



## **CONGRESS BIENNIAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

### **FINAL AGENDA**

**Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast**

**5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

# Women in Unions

## **Motion 1: Organising Women Workers**

“Working women represent 53% of the trade union membership in Ireland. Over 400,000 women are members of trade unions - the largest single organisation of women in civic society.

Therefore, this Conference resolves that the following actions be adopted by Congress Women’s Committees - North and South:

1. That we campaign on the importance of organising more women into unions as a means to achieving equality;
2. That we campaign for the right to collective bargaining by unions to be legally recognised across both jurisdictions on this island;
3. That both Congress Committees launch a public campaign on these twin themes;
4. That this campaign is promoted through the Congress website - especially Union Connect - and through the Congress Social Networking tools.
5. That we engage with relevant civic society organisations to promote this campaign and the need for Equality and Social Solidarity across the island of Ireland.”

*Services, Industrial & Professional Trade Union*

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## **Motion 2: Equality Audit**

Congress notes the completion of the first equality audit of affiliate unions of Congress in 2009. A total of 20 unions returned the survey. This gives a total response rate of 37% with almost all of the larger unions completing the survey, covering 82% of trade union membership on the island.

The results show a significant gender divide both in relation to paid staff and officer roles within the unions, with a more equal split at the level of shop steward. The survey had less success in gathering information on the other grounds covered by equality legislation and showed less of an engagement with policy specific areas - eg. Only half had a disability policy. It also failed to capture the full extent of spread and depth of work done by affiliates in their attempts to provide real equality for all categories of worker, including through the negotiation of policies that unions are attempting to follow in their collective bargaining with employers.

However, it also showed that the majority of unions had equal opportunities policies and were aware of the challenges facing them and working on tackling discrimination and the promotion of equality through:

- taking positive action in recruitment;
- promoting flexible working arrangements;

- having reasonable accommodations/adjustments for staff members with a disability;
- taking cases under the equality legislation;

The survey now provides a baseline for measuring trade union equality work and has helped allay some of the fears that unions had in relation to collecting and releasing information in relation to both staff and membership. Conference urges:

- Unions to redouble their efforts in cooperating with the audit and ensuring that the next audit in 2011 shows real progress in relation to the scope and quality of information collected;
- Congress, through the Strategic Implementation Committee on Equality Issues, to learn from the similar audit carried out by the TUC so that the next audit can capture more information on the benefits of trade union membership for ensuring protection against discrimination and the promotion of equality.

*Women's Committee (ROI)*

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### **Motion 3: Underrepresentation of Women**

Congress notes the major underrepresentation of women at senior levels in unions. Congress therefore calls on the Executive Council to give this issue high priority by investing in a range of positive targeted measures, sharply focused on addressing the gender imbalance at senior official and National Executive levels in the trade union movement.

*Teachers' Union of Ireland*

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# Women in Work

## **Motion 4: Commission on Bullying, Stress and Third Party Violence at Work**

Conference welcomes the establishment by the Executive Council of a Commission on Bullying, Stress and Third Party Violence at Work. Inappropriate behaviour in the workplace can have a devastating impact on the physical and emotional well being of workers, their partners, families and colleagues.

Many Congress affiliates report that the methodology used by employers in investigating complaints can add to the stress of complainants and serve as a deterrent to the lodging of grievances.

Noting the high level of complaints lodged by women workers, Conference calls on the Executive Council to ensure that the Commission examines the issue of gender specific bullying in the workplace, having particular regard to the need for best practice guidelines for the investigation of complaints.

*National Union of Journalists*

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## **Motion 5: Building Equality into Recovery**

The Equality Tribunal was established by the Employment Equality Act 1998 and provides a means of redress for cases of discrimination under the nine distinct grounds identified in the Act. In doing so the State was working towards the elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

Unfortunately the State has failed to adequately resource the Tribunal and as a consequence there are inordinate delays in having cases heard. These delays can seriously damage the claimant's ability to defend their claim and in some cases deters the individual from taking a case at all.

Therefore this motion calls on Congress to campaign for adequate resources in the Equality Tribunal so that workers can have their claims dealt with in a reasonable timeframe i.e., that the claimant is offered mediation or an investigation into the claim within a three month period.

*Civil and Public Services Union*

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## **Motion 6: Pensions**

"That this Conference notes that the recommendation of the Commission on Public Service Pensions that a single AVC type Scheme for Public Employees Additional Retirement Savings (SPEARS) for the entire public service be put in place has yet to be implemented;

Agrees that such a scheme would be of particular practical benefit to women whose occupational pension coverage can be significantly affected by fragmented career patterns and a greater likelihood of involvement in part time working

and

Calls on the Executive Council to press Government to develop proposals for such a scheme as a matter of urgency."

*Public Service Executive Union*

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### **Motion 7: Mental Health**

Conference recognises the importance of addressing depression and various mental health problems in workplaces. According to AWARE, a voluntary organisation providing support through depression, women are three to four times more likely than men to have depression. Nonetheless, depression and mental health issues in general are still treated with reservation in some places of employment. Now more than ever there is a need to develop support mechanisms to enhance mental well being at work. Accordingly, it is imperative that Trade Unions are in a position to provide the appropriate support for their members.

Therefore Conference calls on Congress to campaign for a programme on mental health awareness in workplaces and to develop a strategic approach to this issue to be adopted by affiliated trade unions.

*Communications Workers' Union*

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### **Motion 8: Quality of Public Health Services**

The INMO supports the basic principles of quality public health services delivered by quality workers, with quality working conditions. Investing in quality public services would facilitate the government to stimulate the economy and create jobs. Unfortunately the Republic of Ireland Government has done the exact opposite. We are aware that this Government's focus is to continue to privatise the health care system and is using the recession to introduce significant privatisation. We call upon this conference to oppose the Government's strive for more privatisation and to proactively examine the positive alternatives to privatisation.

*Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation*

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### **Motion 9: Employment Patterns based on Women's Experience**

ESBOA calls upon this conference to ask Congress to negotiate the enhancement and normalization of employment patterns that are based on women's experience on the labour-market, namely flexible work, job sharing and other

part-time arrangements, as a means of preventing companies and organisations from firing women and men employees.

In this time of deep economic recession it is vitally important that women retain their attachment to the workplace to ensure their economic independence and to alleviate the risks of child poverty. Flexible work options are not an automatic right for workers but are often dependent upon the policies of the employer. Part time workers are often perceived as less committed to the job and can be the first casualties of 'downsizing'. This perception particularly affects women workers and urgently needs to be addressed.

*Electricity Supply Board Officers' Association*

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# Women in Society

## **Motion 10: Extension of 1967 Abortion Act**

The women's committee of Unite calls on the ICTU to actively encourage the Irish Trade Union Movement to support the 'Alliance for Choice' campaign, to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to N. Ireland.

Reproductive rights for women have been central to their transformation within our society and we are appalled that the 1967 Abortion Act has still not been extended to N. Ireland. We continue to receive a restrictive reproductive health care provision which is available to our counterparts in the rest of the UK.

It has now been reported that London has become the Abortion Capital of Ireland, with 1,500 women from N. Ireland and an estimated 5,000 from ROI travelling there for the procedure and paying £2,000 in costs.

We can no longer ignore inequality when there is no justification, it is discrimination which needs the support of the trade union movement.

*UNITE the Union*

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## **Motion 11: Domestic Violence**

"Conference recognises that domestic violence is still endemic to society both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and calls for renewed efforts to eradicate violence in all its forms throughout the island.

Conference welcomes the publication of ICTU's revised set of guidelines on Domestic Abuse and calls upon all affiliates to press urgently both public and private sector employers to introduce workplace policies and procedures which will contribute to the overall campaign against domestic violence as well as providing a safe and supportive working environment to the victims.

We also call on Congress to press the Governments North and South to recognise its responsibility to protect its citizens and bring forward proposals to address the issue of access to legal aid for vulnerable families and the provision of properly funded services for victims, such as healthcare through GPs, and support through the police, social services, the criminal justice system, Women's Aid and other relevant support agencies and community organisations in their campaigns and work in tackling domestic violence."

*Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance*

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### **Motion 12: Budget 2010**

Conference condemns the unequal and unfair measures taken by the Irish Government in Budget 2010 which disproportionately attacks children, lone parents, unemployed people and people with disabilities.

Conference deplures the fact that many low income families won't just suffer one income reduction but will suffer multiple cuts. The pain of economic adjustment is not being fairly shared and those on the lowest incomes, those most vulnerable to poverty, are being made to pay for the mistakes of others.

Conference acknowledges the sterling work carried out by the Poor Can't Pay campaign coalition of charities, community organisations and trade unions and calls on unions to campaign individually, and where possible collectively, in defence of low income households, low paid workers and the most marginalised in society.

*Mandate Trade Union*

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### **Motion 13: Fundamental Human Rights in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**

The UK Government has betrayed the people of Northern Ireland by failing to implement the core human rights and equality elements of the Good Friday Agreement. This motion has a particular focus on its betrayal of women's rights.

The UK Government has now abandoned all Bill of Rights proposals from the NI Human Rights Commission on socio economic rights in general and women's rights in particular. It has taken this action despite the universal acknowledgment that women played a fundamental role in sustaining life during the conflict and a key role in peace building.

Women across Ireland are facing growing inequality. Working class women in areas of disadvantage are facing the greatest inequality. The need to enshrine socio economic rights including women's rights in an enforceable Bill of Rights is essential.

The Irish Government has also not lived up to its commitments on equality and human rights in the Good Friday Agreement - either for the people of Northern Ireland or the Republic.

It is also unacceptable that real work on an all island Charter of Rights has stalled. This too is a commitment in the Good Friday Agreement.

The Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements will not be fulfilled until the equality and human rights commitments are fully met and operational. Ironically the Irish Government places an international focus on UN resolution 1325 on women's contribution to conflict resolution and peace-building as it travels the world using NI as model of best practice. The inaction of the Irish

Government and the outrageous actions of the UK Government make a mockery of this position.

Conference commends the NIC and affiliates for their actions to date in this area and now calls on the ICTU Executive Council to fully support the campaign in both jurisdictions.

Conference also calls on the ICTU Executive and the Northern Ireland Committee to engage jointly with both Governments to finally deliver on these essential commitments in the Good Friday Agreement and in particular to lobby:

- both on the urgent introduction on a strong, inclusive and enforceable Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which has socio-economic rights at its core to underpin the Peace Process and create a fair, just and equal society, and
- to lobby both Governments for urgent action on bringing forward a strong and inclusive All Island Charter of Rights;

*UNISON*

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#### **Motion 14: Reform of Banking Culture**

Conference considers that the financial services sector occupies a pivotal position in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland – underpinning economic and social activity in both the private and public sectors in each jurisdiction.

Conference recognises that the exceedingly generous reward arrangements for those who have been primarily responsible for the current financial crisis are in sharp contrast to the remuneration packages available to the vast majority of staff in the financial services sector who are now bearing the brunt of the crisis in the form of job losses, reduced earnings and restructured pensions;

Conference further recognises the widespread concern that excessive annual bonus payments to senior executives in the financial services sector have contributed to reckless decision-making based on short-term super profits rather than long-term stability;

Conference notes that the survival of many leading financial institutions operating on the island of Ireland has only been secured by virtue of considerable State investment at a time when the public finances have been under substantial pressure as a result of the recession;

Conference further notes that a number of governments worldwide have introduced various measures ranging from attempts to curb excessive bonus payments to more far-reaching programmes to change the culture of banking in a more fundamental manner;

Conference, therefore, calls on both the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish working groups

which would include representatives of employers, employees, customers and regulatory agencies involved the financial services sector with a view to making recommendations on the reform of banking culture – which would include the principles governing the structure of remuneration – in their respective jurisdictions.

*Irish Bank Officials' Association*

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**Motion 15: Beijing + 15**

Conference notes that 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The PFA was adopted by many Governments around the world including the Governments of these Islands.

Conference calls upon Congress to further lobby Government to ensure that the twelve critical points are given due and proper consideration, as this has been lacking so far to the detriment of women in all areas of their lives. These include:

Education  
Health  
Violence  
Conflict  
The Economy  
Women in Power  
Ways to make Equality Happen  
Human Rights  
The Media  
The Environment  
Girls  
Poverty

Conference further calls upon Congress to arrange a mid term seminar to discuss progress and updates on the above.

*Women's Committee (NI)*

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**Motion 16: Sex Trafficking**

Conference recognises that the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is a modern form of slavery. It is a horrendous crime that has frequently been overlooked in Ireland. The Irish sex industry is worth €180 million a year – women and girls are being exploited for profit. It is an industry that severely harms women and is a tangible form of human rights abuse. These victims of trafficking have not made a free choice. They are frequently lied to and misled in order to bring them to Ireland and are often beaten and raped into submission. Furthermore, they are at risk of severe emotional distress and fear based trauma.

While various activities associated with prostitution are outlawed in Ireland, such as curb crawling, soliciting, loitering in public places, brothel keeping and living off immoral earnings, the purchase and the selling of sex remain protected by the current law and are viewed as a contract between consenting adults. We can no longer afford to ignore the Irish sex industry and its devastating impacts on the lives of women and girls involved in prostitution to cater for the ever expanding demand for paid sex. It is estimated that up to 1,000 women are involved in indoor prostitution on any given day in Ireland, and between 87 and 97 percent of these women are migrants. It is important to dispel the myth that they are engaging in harmless commercial transactions.

We must develop effective and appropriate responses. This industry which exploits and harms women would not exist if there was no demand from men who buy sex. As other countries, such as Norway and Sweden, criminalise the purchase of sex, Ireland is in danger of becoming a sex tourism destination for men from abroad – further exacerbating the conditions that lead to trafficking.

We must view prostitution for what it is – a harmful and degrading experience for those involved, rather than a harmless commercial transaction. Bearing in mind the life-long health consequences, stigmatisation and psychological damage for the women involved, and also for the men who purchase sex, Conference calls on the Government to adopt measures geared towards the elimination of prostitution.

We therefore urge the Irish Government to learn from those countries which have established good practise for dealing with sex trafficking, in particular Sweden and Norway. These countries have criminalised the purchase of sex and decriminalised the selling of sex.

Through this approach, Norway and Sweden (and the UK is soon to follow) have reduced the demand for prostitution and incidences of trafficking of human beings for the purposes of sexual exploitation, proving that tackling demand is central to tackling sex trafficking.

The conference calls on ICTU to join the National Campaign to tackle the demand for paid sex in Ireland, initiated by the National Women Council of Ireland, Barnardos, Ruhama, FLAC, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Akidwa, DRCC, Women's Aid, APT(action to prevent trafficking) and other leading civil society campaigners in Ireland.

*Technical, Engineering and Electrical Union*

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