

CGU General Secretaries Meeting
11 June 2010 – Geneva

Summary Minutes of Informal CGU Meeting on Occupational Health and Safety

3 March 2010, Geneva

Participants: *Anita Normark (BWI), Fiona Murie (BWI), Brian Kohler (ICEM), Esther Busser (ITUC), Raquel Gonzalez (ITUC), Anabella Rosemberg (ITUC), Anita Gardner (IMF), Sue Longley (IUF), Jorge Mancillas (PSI), Jim Baker (CGU).*

The group was brought together based on a decision of the Council of Global Unions that was taken in connection with the CGU three-year review. Global Union representatives were to be asked to me to “examine how international trade union work on occupational health and safety can be more co-ordinated, coherent and effective.” Anita Normark chaired the informal meeting. A short agenda was agreed. The ILO item was considered first and the reports of Global Unions covered their activities, but also commented on the ILO and, to a lesser extent, on the WHO.

ILO

The ITUC Geneva office provided an overview of activities of the ILO and positions taken by the ITUC over recent years. This included the need to better promote the ratification and implementation of ILO standards on occupational safety and health. The common strategy for promotion of such standards adopted following discussions in the 2005 and 2006 sessions of the International Labour Conference was very weak. The Employers’ Group was against a stronger instrument. The Workers’ Group stresses the necessity for a legal basis for such standards and structures to make them work in practice. Employers may have feared that health and safety issues could be used for union organising purposes. Such issues are among the reasons that workers form trade unions and are, therefore, complementary to the rights to organise and bargain. More recently, the employers seem more open and serious about engaging with trade unions on these issues.

There was a survey on Convention 155 in 2009 (convention on occupational health and safety adopted in 1981). The ILO Governing Body, which meets in March 2010, will discuss a Plan of Action for ratification of 187 (the promotional framework convention adopted in 2006) and 155 and the protocol notification and reporting of occupational diseases. Documents are prepared and have been sent around by the ITUC Geneva Office for comment.

Discussions have also been held with SECTOR on increasing the ratification and implementation of standards, especially on identifying target countries. The ILO Global Jobs Pact can also be used to raise awareness on sectoral and other OSH conventions. The same ILC in 2006 that adopted the framework convention also adopted an important resolution on asbestos. That can be used for follow-up on that issue

Summary on ILO:

- a) Promotion of Convention 155 and sector Conventions and recommendations;

- b) Identifying and developing national action plans including sectors in certain key countries (connected to ILO Decent Work Country Programs; ITUC-Geneva will provide list); March GB discussion of Action Plan for conventions 155 and 187.
- c) Strengthening institutional capacity (including labour inspection); something that should be discussed with ACTRAV.
- d) promoting OHS policies, management systems etc;
- e) Discuss OSH issues with the International Organisation of Employers (IOE).

Current activities of Global Unions

BWI reported on an IOE OSH conference in February (BWI represented the CGU). At the conference, Janet Askerson (previously working for the Confederation of British Industries before going to work for the IOE, and a former labour inspector) introduced GOSH, a global OHS network for employers. The focus of the Conference was on occupational diseases and prevention through training of OHS representatives and contributions of joint OHS committees. There would seem to be new possibilities to discuss areas of cooperation with IOE. CGU will follow up with them.

SAFEWORK in the ILO has been fairly silent in recent years and has lost resources. BWI and IUF have been doing OHS work through SECTOR; BWI has, for example, initiated OHS training materials in construction, especially public works. A new study strongly supports the idea that union involvement makes work safer.

IUF referred to work with SECTOR on ILO Convention 184 Concerning Safety and Health in Agriculture and some concrete actions (but with limited resources). There is a Code of Practice on OHS in agriculture. Work done by SAFEWORK is often contracted out with little possibility of timely trade union involvement. The need for proper consultation procedure at SAFEWORK was stressed. In ILO discussions on safe use of chemicals, the IOE did not play a very constructive role.

IUF also mentioned that there was not agreement with employers at the ILO concerning roving or regional OHS representatives, a very important mechanism for small farms and SMEs. IUF is also working jointly with PSI on OHS effects on avian flu and other pandemics. Other related issues include the food crisis and food security. IUF also mentioned the new Convention on Domestic Workers (including OHS) to be discussed at the 2010 ILC. And informal consultation on the preparation of that convention will be held in mid April.

ICEM indicated that their priority has been on Convention 167 on mining safety. As part of that work, they have developed a poster on that convention. They have been holding regional meetings with the ILO on Chemical safety.

PSI reported on their work with ILO and WHO on HIV/Aids to implement guidelines. Most of PSI's work at international level has been with WHO with a global plan of action for workers health (a 10 million USD programme) and access for workers to health services; There is a shortage of health workers. They run special risks. A campaign is underway to vaccinate 500.000 health workers against Hepatitis B and C. There are also campaign activity on workplace violence and prevention of needle-stick injuries, including those related to exposure to HIV. Their work on OHS training was mentioned and the question of Global Unions joint training in regions was raised.

The ITUC reported on OHS activities in general and on the resolution that will be submitted to the upcoming ITUC Congress; a regional OHS strategy for Latin America with support of ACTRAV; cooperation with ETUI and the OECD on nanotechnologies; the “synergiprocess” involving the Rotterdam, Basel and Stockholm Conventions where a first meeting had been held in Bali. In response to a question about the role of SustainLabour on OHS, the group was informed that they are not involved in OHS, although there has been some recent work on international framework agreements and OSH,

WHO

There was a discussion of the risk of WHO creating a parallel structure in workplaces. This concern was based on positions taken at a recent conference. Concerning workplaces, this should have been a joint ILO-WHO initiative. IUF will send around a draft for an official letter to both the ILO and WHO.

A joint ILO-WHO action plan for prevention and elimination of asbestos and other occupational diseases was mentioned by BWI, and reference was made to a common list of occupational diseases.

The CGU suggested that this group should also look at stress related occupational diseases. There is growing evidence that they are being increased by precarious work, closures and job losses. This question has also been discussed in the Work Relationships' Group.

Campaigns

a) 28 April – Workers Memorial Day

ITUC has proposed the theme “Unions make work safer” (leaving room for different sectoral issues) it's a theme that seems to be very much appreciated. There will be reporting back from national activities. ITUC will also develop a flyer to be distributed.

ICEM will have a newsletter dedicated to 28 April and BWI, with affiliates, will launch, at building sites the OHS study and training materials developed with the ILO.

PSI will launch a set of guidelines for treatment of HIV and tuberculosis and the IUF will focus on the chemical substance paragnat used in agriculture.

The ITUC expressed concerns about the initiative to use 28 April for actions on HIV (in connection with the G20 meeting in Canada).

b) Asbestos

BWI mentioned their and joint Global Union actions organised on asbestos that identify producing countries and importing countries as well as work on the Rotterdam convention and support for victims (a briefing will be sent around). ICEM said that Canada is the crucial country to focus on if there is to be a global ban. It was suggested that the asbestos issue should be acted on in connection with the G20 meeting. BWI is proposing visits to the Canadian embassy on and around 28 April.

Future cooperation

The consensus was that this informal group on OSH should continue to meet on a periodic basis rather than simply being an email list. A letter should be sent to General Secretaries to propose to set up a working group.

In addition, it was, however, suggested that the CGU should create a small email list of those attending the meeting as well as those interested in this area of work, but not able to attend and any other Global Unions' colleagues. This would serve facilitate the exchange of information.

It was also agreed that the sharing of information should also take the form of a calendar of all known Global OSH events. Such a calendar would help with the establishment of common action.

In addition to information and meetings, it was felt that we should look at a number of common strategies in such areas as campaigns, influence on international bodies, and relations with employers on OSH issues. CGU discussions with the IOE might be expected to lead to a small meeting to explore issues and see if there are possibilities for agreement and joint action.