



International Committee Minutes

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| Location | UNISON Centre | |
| Date | Wednesday 13 November 2013 | Time: 10.00 |

Committee

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| Dave Auger | Josie Bird | Janet Bryan |
| Jean Butcher (chair) | John Campbell | Daniel Goodwin |
| Paul Glover | Helen Jenner | Stephen Kennedy (vice-chair) |
| Kevin O'Grady | | |

Officers in attendance

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| Nick Crook | international officer |
| Máirín Power | assistant international officer |

Jean Butcher in the chair

1. Welcome and apologies

Josie Bird and Janet Bryan sent their apologies.

The chair informed the meeting that following the devastating typhoon in the Philippines which had killed thousands and displaced millions, the presidential team had immediately agreed a donation of £10,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), a consortium of British NGOs endorsed by the TUC. The committee **AGREED** the donation.

The committee conveyed its sympathy for those affected and **AGREED** to send a message of condolence to the trade unions and organisations that had written to UNISON asking for support. The committee **AGREED** to invite partner organisations to submit project proposals for future consideration as longer term there would be a need to assist with rebuilding affected communities.

The chair and vice-chair **AGREED** to briefly meet with members of the Filipino community at UNISON who were holding a meeting that evening.

The committee **AGREED** to pose for a photograph in support of education support workers in South Korea who would be taking strike action later in the week because of the precarious nature of their employment contracts.

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 18 September 2013

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

3. Matters arising from the minutes and not covered in this agenda

There were no matter arising.

4. Committee members' involvement in international issues

The committee **AGREED** to NEC representations on boards of solidarity organisations to which we are affiliated including:

Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) Kevin O'Grady (existing member), Jean Butcher (interest – not a board member)
 Amnesty International UK (AIUK) Jean Butcher (existing member of AIUK's trade union network committee - TUNC)
 Amnesty International UK (AIUK) Northern Ireland TUNC (TUNC NIrl not yet operational) Stephen Kennedy
 Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines (CHRP) Kevin O'Grady (interest – not a board member)
 Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) Stephen Kennedy (existing member)
 Justice for Colombia (JFC) Dave Auger
 Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG) John Campbell
 Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) Helen Jenner and Jean Butcher sharing role
 Venezuela Solidarity Campaign (VSC) Dan Goodwin

5. Papers for discussion

5.1 Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

Nick Crook explained the background to the proposed TTIP, and how it might impact on public services should the agreement between the EU and the US go ahead. The TTIP is a new generation of free trade agreements (FTA) whereby an 'investor state dispute' mechanism allows a multi-national company (MNC) to mount a legal challenge against a sovereign national government should they deem a government decision to be unfavourable to the MNC. There had been recent examples of the mechanism being invoked which resulted in multi-million dollar compensation being granted to the MNC as the plaintiff.

The AFL-CIO in the US and the TUC in Britain had adopted a position whereby it sought to influence the terms of the TTIP rather than come out against it as they claimed that there were some positives in the agreement which would benefit the manufacturing industry.

UNISON would seek to ensure that public services were not included in the agreement and would campaign for removal of the 'investor state dispute' clause. UNISON would develop campaign and briefing materials on the TTIP for UNISON members to use in their regions and branches to ensure that the FTA would not impact negatively on public services or public services workers.

The committee **AGREED** the paper and also **AGREED** to consider a motion to NDC on the EU/US TTIP. The motion would be done jointly with PDCC.

5.2 Calendar of international days (branch resource)

The international unit had compiled a calendar of internationally recognised days (including International Women's Day, International Workers' Memorial Day, etc) which could be used as a branch resource to do international work.

The unit was working on a programme of work for 2014 (to be discussed at the January 2014 committee meeting) and would endeavour to integrate the calendar into the work programme so that key milestones could be observed across the union

thereby raising the profile of our international work. The international unit would work with colleagues at the UNISON Centre and in the regions to develop this initiative.

The committee welcomed the paper and suggested additional days, including Nelson Mandela Day. The committee **AGREED** to endorse the initiative.

6. **EPSU Congress delegation 2014**

EPSU Congress takes place in Toulouse 20-23 May 2014. The international committee can nominate one member to attend. It was **AGREED** to nominate the chair, Jean Butcher, to attend on behalf of the committee.

7. **Invited speaker - Colombia**

Alirio Garcia, general secretary of the Colombian agricultural workers' union, FENSUAGRO, who was visiting the UK, was invited to address the committee. He was accompanied by Mariella Kohon, director of Justice for Colombia.

Mr Garcia briefed the committee on the current situation in Colombia and the ongoing targeting of trade unionists who he said were being 'assassinated for demanding their rights'. He said that disputes over land was increasing and that landownership was being further concentrated in 'the hands of the few' – 1% of the population owns 60% of the land and 5m farmers have been displaced.

Powerful collective interests has led to legislation being introduced which favours MNCs to increase landownership. It has also led to the criminalisation of peasant leaders and activists who have been imprisoned on false testimonies, including the wife of Alirio Garcia, who was charged with rebellion and narco-trafficking.

Strikes by agricultural workers in August of this year, led by FENSUAGRO, escalated the violence against activists, 12 of whom have been murdered. There were 800 arrests following the strikes, with 89 being charged. One of those charged was Huber Ballesteros, vice-president of FENSUAGRO, who was due to address the TUC Congress in September. He is accused of rebellion and being involved with the FARC. JFC said that these trumped-up charges are an age-old tactic used by the authorities to discredit trade unionists.

Alirio Garcia said that if the peace negotiations between FARC and the Colombian government are to have any success, the question of landownership must be addressed as it is the root cause of the conflict. The current administration is presenting a face of moderation and progress to the international community but the policies of ex-president Uribe remain in place which continues to see activists being murdered and farmers being displaced as land grabs continue.

Trade union membership had all but been wiped out in many regions of Colombia as a result of the targeting of trade unionists. Mr Garcia said in 37 years over 1,500 members were assassinated and many others either in prison or exile. He was heartened that of the 32 departments (administrative areas) in the country, FENSUAGRO now had a presence in 27 of those. He said it was a slow process touring the country and educating people 'not to be scared'.

Alirio Garcia was returning to Colombia that week and hoped, with JFC, to visit Huber Ballesteros. The committee was invited to send a message of solidarity to him in prison.

As a result of the meeting the committee **AGREED** a number of actions:

- Send a written message of solidarity to Huber Ballesteros;
- Publicise the handing in of a petition calling for Huber's release to the Colombian ambassador on 26 November;
- Circulate the JFC written report on the peace campaign once it had been received;
- Request Dave Prentis to write to regions and branches to encourage them to affiliate to JFC and to become engaged in the issue;
- Consider the current list of affiliations to JFC once it is received from JFC

8. UNISON International Development Fund (UIDF)

8.1 Update on existing projects

There are currently 10 on-going projects; two of which are just about to be completed.

There had been difficulties with the implementation and completion of three of the projects, and the committee was asked to consider a number of options:

Botswana – the committee was asked to agreed to extend this project with the local government workers' union BLAHAWU as there had been a national strike during the implementation of the project. This did not allow the union to complete the project on time so there is a current underspend;

Colombia –the University Workers' Union who were conducting the project requested a 6-month extension as it had faced some administrative issues in completing on time;

Colombia – Sintrambiente union – issues regarding transfer of the grant. The international unit was working to resolve the problem, and would report back to the committee once the union had reassured UNISON regarding financial transparency.

The committee **AGREED** to accept the recommendations.

8.2 New project – NEHAWU South Africa

The committee AGREED to fund the project which will focus on training NEHAWU's leadership at branch level on key bargaining demands on wellness and HIV/AIDS and how to incorporate into collective agreements. The project will be run over one year at a cost of £18,100

8.3 New project – Kav LaOved Israel

The committee **AGREED** to fund this new project with Kav LaOved ('workers' hotline') which will work with Thai agricultural workers, who are amongst the most exploited in Israel.

The project will be run as a pilot over one year with potential to continue into a second year at a cost of £30,000.

8.4 New project – WATER federation Philippines

The committee **AGREED** to fund the project which will focus on building the capacity of WATER federation in the water industry in the Philippines which has been part privatised.

The project will be run over a one-year period at a cost of £25,000.

8.5 New project – One Voice Palestine – to follow in January 2014

8.6 New project – Wac/Ma'an East Jerusalem

The committee **AGREED** to fund the project over two years. This project aims to provide support and advice to Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories directly administered by Israel.

The project will be run over a period of two years at a cost of £25,131 per annum.

The committee also **AGREED** to consider inviting someone from one of the UIDF projects to come to the UK possibly as a guest at NDC and also to address the committee (and services to members committee).

9. International seminar 2014

The committee **AGREED** to hold the next international seminar at Croyde Bay 11-13 April 2014.

A number of themes and countries were discussed including holding sessions on eliminating violence against women (EVAW) which could be linked to national initiatives, Palestine, decent work including safety of workers following the Rana Plaza and other disasters, inviting Labour Behind the Label to give a global perspective on women doing work that involved the three Ds (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) and linking it to a campaign to encourage members to call for their employers to adopt ethical procurement policies, celebrating the 20th anniversary of democracy in South Africa taking in the wider issues in the region, Austerity Europe (and possibly doing this at NDC also), ice breaker quiz, Cuba and support for the international commission on the Miami Five.

It was **AGREED** to consider a revised programme for the seminar in January 2014

10. UNISON grants for individuals and regions – application forms

The committee **RECEIVED** the grant application forms which had been revised for individuals and branches/regions to apply for funding to carry out international visits or voluntary work abroad.

The individual grants were available to activists who, with their branch and region's support, could undertake a study tour abroad. This could include participating in a regional delegation or conducting an individual visit in line with UNISON international policy. The branch/regional grants were available to part-fund outgoing delegations or setting up/following up on twinning agreements.

It was **AGREED** to advertise the grants (two per year for each type of grant) in advance of the January committee and consider applications at the next committee.

It was also **AGREED** to update the Twinning Booklet when capacity allowed.

11. Reports

11.1 and 11.3 ACTSA NEC and AGM

Kevin O'Grady reported back from ACTSA NEC and AGM. He said that ACTSA, like many NGOs, was experiencing financial difficulties. Their application for charitable status had been rejected which deprived the organisation of gift aid which could have been a vital source of revenue. Swaziland continued to be a priority for ACTSA and the AGM heard from a speaker from Zimbabwe. He said ACTSA was developing a 4-year strategy and would be focusing on economic justice, gender issues, solidarity and grass roots development. ACTSA were actively encouraging affiliations and UNION branches and regions would be invited to affiliate.

11.2 VSC AGM

Stephen Kennedy had attended VSC's AGM and submitted a written report. He said the presentation by VSC young members had been a highlight of the AGM and asked the committee to consider inviting them to speak to the committee or the international seminar at a future date. The report from the AGM was **NOTED**.

11.4 Reports from individuals who had received grants

The committee **NOTED** the reports received from two activists who had received individual grants to conduct study visits to the Philippines, and one from an activist who had participated in a delegation to Colombia.

12. Requests

The following requests were all **AGREED** by the committee:

- Reel News/Heliopolis productions – project called Punto Final which is seeking justice for Spanish trade unionists and other victims of Franco's regime in the 60s and 70s (£1,000);
- Kalikasan/War on Want – project to expose devastating effect of proposed mining project in Mindanao, Philippines (£16,000);
- Burma Campaign UK – donation towards BCUK's work on EAW in Burma's ethnic regions where rape is systemic (£7,000). The committee sought clarification on why other donors had withdrawn funding.

The following request was **DEFERRED** until January 2014

- Western Sahara Campaign – project to build global support for UN mandate to include human rights monitoring, and to build links with trade unions on plight of Saharawis in land occupied by Morocco. The committee asked if some research could be undertaken to establish what links WSC had with other organisations in the region.

13. Invited speaker - Swaziland

The committee welcomed Wandile Dlodlu coordinator of the Swaziland Democracy Campaign who was accompanied by Mark Beacon and Rebecca McDowall of Action

for Southern Africa (ACTSA). Wandile's visit to the UK had been supported by UNISON after the original funder had withdrawn support at very short notice.

Mark Beacon told the committee that 2014 would mark the 20th anniversary of democracy in South Africa and would be commemorated in the UK. He said that ACTSA had taken on a new role since democracy in SA, and had widened its remit to include the wider southern Africa region. He talked about the continuing work of ACTSA in seeking compensation for workers and miners who had suffered from asbestosis and silicosis, supporting fair trade and fair taxation initiatives, supporting a Zimbabwe women's campaign, organising delegations to the region and latterly supporting the democracy movement in Swaziland of which Wandile was a key figure.

Wandile Dlodlu gave some background to the history of Swaziland and the supremacy of the king, the last absolute monarch in Africa. He informed the committee that Swaziland had now endured a 40-year state of emergency and the environment was becoming very hostile especially after the banning of TUCOWSA (the country's national trade union federation). This hostility had led to democracy and trade union activists being jailed and hundreds more being forced into exile abroad. Wandile said political parties were effectively banned, and had led to the criminalisation of any opposition to the king. Swaziland is the 2nd most armed country in Africa, despite there being no external threat to the hegemony of the country, so the security forces exert firm control over any dissent.

For a political solution to take place Wandile said the existing draconian legislation needed to be repealed, there should be an unconditional release of political prisoners and a guaranteed safe return by those who had been forced into exile. He called for a new constitution to be agreed which would reinstate the original constitutional monarchy (set up after independence) so that a party-political system could be put in place to govern the country.

He said EU development aid being given to Swaziland was not alleviating the chronic problems for the 1m citizens of the country most of whom lived in poverty. Swaziland is a middle-income country yet has the highest prevalence of TB and HIV rates in the world. Life expectancy has dropped to 48, and the entire health budget is roughly the same as the budget allocated to the king. In a country rich in natural resources and fertile enough to provide food, the country did not have food security and relied on the UN World Food Programme to feed the population.

Rebecca McDowall gave a harrowing account of the situation affecting women: 1 in 3 of whom had been the victim of sexual abuse as a child. She said that women were more likely to be unemployed than men and that women seeking redress for domestic violence cases had to resort to traditional courts which did not recognise rape in marriage or underage marriage.

ACTSA was working partnership with the Foundation for Socio-Economic Justice to support community-based groups empowering rural women to become peer educators.

In response to questions from the committee, Wandile called for the UNISON group of MPs to put pressure on the UK government to respond to events in Swaziland. He said the king was very sensitive to international criticism and paid attention to the external media.

The next step was to set up a UK chapter of the Swaziland Democracy Campaign which would develop campaigns in the UK to raise the profile of the situation in

Swaziland. The 31st anniversary of the state of emergency is in April 2014 which provided an opportunity to conduct a campaign including lobbying politicians and investors such as Cadburys to highlight the gross rights violations taking place in Swaziland. The Commonwealth games would be taking place in Scotland in 2014 which would also be an opportunity for the SDC UK chapter to raise the issue.

The committee thanked Wandile and colleagues from ACTSA for updating them on the current situation in the country, and pledged to respond to the requests of the SDC and support the campaigns of the SDC UK chapter. The committee noted that Wandile had been denied an opportunity to complete his legal studies as he had been tried for treason in 2006 and then kicked out of college: a fate that had befallen several democracy activists who were hoping to complete their studies.

The committee **AGREED** to continue its support for the SDC, had further **AGREED** to show the film Swaziland: the king and the people at the UNISON Centre, and to distribute copies of the DVD when they became available.

14. **Affiliation recommendations**

The committee **AGREED** PDCC decision not to renew associate-affiliation of Local Authority ACTSA (LaACTSA) as UNISON was already affiliated to ACTSA. However, the committee **AGREED** to to ask activists in local government to encourage their local authority to affiliate as LaACTSA.

15. **Invitations**

It was **AGREED** that Helen Jenner would attend the PSC AGM on 25 January 2014

16. **Chair's actions**

The committee **ENDORSED** chair's action for the following:

- Sponsor a table at ACTSA's fundraising dinner in November (£550)
- Sponsor a table at JFC's fundraising quiz in December (£275)
- Make a donation towards the cost of the visit of Wandile Dlodlu of the Swaziland Democracy Campaign to visit the UK as the original funding had been pulled at the last moment (£3,000).

17. **AOB**

The committee **ASKED** for their concerns regarding current staffing levels in the international unit to be minuted and **AGREED** to send a letter/email to the presidential team setting out their concerns.

18. **Date of next meeting:** 22 January 2014