

Report on the Work of the Congress Global Solidarity Committee



Global Solidarity Summer School
August 30-31, 2017
Wexford





President Higgins meets Huber Ballesteros at BDC 2017

Global Solidarity Committee

The Committee Chair is Mags O'Brien (SIPTU) and Joan McCrohan (IMPACT) is vice Chair. Kevin Daly chairs the Committee in NICICTU and we liaise closely together. Following the adoption of major agreements on climate change - the Paris Agreement; and ending poverty and inequality, Agenda 2030: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have adopted these as useful frameworks for our work. The SDGs contain a very welcome commitment to Decent Work (Goal 8), which commits countries to: "The promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

Trade unions across the globe had worked hard to ensure the inclusion of Decent Work in the new development agenda and we now have a responsibility to ensure that it is fully realised. Congress was a founding member of Coalition 2030: an Irish civil society alliance established to promote the implementation here of the new Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 8 - <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2017/03/01/coalition-2030-launch-march-1st-2017/>

Congress also ran a joint project with Trinity College, Dublin on the implementation of Goal 8, which included a presentation (with TCD) at the Irish Social Policy Associ-

ation conference in July 2016 and culminated in a joint conference in November 2016, in Trinity College. This heard from a range of international and national speakers, including: David Donoghue (Irish Ambassador to the UN and Co-Facilitator of the negotiations leading to Agenda 2030), representatives of the ILO, Irish business and NGOs, along with Jack O'Connor, Chair of the Congress Global Forum - [https://www.ictu.](https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2016/11/14/the-un-sustainable-development-agenda-and-labour/)

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Climate change was also a theme at our 2016 summer school and we liaise closely with the newly formed Congress Energy & Natural Resources sectoral group. There was a Just Transition conference held in May - <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2017/05/11/just-transition-conference/>

Congress attended the National Economic Dialogue in June 2017 in Dublin Castle and fed in a trade union perspective at the breakout session on Climate Change, chaired by Minister Naughton. We have also submitted views to the Citizens Assembly. We liaise closely with the ETUC Standing Committee on Sustainable Development.

Summer Schools

The Global Solidarity Summer School has now become a feature on the annual trade union calendar and continues to educate and engage on global issues. The 2016 Summer School was held in Letterkenny and with the theme Global Challenges & Opportunities: Local & Global Responses.

The keynote speaker was the Minister of State for International Development, Joe McHugh TD, who deliv-



GS Summer School 2016, Letterkenny

ered the opening address and formally welcomed the Summer School to Donegal. There were sessions on the refugee crisis with speakers from Oxfam Ireland and other organisations. The climate change session looked at the implications of the Paris agreement for Ireland and the need for a 'just transition' for workers. There was also a showing of the film: This Changes Everything, by Avi Lewis. More here: <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2016/08/31/8th-annual-global-solidarity-summer-school/>

International Labour Organisation

Congress participated in the International Labour Conference 2017 (ILC) and was represented by David Joyce (Congress Equality and International Development Officer) and Ethel Buckley (SIPTU and Congress Executive Council member). Significantly, the conference saw the election of the Government of Ireland to the ILO Governing Body for the first time.

Mr Joyce participated in the Committee for the recurrent item on fundamental principles and rights at work. Constituents renewed their commitment to make progress toward the respect, promotion and realization of fundamental principles and rights at work (FPRWs). The conclusions outlined a clear direction for the road ahead

with a commitment to step up action by the Centenary in 2019 towards the universal ratification of all core labour standards and achieve 50 ratification of the forced labour Protocol. In the campaign for ratification, but also for action tackling gaps in implementation, the workers group welcomed the clear focus on freedom of association and collective bargaining as enabling rights. The 2030 Agenda was seen as an important opportunity for the ILO to develop a plan of action to support projects around SDG target 8.8, which aims to protect labour rights and promote a safe and secure working environment for all workers. Indeed, this target could only be reached through tripartism, social dialogue, freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. The conclusions also envisage strengthening the annual follow-up to the 1998 Declaration with a view to better assist countries to ratify conventions as well as to make a better use of Decent Work Country Programmes to increase ratification and implementation rates of core labour standards. The promotion of policy coherence and partnerships with economic institutions to ensure respect of FPRWs was also an important policy priority reflected in the conclusions. The Press release and full text of speech of Mr Joyce to the plenary session is available here: <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2017/06/14/congress-at-international-labour-conference-2017/>

In light of our case at the 2016 Committee on the Application of Standards, there was a great deal of international interest in the recently passed Competition Amendment Act and Congress has facilitated contact with other unions tackling similar issues.

Congress met with ILO Director General, Guy Ryder, on the occasion of his visit here for the Phelan lecture in February 2017 and recorded a podcast interview. At the Phelan Lecture, General Secretary Patricia King delivered the response on the role of the ILO regarding women and work - http://www.nui.ie/news/2017/Phelan_lecture2017_Delivered.asp .

The conditions facing migrant workers in Qatar building World Cup 2022 infrastructure was a major focus of our work, in the period under review. Congress called on Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor to ensure Irish government support for an ILO mission of inquiry to Qatar at the March 2017 ILO Governing Body meeting. The Governing Body agreed to defer further consideration on the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry until its 331st Session (November 2017) and Congress is liaising with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. More on our Qatar work here: <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/actions/playfairqatar.html>

ILO Motion for BDC

The July 2017 Biennial Delegate Conference debated and passed an Executive Council motion on the ILO. It stated that:

"The Irish Government has just taken up a seat on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and will be represented by the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation (Now Employment Affairs and Social Protection)... "Welcomed the participation by the Government of Ireland in the Governing Body and urged it to use this opportunity to fulfil the ILO aims and objectives at home and abroad. It is an opportune time to be in this position as the ILO is marking its centenary in 2019 and is preparing a number of initiatives including the "future of work initiative", which "aims to cultivate a global dialogue on the future of work, to build the ILO's ability to prepare and guide governments, workers and employers to better meet the world of work challenges of the next century."

The motion also *"urged the Irish Government to liaise with trade unions and employers in a process to ratify the most*

relevant of outstanding ILO Conventions for Ireland's workplaces in the 21st Century."

Engagement with Business on Human Rights

Congress continued to provide a trade union perspective at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) coordinated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) multi-stakeholder forum regarding the implementation of the 1st national Corporate Social Responsibility plan and the drawing up of the second plan, launched in June 2017. – Towards Responsible Business Behaviour - <http://www.csrhub.ie/CSRhub/Ireland-s-National-Plan-on-CSR/> . The plan has many positive elements, including:

- the adoption of the EC definition of CSR as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”;
- the attempt to link the plan with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals;
- The inclusion of the workplace as one of 4 dimensions of CSR;

It is our view however that the stated vision “for Ireland to be recognised as a Centre of Excellence for responsible and sustainable business practices” is not reflected in the workplace dimension of the document. While the plan mentions a range of workplace issues such as flexible working, staff consultation, equality and diversity, migrant integration, and references a number of international instruments (the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinationals – all of which define responsible business conduct in a workplace setting) remarkably, it fails to mention people’s fundamental rights at work, not least the right to be in a trade union and to be represented, and collective bargaining rights. It is particularly disappointing that this occurs during the same month that the Irish Government, for the very first time, took up a Titulaire seat at the Governing Body of the ILO, whose stated aim is “to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues”.

As a member of that body, Ireland is expected to be a leader in promoting peoples fundamental rights at work, including collective bargaining. The ILO Governing Body most recently defined responsible business conduct in

the revised ILO Declaration on Multinational Enterprises in March this year and this of course includes the fundamental principles and rights at work – including collective bargaining.

Congress has been an active member of the CSR stakeholder forum and has repeatedly made the point that Companies claiming to practice responsible business conduct cannot pick and choose to work on selected rights of their employees while ignoring others. It is our view that this plan is a missed opportunity for Ireland to lead in this area. We note actions 2 and 11 in the plan and remain willing to explore this important dimension of responsible business conduct in rolling out their implementation. We have asked the Tánaiste to use her offices to have the matter rectified. The Tánaiste has responded by stating that the primary focus is “encouraging companies to go beyond complying with legislation by making a positive impact on the community and environment in which they operate”. However, “Going beyond” the law was how the old EU definition worked – thus responsibility became voluntary and hence optional. That is why the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights are so powerful as an idea – they are about adverse impacts that a business causes, contributes to or is linked to. With respect to internationally recognized human rights the law, if there is one, does not matter.

We have also met with Business in the Community (BITC) regarding the criteria for their ‘Business Behaving Responsibly’ and suggested wording on collective bargaining to be included in their criteria. We also attended BITC annual CEO forum on responsible business, themed around the Sustainable Development Goals.

We also continued our participation in the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) Standing Committee on Human Rights. This included discussions on the draft



Omar Barghouti addresses delegates at BDC 2017

national action plan on business and human rights. We organised a briefing on this in May 2017 - <https://www.ictu.ie/press/diary/2017/05/19/friday-briefing-responsible-business-behaviour/> and are still awaiting publication of the action plan.

Congress also provides an annual input on business and human rights to Masters’ degree students in the NUIG Centre for Human Rights. Congress participated in a public meeting in November 2016 on problems for workers in Mexico’s coal mining industry and hosted a meeting met with the two human rights defenders, Cristina Auerbach and María Esmeralda Saldana.

Palestine

Congress addressed the Trade Union Friends of Palestine 10 year conference in Belfast September 2016. Congress wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Charlie Flanagan regarding Israeli actions in relation to well-known BDS activist, Omar Barghouti and were pleased with the reply received confirming the Irish government’s support for the right to advocate for BDS. Mr Barghouti was also



Congress vice President Kevin Callinan at the TTIP/ CETA briefing

a guest speaker at the July 2017 BDC and Trade Union Friends of Palestine also hosted a fringe meeting.

NIC-ICTU Global Solidarity, with Justice for Columbia & Trade Union Friends of Palestine hosted a meeting of Palestinian human rights activist Omar Barghouti and Colombian trade unionist Huber Ballesteros on Monday 3rd July at the historic First Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street, Central Belfast. Over 70 members of the public attended the meeting which was chaired by former Congress president Patricia McKeown. Unions also supported the Gaza Kids initiative - <https://www.facebook.com/GazaActionIreland/>

Global Solidarity Working Group on Refugees & Asylum Seekers

The working group was established following the Committee's delegation visit to the refugee camp in Calais

(France) in September 2016. Since then a number of initiatives have taken place. With support from IMPACT and SIPTU, Gansee Films produced a short documentary The Jungle of Calais. This looks behind the humanitarian situation to the needs, fears and hopes of those seeking a safe haven in Europe. The film was launched on the February 8, 2016 in Temple Bar with speakers from Oxfam and Amnesty International. More here <https://www.ictu.ie/global-solidarity/newsevents/keyissues/2016/10/13/ireland-must-take-immediate-action-to-support-refu/>

Through the Global Solidarity Committee, the working group has written to affiliates to encourage them to organise an event or a screening of the film at their conferences to create awareness amongst trade unionists on the role of unions in addressing the needs of those fleeing conflict and persecution.

Together with other groups the Committee campaigned with the 'Not on Our Watch' campaign to request the Irish government

give refuge to 200 unaccompanied minors from the Calais Refugee Camp. A cross-party motion was subsequently adopted in the Dáil on this. According to an update by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency – they are committed to implementing the Government's decision to accept separated children who previously lived in the unregistered refugee camp in Calais. Tusla's team for separated children seeking asylum is working in partnership with other agencies to receive 40 such separated children. As of 31st March 2017, 21 children who previously lived in the Calais refugee camp had been resettled in Ireland.

The working group is continuing to nurture the relationships it has built through this activity with organisations such as Oxfam, Amnesty Ireland, Irish Refugee Council and others. There are plans to develop a 'welcome pack' for programme refugees and those leaving the direct provision system, which will provide information on rights at work, including the right to join a union.

We also attended the PSEU Diversity Forum on Refugees in December 2016.

The working group is currently updating the Congress policy position on the 'Right to Work' for Refugee and Asylum Seekers, which was adopted by the Executive in 1998. At time of writing, it is planned is to submit this to the Congress Executive Council, when drafted. Finally, Congress welcomed the May 2017 decision by the Supreme Court in the case of NHV v Minister for Justice and Equality on the right of an individual living in direct provision to earn a livelihood. The Supreme Court ruled that, in circumstances where there is no time limit on the asylum process, the absolute prohibition on seeking employment under the Refugee Act 1996 is contrary to the constitutional right to seek employment.

It has been Congress policy for almost 20 years that that the right to work for asylum-seekers is essential for a number of reasons, including adequate income, a sense of worth and human dignity, interaction with local communities and challenging stereotypes to which they are subjected. Congress believes the current situation is totally unacceptable and reiterates its demand that the right to work is extended to all asylum seekers within six months of their original application. Eligibility to attend ETB courses and the right to English language classes to prepare people for the job market should also be extended to asylum seekers.

TTIP & CETA Trade Deals

Following the passing of motions on TTIP and CETA at the BDC 2015, the Executive Council appointed a group chaired by then Congress President, Brian Campfield, to coordinate activities in relation to trade. Since then, there has been ongoing contact with officials in DJEI regarding our position and the planned ratification process for CETA, which was passed by the European Parliament in February 2017. We have also engaged in correspondence with Minister Mitchell O'Connor regarding the ratification process for CETA.



Jack O'Connor addresses Sustainable Development event in Trinity College

Congress also produced a comprehensive briefing paper on the TTIP and CETA trade deals, which was launched in July 2016, and in addition attended a range of briefings and meetings on these trade deals, including affiliate conferences and a briefing at the US Embassy. Planning is ongoing for the lobbying of government and elected representatives in relation to ratification of CETA, with a daylong lobby of Oireachtas members held in October 2016. This was followed up with a public statement issued upon the signing of CETA and Congress also contacted Irish MEPs in advance of the vote in the European Parliament

Congress continues to liaise with other civil society organisations sharing concerns about TTIP and CETA, including, Age Action Ireland, Trocaire and the Irish Environmental movement. A representative of our trade group participated in the EU wide day of action on CETA on January 21, 2017.

Colombia

After more than three years in jail, Huber Ballesteros was finally released from prison in January 2017. The support for the campaign from Irish trade unions was considerable, including letters to the Colombian authorities, and delegations visiting him in jail (including then Congress President Brian Campfield and Vice President Kevin Callinan). Such acts of solidarity also played an essential role in not only securing Huber's freedom, but also forcing the prison authorities to show some respect for his rights whilst he was in custody. We were also delighted to host a visit by Huber to our July 2017 BDC where he received a rapturous reception and thanked Irish Trade Unions for their support for the struggle in Colombia. Huber also spoke at the Belfast public meeting on 3rd July.

The Colombian peace agreement was also finalised with a Constitutional Court decision in November 2016 finally clearing the way for the peace deal to be implemented. The unwavering support provided by Irish trade unions for the process has been widely acknowledged by the CUT and Justice for Colombia (JFC) in London.

Our work in developing the campaign in Ireland in support of human rights, trade union rights and peace in Colombia was recognised along with input on the experience and operation of the Good Friday Agreement. Congress participated in delegations to both Colombia and the Havana peace talks. The Irish trade union movement will continue to have an important role in the successful implementation of the peace deal.

Development Cooperation Projects

Disability Champions

Congress continues to support the work of the Disability champions – international programme. The International Programme continued in 2016 in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. The programme was delivered by African trade union disability champions previously trained by ICTU/TUC affiliates. In 2017 the work continues with the Ethiopian and Tanzanian programme and they are developing a working relationship with the ILO. They have been invited by the East African Trade Union Congress (EATUC) to make a presentation on disabled workers rights at their annual congress.

Support for Myanmar Trade Unions

Congress successfully applied to Irish Aid for a grant to support the ITUC/CTUM project which proposes to improve the legal environment of labour protection to ensure that the market based economic reforms of the government of Myanmar is inclusive and able to benefit workers by creating decent jobs for all. Through capacity trainings by the international trade union experts, the legal team of the Confederation of Trade Unions in Myanmar will be strengthened to negotiate amendments to the labour laws under review at the national tripartite forum; engage members and promote unity with other unions; ensure the amended laws are in conformity with international labour standards and gaps of enforcement are closed.

Other activities included:

- *Engaged with the Council of Europe Group of Experts, in December 2016, on the Second Evaluation of the implementation of the Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland;*
- *Participation in demonstration outside Fyffes EGM in January 2017 and disseminated information on abuse of union rights in Honduras - <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/2017/01/13/fyffes-must-repay-the-money-they-have-stolen-from/> .*
- *Spoke at demos and attended the Kurdish New Year celebration Spoke at demos re Ibrahim Halawa and anti direct provision.*
- *Maintenance of website <https://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/> , internal Facebook page and Twitter Account @G_Solidarity*

