fund). Well, now we have to get used to hearing about EPAs, or Economic Partnership Agreements, because they are fast becoming the number one concern of the international aid and development community.

EPAs are the trade agreements passed between countries but, as the World Trade Organisation's talks have stalled in recent months, the EPAs have been seen by some politicians as a means of allowing the rich countries to gain access to poor countries' resources without having to go through the public and democratic processes of open discussions at the WTO. Already, a

number of bilateral trade agreements have been signed: in January this year the US signed one with Oman – a real partnership of equals! One between the Kingdom of Morocco and the US also came into force earlier this year and the EU is currently working through a major EPA with 76 of the 78 members of the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific group of least developed nations) – but exactly how helpful are such deals for the peoples of the countries concerned?

The trade union movement is unhappy that the WTO trade talks have collapsed, even though the WTO has not done much for workers worldwide in the 10 years it has been in existence. The reason we are not happy is that poor countries around the world will now have even fewer means of promoting their interests in international trade.

Instead, big trading blocs such as the EU and the US will pick off

the poorer countries one by one or in groups that are powerless to do anything substantial against them. There will be no symmetry or equality in the 'partnerships' that will be discussing future trade. Poor countries cannot win when the odds are stacked so heavily against them. The WTO was ineffective but at least it was an international, UN-supported, system of rules where every country was involved. In this new system, poor countries are being encouraged to sign up to 'agreements' that risk being simply the terms that rich countries want to impose on poor ones.

Global Solidarity, along with other trade union and NGO actors, will continue to lobby for reforms within the WTO and for all international trade talks to take place under the auspices of a reformed WTO. Economic Partnership Agreements are not the way to deliver the trade reforms that poor countries need!

# Global Campaign for Education

David Joyce, Project Manager of the Global Solidarity project, also chairs the Irish Coalition for the Global Campaign for Education. And on the back of the Make Poverty History campaign last year, the GCE has been doing some amazing work to keep education high up the public agenda.

The Irish Coalition for the GCE aims to help put pressure on both Government and the public in pursuit of the fundamental goal of getting all children of school age into school for a free, quality education for all by 2015.



*School assistance for children who live in a garbage dump in the Philippines*  
© ILO/Maillard J

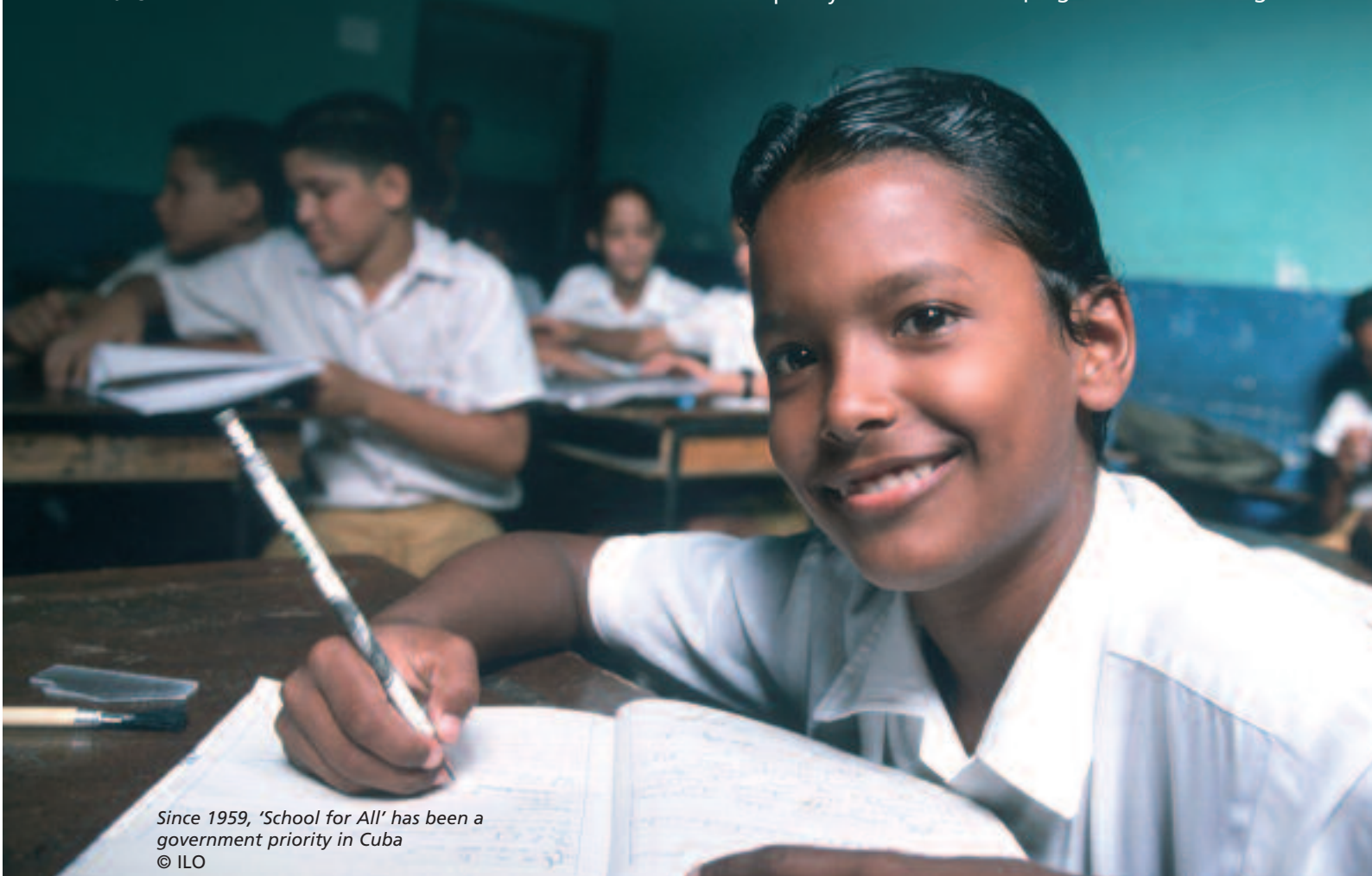
## The Six Education for All Goals:

- Expand early childhood care and education
- Provide free and compulsory primary education for all
- Promote learning and skills for young people and adults
- Increase adult literacy by 90%
- Achieve equality and equal numbers of girls and boys in school
- Enhance educational quality

Congress is actively supporting the GCE, especially ahead of its next Action Week, scheduled for April 2007. If you want to get your union involved more, or register your church group or school with the GCE for work before or during that week, please contact the Coalition directly on:

[www.campaignforeducation.ie](http://www.campaignforeducation.ie)

[www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)



*Since 1959, 'School for All' has been a government priority in Cuba*  
© ILO



*Labour Start has been successfully campaigning against the Korean Government's failure to ratify the basic labour conventions, and thus give poor workers a better deal*  
© ILO



## Every Little Helps – especially in supporting workers worldwide!

Those of us who use computers regularly for work probably get a little fed up of all the ‘spam’ that keeps coming at us from all directions. But the internet gives us so much more possibility of keeping abreast with what’s happening in the world that it is often a difficult choice to turn away from yet another online appeal, or yet another electronic petition that you wonder whether anyone will read.

Well, the excellent website maintained by Eric Lee at [www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org) has just put together 24 neat little examples of online campaigns that have worked! Workers in 17 different countries won victories thanks to the solidarity shown by workers elsewhere who took a couple of minutes out of their busy schedules to e-mail support to them. From our own Dunnes Stores campaign in March of this year to as far afield as Indonesia, Nepal and Costa Rica, we have helped secure workers’ rights just by clicking on the send button on our computers!

More than that, we have helped to show a little practical solidarity to workers who are often isolated and feeling powerless. The labour movement, too, is gearing up to use the internet to support our brothers and sisters across the world! Check out Eric’s site on [www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org) or see [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org) for our own campaigns



# Are the Americas really a New Found Land?

Events on the American continent are happening with breakneck speed! After the elections of Presidents Eva Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, we have seen the recent re-election of President Luis da Silva in Brazil, and the return to power – after 19 years in opposition! – of President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. These are four populist presidents, elected in what many see as a rising tide of opposition to the failed politics of privatisation, deregulation and profit-before-people. Popular candidates in Colombia and Mexico narrowly avoided being elected, and the narrowness of the business candidates' win has sent shock waves far beyond those countries' borders.

The US House of Representatives has now swung decisively away from President Bush's Republican control, into the Democrats' pocket, and even the Senate has 'Democratically-inclined Independents' who will give the Democrats a working majority there, too.

*Brazilian housing: a popularly elected government delivering real benefits for working people*  
© ILO/Maillard J.

What does all this change mean for ordinary working people and - especially - for trade unionists? The first point to make is that Latin America – long seen as a hotbed of revolution – is now able to use the ballot box as the main means of social change: democracy is alive and well and working throughout that vast continent.

Secondly, when people are given the power to elect their own representatives, they will not vote for long against their own interests: turkeys do not vote for Christmas. The huge majorities of the electorate in the UK and the US that voted for Thatcher and Reagan were dazzled by the offers of tax cuts and cheap shares in once-public companies, but even that infatuation has worn thin. People are increasingly voting for real public services (such as water, education, health, energy, transport and housing), for elected officials who have to carry out the policies that people want, and for an anti-poverty strategy that puts people first.

Thirdly, the old labels of 'Left' versus 'Right' are no longer relevant: if the Democrats let the people down in the US, now that they have been given a mandate, neither of the two big parties will be given a mandate again – there will be widespread apathy, abstentions and voting for more radical and populist candidates such as Ralph Nader. In Nicaragua, President Ortega still sports his popular moustache but is doing his utmost to attract businesses and investment to his country: everyone realises these days that delivery is what is important, not just the rhetoric of empty promises.

The American continent – North, Central and South – still has huge multinational companies where executives sit on Remuneration Committees that decide to reward themselves with huge salary and benefit increases while the workforce languishes in relative poverty. But the events of these last few months have shown that the American peoples are on the move: it is an exciting time for the labour movement and Global Solidarity will be monitoring events closely to see where we can help and where we can learn lessons for our own struggles and strategies.

Keep up to date with  
[www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)





# Fancy joining a union with 168 million members?

At the international level, there was a merger in early November of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Congress of Labour (WCL) to form a new body – the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

This merger finally does away with a legacy of the Cold War – when there were considered to be ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ trade unions. But it is much more than that: by focussing the resource of two international confederations in one unit, it brings much greater synergy, cost savings, and effectiveness. There will now be only one co-ordinated voice from the trade unions on all international issues, and that should give us more weight and more influence in the struggle to make globalisation fairer and to help poor countries escape from their poverty. It will also be a major force for negotiations with the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and other UN agencies, as well as with businesses and governments across the world.

Check out their new site on [www.ituc-cis.org](http://www.ituc-cis.org)

*Workers from all over the world came together for the Founding Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)*







## Trade Union Friends of Palestine – TUFPP

**On a cold and damp October morning in Belfast, trade unionists and members of trade councils from around Northern Ireland gathered for a meeting to see what interest there would be in launching a Trade Union Friends of Palestine support group.**

Congress overwhelmingly supported a resolution at the BDC in June 2005 that the trade union movement in Ireland should establish a support group. More recently, the Northern Ireland Committee approved the idea of a formal Trade Union Friends of Palestine structure and suggested that the Global Solidarity Committee should be the proper structure which should assume responsibility for the TUFPP within the movement.

Then, in early November, Israel attacked the small Palestinian community of Beit Hanoun, killing 72 Palestinians in the space of a week, in retaliation for the launching of several rockets into Israeli territory - rockets which had not reportedly killed a single Israeli during that period.

It is very important that all trade unionists express their solidarity with Palestinians who are suffering from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are not asking people to drop all support for Israeli trade unionists, families, workers and peace activists, but the terrible imbalance between the firepower of the Israeli Defence Force and the Palestinian forces has resulted in unacceptable and disproportionate deaths among Palestinians. That is why we urge all trade unionists to support the TUFPP and to get their union to affiliate to it. For further details, contact Eamon McMahon ([Eamon.McMahon@ntlworld.com](mailto:Eamon.McMahon@ntlworld.com) or ) or Neil Alldred at the Global Solidarity project.

# Zimbabwe: still tough for workers

Following the excellent trip to Ireland by Timothy Kondo (see page 6), Congress has received a request from the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) for support. Zimbabwe has been suffering for many years now, as its President Mugabe prints money to counter the annual inflation rate of 1,200%, and increasingly looks to China to help him out with soft loans to pay for his various projects. In a once-prosperous country, people are suffering, and workers are suffering more than others.



*Mugabe's cruel police trash workers' homes near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe*

Mugabe wants his Patriotic Front party to be the only decision-maker in the country – for food aid, for wage increases, for land allocation following confiscation from white farmers. The trade unions are not only ignored but actively attacked and harassed on every occasion. They need our support, be it in the form of money, letters of solidarity, or political pressure on our own leaders to urge them to rein in Mugabe's worst excesses. Keep up to date with what is happening in that sad country by logging on to [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)

*Children 'talibe' in a Koranic school in Niamey, Niger*  
© ILO/Crozet M



## Solidarity Committees

The Solidarity Committees (NI and ROI) continue to be the vital link between Congress and affiliates on solidarity issues. These Committees work closely with the Global Solidarity Project to ensure that it reaches affiliated unions of Congress and meet regularly during the year. They continue to act as a link between the project, their individual unions, and the membership.

These Committees encourage affiliates to engage with the project and looks to embed solidarity linking within trade union structure.

Some affiliates (NIPSA, IMPACT, PSEU and ESBOA) have formed their own structures to engage with international solidarity issues.

## Northern Ireland

Neil Allred, Global Solidarity Northern Ireland Committee  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)  
Carlin House, 4-6 Donegall Street Place, Belfast BT1 2FM

t: +44 (0)28 9024 7940  
f: +44 (0)28 9024 6898  
e: [info@ictuni.org](mailto:info@ictuni.org)  
w: [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)  
w: [www.ictuni.org](http://www.ictuni.org)

## Republic of Ireland

David Joyce  
Development Education Officer  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)  
32 Parnell Square  
Dublin 1

t: +353 (01) 889 7746  
f: +353 (01) 887 2012  
e: [info@ictuni.org](mailto:info@ictuni.org)  
w: [www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org](http://www.ictuglobalsolidarity.org)  
w: [www.ictuni.org](http://www.ictuni.org)

STRONGER TOGETHER  
**CONGRESS**  
Northern Ireland Committee



Congress would like to acknowledge the continued financial support of Trocaire, the European Commission, the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and affiliated unions for our global solidarity work.

