

RESOLUTION 54

Support for the Work of the Solidarity Center

THE SOLIDARITY CENTER, founded in 1997, has been promoting global trade union cooperation, democratic development and economic justice for workers throughout the world. It has helped thousands of workers to organize and build their unions. As corporate-led globalization sweeps across the world, workers need strong unions and pro-worker policies now more than ever.

The Solidarity Center works closely with more than 40 affiliates, trade and industrial departments, constituency groups and allied organizations to build global solidarity. The Solidarity Center regularly sponsors affiliate exchange programs for national and local labor leaders focusing on how globalization is impacting workers and the need to organize unions within global corporations. Delegations of central labor council and state federation leaders have traveled to Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia and South Africa over the past several months. They have seen firsthand the vital work of the Solidarity Center in assisting free and independent unions facing the extreme challenges of globalization.

In today's global economy, where a pro-corporate, anti-union agenda has weakened the rights of workers and destabilized democratic governments, unions are central to pro-worker policies and support for democratic systems of government. In Cambodia, with the support of the Solidarity Center, workers and trade unionists are building their first unions and winning their first collective bargaining agreements under a unique labor rights trade agreement and organizing under threats of violence and against enormous odds. The Solidarity Center will continue to support unions' and workers' participation in the struggle to gain freedom, workers' rights, economic and social justice and fair elections.

The Solidarity Center responds to the needs of its union partners. In South Africa, the Solidarity Center supports worker-driven HIV/AIDS programs in workplaces. Without the right to affordable health care, workers cannot meet their responsibilities in workplaces and build strong unions. The Solidarity Center, working in partnership with affiliates, supports unions to provide treatment for working families living with the devastating effects of this pandemic.

With 129 trade unionists killed worldwide in 2004 and an increase in death threats, imprisonment and physical harassment, trade union rights continue to be violated across the world. In response, the Solidarity Center is supporting a program for Colombian trade unionists to temporarily visit the United States, work on local union organizing campaigns and educate U.S. trade unionists about the challenges facing Colombian trade unions and workers. This program, in addition to programs in Burma, Zimbabwe and Guatemala, among others, supports workers and trade unions to challenge and fight against violence targeting trade unionists.

While the gap between the wealthy and poor grows, the Solidarity Center is working to ensure the global economy benefits workers and the poor. The Solidarity Center's programs to address racial and gender discrimination are supporting unions to develop programs and policies that address workplace sexual harassment and violence, document discriminatory hiring and wage-setting practices and train workers on how to increase diversity within their union structures. The Solidarity Center is also assisting migrant worker associations and unions to ensure all workers, regardless of their country of origin, are guaranteed fundamental workers' rights in their host countries.

To help build strong unions and a global labor movement capable of organizing workers and shaping pro-worker policies, the Solidarity Center needs funding. Labor movements in almost every advanced democracy receive government support for international labor programs.

The Solidarity Center will continue to seek public funds, while at the same time it will work to diversify its funding base. With bipartisan support for its programs to strengthen unions and promote democracy, the Solidarity Center maintains its independence to set priorities that reflect the American labor movement's commitment to workers' rights and democratic values.

The Solidarity Center will continue to use public funding to support the building of free and independent trade unions.

In Iraq, the Solidarity Center is supporting every major trade union confederation in that country and a number of sector- level unaffiliated unions. These programs, as is the case with many Solidarity Center programs, are carried out multilaterally through the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Global Union Federations (GUFs) and the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU).

The Solidarity Center is supporting programs that assist workers and unions to shape pro-worker policies. In Venezuela, the Solidarity Center's programs reflect the AFL-CIO's statement of support for the Chavez government's socially progressive domestic

programs and its objection to Chavez's infringement of freedom of association rights. Since 1999, the Solidarity Center's programs in Venezuela have focused exclusively on collective bargaining, freedom of association and workers' rights in relation to trade. In response to a demand placed on the Confederacion de Trabajadores Venezolanos (CTV) by President Chavez, the Solidarity Center supported programs focused on the democratization and direct election process in Venezuelan unions. Funding for these programs has been rigidly managed and controlled and has included support for both non-CTV and pro-Chavez labor organizations.

The Solidarity Center works with unions, national federations and Global Union Federations around the globe. Trade union development assistance for the global labor movement is coordinated multilaterally through ICFTU (www.icftu.org). Organizations similar to the Solidarity Center exist in Europe, Japan and Australia and recipient country unions such as COSATU/South Africa, CUT/Brazil, as well as unions from Asia and Eastern Central Europe.

Whether in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe or the Americas, unions are vital to the struggle for a global economy that works for working families. The Solidarity Center will continue to work with our affiliates and the global labor movement to ensure workers have the right to join unions and bargain collectively. The work of the Solidarity Center is at the forefront of strengthen the global labor movement and shaping global policies that benefit workers and their families.