

# United Action

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**THE MISSION STATEMENT** OF THE COUNCIL OF GLOBAL UNIONS, SIGNED IN JANUARY, 2007 SAYS IT ALL – “TO ORGANISE, TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOUR STANDARDS EVERYWHERE, AND TO PROMOTE THE GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL WORKING MEN AND WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES.” NEVER HAS THIS SIMPLE EXPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY BEEN MORE NEEDED THAN IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES.

The recession that has followed on the heels of the financial services collapse has reinforced the need for partnership between organisations representing national centres and those representing sectoral unions. This is the time when unions need all the political and industrial muscle they can muster.

This publication outlines a strategic response to the global crisis from the international trade union movement. The ideas set out here are being put before the international community and world leaders, not to duplicate work already being done by individual Global Unions, individually or collectively, but to raise a single, unified voice in favour of a recovery strategy that puts people first.

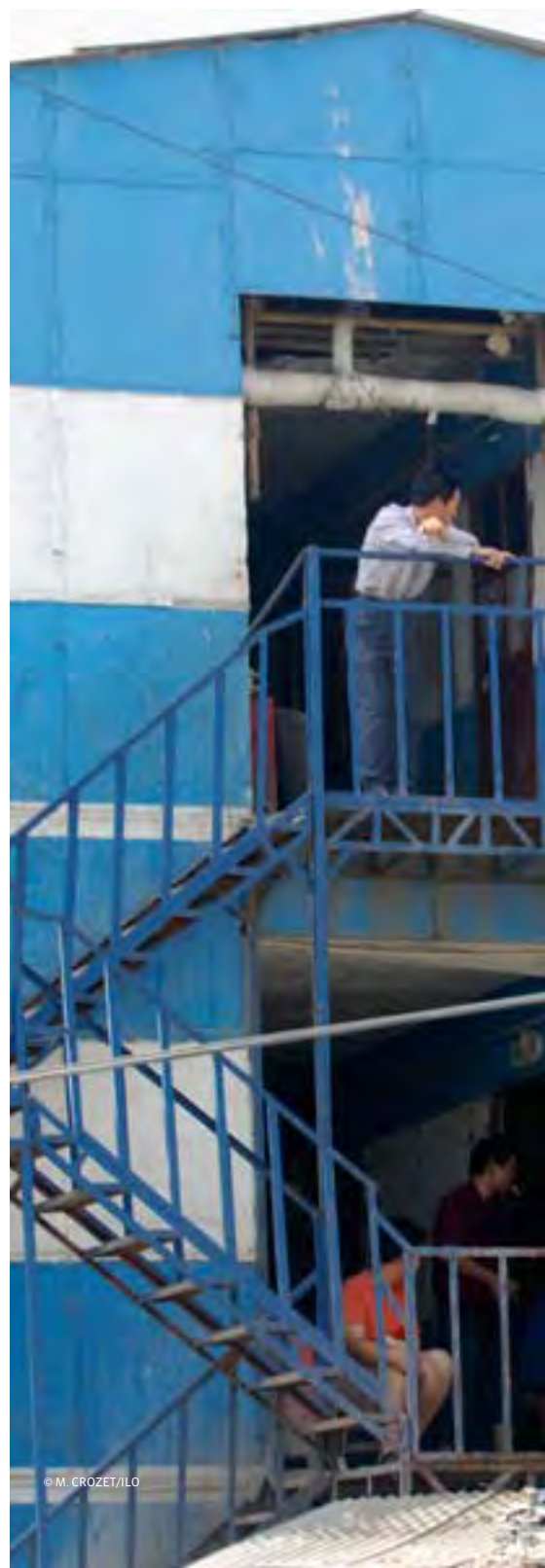
The Global Union movement takes strength from concerted activity. It serves as a forum for sharing information and ideas and as a catalyst for action and co-operation that is valuable to the international trade union movement as a whole.

Nearly all of the actions of the Council of Global Unions relate to organising and trade union recognition. It may be working to effect changes in labour legislation and its implementation so that workers are free to form unions without fear. The effort to provide international support for the effort of the US trade union movement to adopt the Employee Free Choice Act is one such and very important example.

Other countries are also being identified where we can combine our political and industrial force to give workers a chance to exercise the right to organise their unions and bargain. That includes country targets as well as collaboration in Export Processing Zones.

The increasing numbers of precarious and informal work relationships throughout the world have also become a serious barrier to organising, bargaining, and building trade union strength. Workers outside the orbit of regular, direct employment contracts, live in a twilight world of precarious work often without any social, legal or bargaining protection. And, even those protected on paper are often afraid to organise and risk losing employment. “Disposable” workers have been the first victims of the economic crisis. Co-operation in this area, facilitated by a working group, has been one of the highest priorities of Global Unions. We must come out of this crisis with a restoration of the idea of regular employment not only for the sake of the affected workers, but also to help to block an employment “freefall” whenever economic troubles hit. This global work is advancing rapidly due to tight co-operation among Global Unions on policy, including with intergovernmental bodies, and on sectoral work in the areas of organising and industrial relations.

Global migration is another increasing phenomenon affecting organising



possibilities, especially in some sectors like construction, health and service sectors. Therefore, joint work has been initiated on migration, an issue that has both a policy dimension and sector-specific impact. In the coming years millions of workers will be crossing continents in search of work and a better life and co-operation among Global Unions is seen as a way of strengthening both policy and sectoral responses.

Also important are efforts to influence the impact and role of multinational companies on global

and national markets. They are often operating with turnover budgets bigger than many national budgets. This also has an impact on national labour markets and opportunities to organise workers and defend their rights. Global social dialogue between several Global Union Federations and individual companies has expanded enormously over recent decades, including though the negotiation of over 60 international or global framework agreements with multinational corporations. The Council of Global Unions is gathering and exchanging information on company strategies and framework agreements.

Fulfilling our trade union ambitions is not possible, however, without good laws that fully protect rights and that are enforced. That requires governments that work and a rehabilitation of public service values. The economic crisis underlines the folly of “contracting out” public responsibilities and the public good to those who are driven by profit. The wide range of issues from quality public services to fair and adequate taxation, to the vital links between public rules and private conduct and performance to economic and social justice are being examined together by Global Unions. A “recovery” with government back in the closet after the banks are back on their feet or with public service values crowded out by private profit will re-sow the seeds of market meltdown.

To make the most of this wide-ranging Global Unions’ programme and to help its members communicate better with their members and the general public, elements of a unified, coherent campaigning and communications strategy are being developed. A task force brings together Global Unions to develop common communications approaches and tools, including making further advances into the internet age. This publication is itself an initiative of the task force.

It is impossible to examine the options for recovery without addressing the growing inequality inside and among countries. Poverty and unemployment are expanding so rapidly that figures become almost instantly out of date.

A response to the economic crisis is not just about financial regulation and oversight; any recovery must deal with inequalities and injustices and forge a new approach in government



policy, directed towards increased scope for collective bargaining as a process to redistribute wealth and to promote equality. The impact of discrimination based on gender, national status, race, religion, and other considerations is growing as the financial, food, and energy crises worsen.

All of these issues provide a rich and plentiful agenda for union action. Success is not guaranteed, but progress will be made so long as there are better communications and stronger ties between the national and international communities of labour. Working together to promote international labour standards to defend workers rights to organise and bargain collectively, promoting industrial co-operation, new laws and a liberating policy environment as well as action at workplaces, will bring its rewards. The recovery from the mess created by global capitalism will take time and will be painful, but the international labour movement is determined to put coherent and effective trade union strategies for rights and growth into the mix of solutions.

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