

# Solidarity Center

PROMOTING  
WORKER RIGHTS  
WORLDWIDE



2010 Annual Report

**T**he Solidarity Center is a non-profit organization established to help workers build democratic and independent unions around the world. It was created in 1997 as the American Center for International Labor Solidarity through the consolidation of four regional AFL-CIO institutes. Working with unions, non-governmental organizations, and other community partners, the Solidarity Center supports programs and projects aimed at advancing worker rights and promoting broad-based, sustainable economic development.

The Solidarity Center thanks the leaders and activists from the U.S. and global labor movement whose expertise as trainers and researchers was key to building global labor solidarity in 2010. We also thank the thousands of courageous workers from around the world who risk their lives every day in the struggle for worker rights and social justice.

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**Cover: Chinese factory workers strike to demand higher wages at a Honda auto parts factory in Foshan city.**

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# The Solidarity of Shared Interests

People across the globe “dug deep” this year to help survivors of the natural disasters that devastated Haiti and Pakistan. The Solidarity Center provided an outlet for these generous impulses by establishing a fund to which hundreds of organizations and individuals in the United States contributed, in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$25,000. An impressive showing of solidarity to be sure.

The people who reached into their wallets to help Haitians and Pakistanis did so because they understood that these are low-wage, underdeveloped countries. Families caught in the wake of these disasters could not count on their own reserves, in-country private largesse, or their governments’ coffers to help them recover.

That’s why the Solidarity Center directed the financial expressions of solidarity toward efforts that could have society-changing results, in addition to immediate disaster relief: efforts that build workers’ organizations. Workers’ organizations that will benefit not just workers in Haiti and Pakistan, but also workers throughout the world.

The world’s workers share many interests. One particularly important one is eliminating the cost of labor for comparable skills as a factor in where employers decide to locate production. The greater wage rates vary for comparable work, the faster the “race to the bottom”—weakening all workers’ labor market power, heightening the differences between the haves and have-nots within and among nations, and resulting, all too often, in retreats from democratic principles of equity and inclusion and in further deterioration in living and working conditions for the majority of the world’s people.

For example, 2010 saw hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers fight to gain a larger share of the profits that their employers draw from their labor (*see page*

4). Their victory means that the relatively lower cost of labor in China will recede as a reason for businesses serving a global market to locate production there. At the same time, the ability of Chinese workers to buy goods and services, both from China and elsewhere, will rise. That’s the connection of common interests.

When authentic worker organizations in developing countries—free of domination by government or employers—win higher wages and benefits, their members are economically better off, and the employment security of workers in more developed, higher-wage countries is strengthened.

governance of their communities and country. At the same time, their country’s prospects for peace and stability brighten. But it’s not sympathy for their plight that motivates us. **It’s the recognition that the ability of workers in developed nations to preserve their standard of living absolutely depends on the success of their counterparts in developing and democratizing countries.** That’s the connection of shared interests. That’s the connection of solidarity.

## Monthly Minimum Wage

Repressive regimes are weakened and the prospects for world peace strengthened. That’s why the Solidarity Center promotes the solidarity of shared interests.

**The Solidarity Center understands that core political rights, core worker rights, and the economic realities of the world’s workers are connected.** That’s why it doesn’t surprise us that Egyptian workers and young people—fed up with a stagnant economy and the lack of core civil and political rights in their country—have taken to the streets to demand freedom of association and a responsive government. When workers in Mexico, Egypt, Zimbabwe, and Cambodia, to name just a few of the countries in which we work, can determine their own destinies rather than have them dictated by employers or government-controlled sham-unions, they can work in a stable environment, pay the rent, feed their families, send their children to school, and participate in the



This year, the Solidarity Center adopted a clear set of programmatic priorities to accomplish its mission.

**To build the capacity of worker organizations to advance internationally recognized labor rights and standards and achieve concrete improvements in living and working conditions by:**

- Winning for Workers (strategic organizing and bargaining campaigns)
- Seeking Social Justice (global advocacy campaigns)

- Fighting Repression (challenging and reforming laws, policies and practices that suppress rights and marginalize workers)

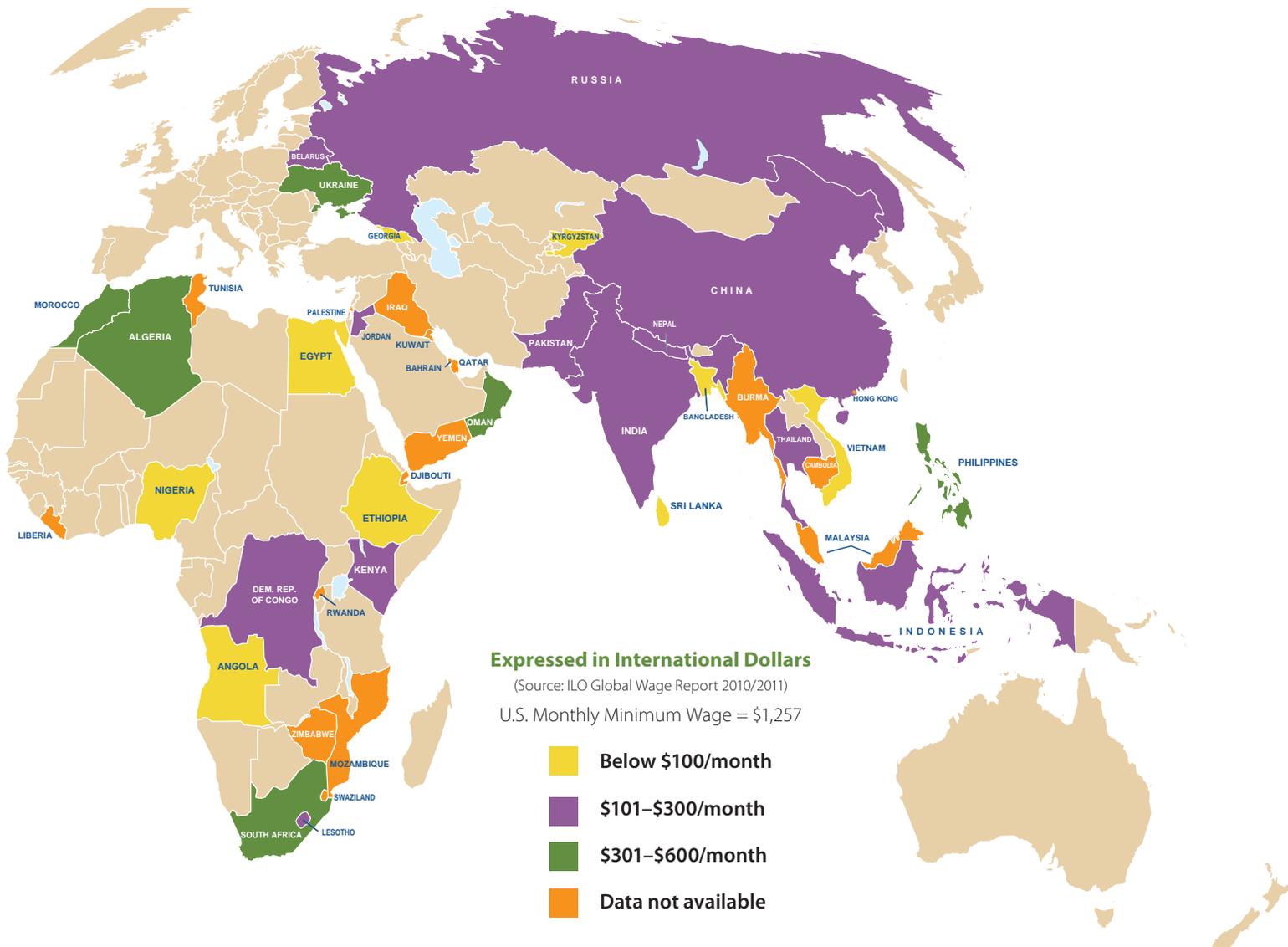
**All of the Solidarity Center’s work is driven by the belief that it will take a more powerful, more united, and more purposeful global labor movement—one that fights alongside others who share an interest in increasing the number of sustaining and sustainable economies and political systems—to achieve a**

**global economy that really works for the world’s workers.** That’s why the Solidarity Center directed contributions for Haitian and Pakistani disaster survivors toward unions and their partner organizations. The donations build the solidarity of shared interests. In the pages that follow, we will briefly showcase some of the other ways that workers and their allies, with the Solidarity Center’s support, did the same.

Nancy Mills  
Interim Executive Director

*Nancy Mills was appointed interim executive director of the Solidarity Center effective October 10, 2009.*

## in Countries Where We Work



# Workers Make History

All over the world, workers are making history. As we go to press, Egypt is on the cusp of historic change. Egyptians, inspired by their brothers and sisters in Tunisia, have bravely taken to the streets by the hundreds of thousands to call for an end to decades of authoritarian rule and to demand democracy and social justice. A new independent trade union federation—the first the country has seen in 50 years—has been formed. And peaceful demonstrators continue to raise their voices as they occupy a square called Liberation.

Workers in China are making history as well, changing the face of industrial relations in a country where unions have been linked to government and employer alike. By exercising their rights on the job, they captured the world's attention and forged true democracy in the workplace. The striking workers on our cover are young, passionate, and fiercely unwavering in their determination to achieve respect and dignity for themselves and their colleagues on the assembly line.

In this section, we showcase these historic triumphs for Egyptian and Chinese workers—with repercussions that have been felt around the world.

**Chinese factory workers strike to demand higher wages at a Honda auto parts factory in Foshan city.**



© GAO GUANG/IMAGINECHINA

## Changing the Face of Industrial Relations in a World Economic Super Power

In June 2010, young workers in **China's** booming auto industry spontaneously went on strike. After decades of toiling under a “low wages, long hours” industrial regime, the strikers forced their employers to bargain collectively over wages, hours, and working conditions, often across the table from worker representatives chosen democratically from the factory floor. These dramatic strides in collective bargaining have the potential to reshape Chinese industrial relations and the larger civil society, as more grassroots collective voices are raised and heard.

A closer look at China's explosive private industrial sector explains the sudden entry of assertive Chinese industrial workers onto the Chinese and world stages. Since 1982, multinational employers have set up thousands of factories in China, spawning a huge, young industrial working class. Despite two decades of double-digit national economic growth fueled largely by these factories, wages in this new sector remained stagnant and low even as production demands grew. This was especially true in the auto industry, which was growing by leaps and bounds to meet the escalating demands of Chinese consumers.

In late May 2010, Japanese auto company Honda announced plans to increase its Chinese production by about 30 percent, heralding longer hours and acceleration of the assembly line. Honda operates in China through a web of separately housed joint ventures with a Chinese company—each joint venture responsible for a different stage in the production of its automobiles. Transmissions are made at a plant in Foshan, near the southern metropolis of Guangzhou. About 900 of the approximately 2,000 workers in that plant were “interns” from China's new technical schools—men and women in their twenties. Overall, Honda transmission workers were paid less than vehicle assembly workers, and the interns—who were doing the same work as their regular counterparts—were paid even less. Moreover, many Chinese Honda workers in all phases of the operation work side by side with Japanese technicians who were receiving markedly higher wages.



Strikers, some wearing masks, gather at the gates of an auto plant in Foshan, China.

© GAO GUANG/IMAGINECHINA

Shortly after Honda announced its increased China production goals, workers at Foshan demanded a wage increase, wage equality across groups of workers, and other improvements. Honda dismissed these demands, and the workers struck, selecting strike leaders from among their ranks to speak for them to management. The strike drew worldwide attention. The international and auto press pelted Honda with questions about when production would resume.

Honda, now under intense scrutiny, fired suspected strike activists and made a halfhearted wage increase offer. The strikers rejected Honda's offer and kept the Foshan plant closed. Honda then sent in a group of about 100 muscular men, claiming to be local union representatives, in an effort to force the strikers back to work. Despite Honda's threats of mass firings and public promises to resume production, the Foshan plant stayed down.

As the strike stretched on, managers realized that it represented something unprecedented in Chinese history, requiring new industrial relations practices. Over the past decade, China has very publicly reformed some of its labor laws. Worker centers, groups in the official union, legal aid centers, and other worker rights activists launched initiatives to educate workers about their rights under Chinese law. The media publicized the law reforms, industrial conditions, and worker rights issues. As a result, China's young workers and technical school students are increasingly conscious of their rights and prepared to assert them. The Foshan strikers were evidence of that. They circulated their demands internationally: better pay and conditions, an apol-

ogy from Japanese managers to Chinese workers for Honda's conduct during the standoff, a promise not to lay off any employees for the next two years, and a wage increase of about 500 yuan (\$74) per month over the current 980 yuan (\$174).

In a joint statement, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka and **United Auto Workers** President Bob King called on Honda to accept the demands: "The workers and consumers of America and the world will be watching Honda and other employers to ensure that Honda and other Chinese employers comply with core international labor rights, obey Chinese and international labor laws, and bargain in good faith."

**With the eyes of the world upon them, Honda managers reached out to the grassroots strike representatives at Foshan and met the workers' demands for improved wages, hours, and conditions, as well as the right to select their own factory-level representatives.**

During the summer, strikes in the Japanese auto sector spread all over China. Workers pushed their employers to engage in genuine collective bargaining and often gained better wages, hours, and working conditions. Far from reacting punitively to these worker-led strikes, the government called for increasing Chinese workers' purchasing power and for initiating some form of collective bargaining. The strikes clearly had the wind of public opinion in their sails as they forged new practices of genuine bargaining in a large area of China's private economy and civil society.

# Workers Create Egypt's Independent Union Movement

**E**gyptian workers are in the vanguard of social progress. Over the last six years, more than 2 million Egyptian workers, frustrated by economic disparity and declining working conditions, have engaged in thousands of job actions, demanding not only improvements at work but real, worker-led unions. A 2006 strike in the textile industry was the largest in Egypt's modern history. The strikes spread to other sectors and inspired Egypt's independent union movement. Despite harsh government crackdowns on the movement's leaders, workers have stood firm.



© BILL BURKE/PAGE ONE PHOTOGRAPHY

**RETA President Kamal Abu Eita (left) and CTUWS Director Kamal Abbas accept the George Meany-Lane Kirkland award from AFL-CIO President and Solidarity Center Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka.**

In 2007, municipal tax collectors organized public demonstrations to protest pay inequity and won a bonus equal to two months' wages as well as a 325 percent raise. A year later, they established the **Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Authority Workers (RETA)**—Egypt's first independent union in more than 50 years, now 40,000 members strong.

From the beginning, Egyptian women played a central role in this movement. The 3,000 textile workers who led the 2006 strike were women. Women bravely and enthusiastically supported RETA's establishment every step of the way, joining male colleagues and family members in the streets for 11 straight days and nights. Now they are leading RETA: 16 of the 46 seats on the union's general council are held by women.

Militant, direct worker action was coupled with careful strategic planning. RETA's leaders expertly used the leverage of the International Labor Organization's core labor standards to pressure the government into negotiating. And they did not fight alone. The **Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS)**, an organization that provides important support for Egyptian workers,



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**Kamal Abu Eita rallies the crowd during a demonstration.**

was at their side. The Egyptian government tried to silence CTUWS by shutting it down, but bowing to global criticism and a court order, it allowed CTUWS to reopen. CTUWS continues to provide invaluable support for Egyptian workers and helps connect the independent Egyptian worker movement to its counterparts around the world. As leading examples of dedication to fighting for freedom of association and worker rights, CTUWS and RETA received the AFL-CIO's 2009 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award on behalf of the independent worker movement of Egypt.

**"Workers in Egypt are doing something truly remarkable,"** said Dan Heck, Midwest regional director for the AFL-CIO's **Working America**, who visited Egypt in December 2009 as a member of a three-person delegation sponsored by the Solidarity Center. "In the face of very long odds, they are organizing an independent, democratic workers' movement, which has the potential to lift their families out of poverty and spur a new wave of democratic reform in Egypt."

# Winning for Workers

Economic globalization, characterized by trade liberalization, an expansion and massive movement of capital across borders, and the spread of information technology, has been a mixed blessing for workers around the world. Although much about a shrinking world is positive for working families, workers in developing countries often face the unrestrained power of globalized capital and markets with few remedies. Especially in a global recession, without the protection and promotion of workers' fundamental rights, the outcome of such a mismatched contest is job vulnerability and plummeting wages.

According to the International Labor Organization, world unemployment reached its highest level on record in 2009, with nearly 212 million—6.6 percent of the global workforce—jobless. Against this backdrop, workers have watched wages for top earners increase while they stagnate for everyone else. The growing wage inequity, widespread degradation of work, and widening food price crisis increase the risk of poverty for workers and their families.

In response, workers have pulled together to fight back and demand their right to social and economic security, often by engaging in large-scale strikes. Workers by the thousands are walking off the job, in emerging and advanced economies. These strikes—25 in 2010 alone—are not just seeking concrete improvements for working people; they are also advancing new forms of unity among workers, their unions, and other forces in society unhappy with the social ills that the economic race to the bottom encourages. Unions are the means to reverse this pervasive discontent. Data from the 2009 report "Labor Unions and Life Satisfaction: Evidence from New Data," by a team of U.S. researchers show that the stronger the presence of effective worker organizations in a country, the more satisfied people are with their lives, whether or not they themselves are union members.

**Winning concrete improvements in working and living conditions for workers in the developing world by partnering with their unions in organizing and bargaining campaigns is the Solidarity Center's top priority.** Solidarity Center programs support workers' struggle to win union recognition, provide expert assistance in strategic organizing and bargaining campaigns, and help "precarious" workers—those in temporary, contract, or dangerous jobs facilitated by economic globalization—gain workplace protections. Through these programs, Solidarity Center partners have the tools to stem the forces pushing workers to the economic bottom.



PHOTO BY GREG DOUROS, SOLIDARITY CENTER

**Indonesian workers stand united in protest before a tent city set up outside a wiring systems plant in Purwakarta, where 17 union leaders were fired after filing for union recognition. The union leaders ultimately received a fair compensation.**

## Winning Union Recognition

Union membership in auto assembly and parts manufacturing plants in Southeast Asia is low. Employers in **Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia** take advantage of laws to slow court processes that benefit companies over workers in this critical sector. In addition, employers may shift permanent jobs to temporary and subcontracted work, often to prevent workers from forming or joining unions or to break an existing union. Union leaders may be fired or transferred to remote facilities where they have no contact with other workers.

**To help local union and work site leaders organize under these difficult circumstances, the Solidarity Center undertook a three-year mentoring program for auto unions in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.** Over the life of the program, results have been impressive. In 2010 alone, 900 workers at four Malaysian work sites filed for union recognition with the **National Union of Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Workers**; 804 workers from two Indonesian plants joined the **Federation of Auto, Metal, and Electronic Workers in Indonesia** (FSPMI); and 960 workers from two Thai plants joined the **Federation of Thailand Automobile Workers' Unions**.

# Winning Strategic Bargaining Campaigns with Grassroots Input

It is never easy to organize hotel workers, especially in a place like **Palestine**, which faces challenges on so many levels. But the **Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union** (HRWU) has won some impressive victories. The HRWU organizing campaign represents the single most successful attempt by any sector union in Palestine over the last five years to achieve strength and growth through direct outreach to members at the grassroots level.

**First, the union established active worker committees in five of the nine largest hotels in Ramallah, Palestine's top tourism city.** These committees successfully handled 14 grievances on behalf of workers who were denied their basic rights under Palestinian labor

law. Since the formation of the worker committees, more than 100 hotel workers have joined the union. In the most open and democratic union election in years, 68 workers voted for 11 executive board members.

Recognizing the union's growth as a sign of strength, the Arab Hotel Association in Ramallah agreed to begin discussions over a citywide collective bargaining agreement.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HRWU

**HRWU members unfurl their banner in preparation for a May 1 march in Ramallah, Palestine.**

The negotiating committee organized focus groups with workers to develop and hone its priorities—a significant achievement given that getting grassroots input prior to collective bargaining is rare in the Middle East.

HRWU's strategic goal, persuading hotel owners to adhere to existing labor law and follow up with a collective agreement that would eventually cover the entire West Bank, was reached in December 2010. This agreement, which provides basic health and safety measures, training for workers, and paid vacation, was extended to cover 65 hotels in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

HRWU members see the campaign as the most important vehicle for enforcing and improving the labor code at their work sites. The success of the HRWU campaign, which combines elements of a U.S. organizing model with local practice, has attracted the attention of other international organizations, which are now trying to increase their support for organizing and bargaining campaigns in other sectors in Palestine.

The Solidarity Center provided support for the original organizing campaign, working with the local Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union.



## Winning Representation

**A**round the world, contract workers are denied the right to freedom of association. Port workers in **Colombia** are pushing to formalize work in their sector, where roughly 75 percent of the workforce is employed under flexible or non-labor contracts. **Members of the new *Unión Portuaria* (UP) recently approved a collective bargaining proposal to present to the government and port operators.**

The proposal establishes a framework for formalizing employment contracts and working conditions in the ports; developing professional standards, training, and certification for port workers; creating incentives for employers to hire workers directly; and improving security in the ports.



UP dock workers load coffee sacks in Buenaventura, Colombia's main Pacific port.

PHOTO BY RHETT DOUMITT, SOLIDARITY CENTER



Belkozin workers read the latest issue of the IUF regional publication *Vmeste (United)*, which brought news of their struggle to workers throughout the region.

PHOTO BY VITALI KOPYSH, AWLU, UKRAINE

## Winning Wage Increases, Boosting Union Confidence

Workers at a food processing plant in the northern **Ukrainian** town of Priluki won a 54 percent wage increase following a weeklong strike, tough bargaining by the plant's local union, and a solidarity campaign by the **IUF**, the global union federation that represents food, agricultural, and hotel workers worldwide.

Beginning in 2008, poor management at the Belkozin sausage casings plant led to wage arrears and hardship for nearly 500 workers, more than half of them women. In May 2010, the union staged a protest rally and warned of strike action if management did not meet demands for full payment of all wage and benefit arrears, guarantees that wages would be regularly paid, and an increase in hourly wages, which had been stagnant since 2008. Management failed to respond, and on May 21 the Belkozin workers halted production for a week. "We have nothing to support our children with, no money to buy food," said a woman striker. "We won't work for free anymore!"

The strike ended with an agreement to settle all arrears and to start negotiations for a wage increase by September 1. The union received support from regional IUF affiliates during the months of preparation, and the Solidarity Center provided expert research and training. Negotiations concluded with a signed agreement that not only raised hourly wages but also included a hazardous work differential, more vacation days, and higher sick pay, among other provisions.

The success of the Belkozin campaign has boosted union confidence.

**The "struggle at Belkozin became a landmark not only for the plants in the region, it became known across the whole country,"** said Sergei Khabotnya, regional chairman of the IUF-affiliated **Agro-Industrial Workers' Union of Ukraine**, to which the Belkozin local belongs. "With this example of a successful fight, it will be easier for us to explain to workers the value of a genuine trade union and the results that can be achieved through effective action."

## for Temporary Workers

To promote the proposal, UP members are distributing flyers and holding meetings with workers on basic worker rights and specifics of the UP proposals.

Established in 2009, UP represents workers at Colombia's top four seaports—Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cartagena, and Santa Marta—as well as workers in non-maritime port operations. The union chartered locals in all four ports last year and continues to grow.

The UP proposal and its organizing vision coincide with announcements by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos that his administration intends to formalize 500,000 jobs.

# Winning a Better Way of Life, Getting a Load off Their Backs



SCOTT WEAVER, USW

**A** new contract will dramatically change the lives of 4,500 workers at a Firestone rubber plantation in **Liberia**. The contract culminates years of partnership between the workers and the U.S. labor movement.

**The Solidarity Center and the *United Steelworkers (USW)* began supporting the *Firestone Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia (FAWUL)* in 2005, when the election of the country's first democratic government in 14 years**

created the political space for workers to raise their voices about abuses on the 240-square-mile plantation. Union skills training and solidarity during the organizing campaign led to the first free and fair election in the company's 80-year history, followed a year later by a groundbreaking first contract. In 2007 the AFL-CIO presented FAWUL with its George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award in recognition of the extraordinary courage, strength, and solidarity of Liberian rubber workers.

The new two-year contract, signed in June 2010, provides a 3.5 percent pay raise. Equally if not more important is a motorized transportation system for the heavy buckets of raw latex, which workers had been forced to carry on their shoulders for miles. It was backbreaking and time-consuming labor. To meet production quotas, workers often had to enlist their families, including children. With help from the Solidarity Center and USW, FAWUL's negotiating team used photographs of motorized latex transportation systems on rubber farms in Asia to convince Firestone that this could and must be done in Africa as well. Testing of the new system began in December.

"This is a perfect example of how the Solidarity Center and its U.S. union partners can help workers across the world make critical life-changing connections," said USW Vice President Fred Redmond.

**Instead of carrying heavy buckets of latex on their shoulders for miles (top), Liberian rubber workers will load the latex onto tractors for transport to weigh stations (right).**



AL HOSINSKI, SOLIDARITY CENTER

# Seeking Social Justice

**A**round the world, workers face unjust conditions that transcend workplaces and even national borders. Discrimination against women, the unscrupulous practices of labor recruiters who use bait-and-switch tactics to seduce workers seeking better conditions, and the shunning of AIDS sufferers in the workplace and in their communities are problems for all working people and for all people of goodwill.

Unions and worker organizations are often the early fighters against these and other society-wide challenges. Unions have the motivation of workplace unity, the power of organization, and the benefit of legal tools to start addressing social issues.

**The Solidarity Center seeks improvement in working people's living and working conditions through global thematic advocacy campaigns with its partners around the world.**

When working peoples' organizations decide to take on gender and racial discrimination, violence against women, human trafficking, child labor, HIV/AIDS, and other complex and pervasive social problems, the Solidarity Center is there to provide assistance and support. The Solidarity Center also encourages strong relationships among NGOs, labor support organizations, and unions so that they can join with worker organizations to seek social justice.



PHOTO BY CESAR DE LA CRUZ

## Seeking Worldwide Protection for Domestic Workers

**A**ll over the world, tens of millions of domestic workers clean houses, cook meals, care for children, and do countless other tasks, toiling long hours and earning low wages. Domestic workers—mostly young women, often migrants—are frequently denied legal rights, excluded from labor law and other protections, and sexually and physically abused. Despite their growing numbers, poverty and isolation shut them off from political and social structures that could support them.

For many years, the Solidarity Center has joined the global labor movement as well as domestic and informal worker organizations worldwide in a campaign aimed at protecting domestic workers. This campaign moved a step closer to fruition when delegates to the June 2010 International Labor Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, voted to present a binding convention on domestic worker rights. The convention will be adopted at the June 2011 conference, and ratification by the International Labor Organization's 183 member countries will begin. More than 2,500 worker, employer, and government representatives, including AFL-CIO and Solidarity Center staff, witnessed the historic event.

Marie Odette Jean, a member of the **Association of Home Workers**, a Solidarity Center partner in the Dominican Republic, attended the conference as an observer and was extremely moved to see that domestic work was universally viewed as legitimate, dignified, and worthy employment: **"For the first time in my life, I felt like I was somebody."**

# Seeking an End to Child Slavery

**P**overty is the driving force behind trafficking of children in **Kenya**. More than half of all Kenyans live below the poverty line, and children often must work to help put food on the table. Nearly 2 million children in Kenya—some as young as 5 years old—are working. Child workers are vulnerable and can fall prey to traffickers, who use them in the fishing industry, on sugar plantations, or as domestic workers.

**In partnership with Kenyan unions and community organizations, the Solidarity Center is fighting to stop child trafficking in Kenya.** Working with the *Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union* and the *Kenya Sugar Plantation Workers Union*, as well as community organizations, local governments, and employer associations, the Solidarity Center aims to raise awareness about child trafficking, create incentives for parents to



**A young girl and her brother pick coffee beans on a Kenyan plantation. In Kenya, 30 percent of coffee pickers are under 15.**

keep children in school, train union members as peer educators and trafficking monitors, and help ensure that workplace policies do not enable or condone child trafficking. Through the Solidarity Center's programs and the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor, child labor and trafficking on unionized tea and sugar plantations have been significantly reduced as a result of awareness raising and negotiated collective bargaining agreements with strong anti-child labor and anti-trafficking language.



# Seeking Decent Work

**I**n the town of Kolwezi, 17-year-old Elysée Bilonda Mutombo is doing something unprecedented: She is learning to be a carpenter. Mining is the dominant economic activity in the Katanga province of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, where Kolwezi is located, although only a fraction of Katanga's hundreds of thousands of mineworkers are formally employed. The rest work in artisan mines, under unsafe, precarious conditions. Children toil alongside family members and friends.

One of four children in a single-parent household, Elysée sold small items in and around the mines to help meet basic family needs. But last year, her life changed when she enrolled in a unique program administered by the Solidarity Center in cooperation with **Save the Children UK**. The program is helping eradicate child labor in the DRC by removing nearly 300 girls, ages 15–18, from the Katanga mines and enrolling them in vocational training courses. Elysée selected carpentry from a list that included sewing,

© ROMANO

# Seeking to Stop Human Trafficking



Elysée Bilonda Mutombo works on a couch she has built in her carpentry class, where she is the only girl.

PHOTO COURTESY OF REETE

To help bridge efforts to promote migrant worker rights around the world and initiatives to organize and support immigrant workers in the United States, the Solidarity Center created a new position, Senior Specialist on Migration and Human Trafficking, and designated long-time Solidarity Center staffer, Neha Misra, to fill it. Misra has been coordinating migration and human trafficking programs for many years and has authored numerous articles and reports for the organization.



COURTESY OF IOM.

Senior Specialist on Migration and Human Trafficking Neha Misra participates in an expert panel discussion at a conference of the International Organization for Migration.

Since 2001, the Solidarity Center has worked with partners in **Thailand, Indonesia, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Kenya, the Dominican Republic,** and many other countries to implement more than 20 counter-trafficking programs. All address the four “Ps” of anti-trafficking: prevention, protection of victims, prosecution (i.e., rule of law), and partnerships. The Solidarity Center raises awareness about the prevalence and underlying causes of trafficking for labor exploitation, and it strives to unite disparate forces to combat the problem.

In testimony on September 30, 2010, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Misra said: “The Solidarity Center has seen firsthand how violations of worker rights and the lack of labor standards and protections for workers make them vulnerable to human trafficking. **Human trafficking is a labor issue because it is often linked to various forms of labor exploitation, and it is one of the worst forms of worker abuse.**”

## for Young Women

motorcycle repair, hair dressing, bread making, photography, welding, and knitting, among other options. She is the only girl in her class.

Why did she choose a profession that most girls would not even consider? Elysée felt that she had a better chance to make a living from carpentry than from other more traditional activities, such as sewing. For the first time in her life, she says, she is optimistic about her future.

**“Child labor not only robs children of their childhood, but also undercuts the wages that adults could be earning, perpetuating a cycle of poverty,”** said Jean-Bosco Puna of **SYNECAT**, the national union of Catholic school teachers in the DRC and a staunch Solidarity Center partner. “Thanks to this project, hundreds of young girls in Kolwezi will have a chance for an education that will enable them to find decent work as adults.”

# Seeking to Prevent the Spread of HIV/AIDS

Low wages and long absences from home put transport workers at high risk for contracting and spreading HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The Solidarity Center, in partnership with *Family Health International*, the *International Transport Federation* (ITF), and its affiliates, has been wrapping up its highly successful HIV/AIDS

education project, aimed at long-haul truckers, commercial sex workers, and communities at major truck stops along the East African transport corridor in **Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi**. The project, part of a five-year effort titled “Regional Outreach Addressing AIDS through Development Strategies” (ROADS), provides peer education, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), and referrals to other health-related services.

**Resource centers called SafeTStops were set up at key truck stops in border towns to offer resources, VCT services, and activities such as chess and pool.** The SafeTStops were staffed by volunteer peer educators from the *Communication Transport Workers’ Union of Tanzania*, the *Amalgamated Transport and General Workers’ Union of Uganda*, and Burundi’s *Fédération Nationale des Travailleurs du Transport* (FNTT). During 2010, the project reached tens of thousands of men and women in Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi.

“I have witnessed many of my colleagues get infected with HIV and die of AIDS-related infections,” said an FNTT member who has been driving the corridor for more than 10 years. “As a result of ROADS, many of us have changed our risky behavior, and this has helped reduce our vulnerability.”



While waiting for their transit papers to be processed, long-haul truck drivers (including one with “AIDS” woven into his hat) play chess at a SafeTStop in Kigali, Rwanda.

ROADS peer educators from the Communication Transport Workers’ Union of Tanzania get ready for a day of outreach.



# Righting the Rules

**W**hen employers and governments act to adversely impact workers' lives, they often count on workers' ignorance of the rules or inability to right them. Too many basic labor laws in developing countries are written by industrialists without labor's input. So some countries with great health and safety legislation on the books have miserably unsafe workplaces. Others may ostensibly recognize the right to freedom of association, but deny recognition of their workers independent unions.

**That is why the Solidarity Center's rule of law program aims to make national and international worker and human rights norms real and enforceable.** We assist unions, worker centers, and legal aid networks in developing the legal tools they need to better the living and working conditions of workers in their countries.

Around the world, our rule of law experts work with partners and their legal counsel to design employment codes and regulations; train workers on their rights under domestic and international law; establish labor law counseling systems and paralegal training; develop labor court systems and train stakeholders how to use them; teach the application of international legal instruments, including U.S. and European trade laws; and support alternative dispute resolution and mediation mechanisms. The Solidarity Center fights repression of workers worldwide by helping them identify, challenge, and reform laws, policies, and practices that suppress worker and human rights, undermine freedom of association and collective bargaining, and result in discrimination against, and marginalization of, workers.

## Righting Abusive Labor Laws

**L**abor laws in **Iraq** are in gross violation of fundamental international labor standards. Government and private-sector employers interfere with union operations and elections, confiscate materials and equipment, and shut down union offices. In the face of massive unemployment, reports of abuse of foreign workers, including allegations of human trafficking, are widespread.

Despite this hostile environment, Iraqis continue to form and join unions. **For the first time in decades, an independent trade union movement is emerging in Iraq.** The Solidarity

Center, along with other U.S. and global union coalitions as well as the International Trade Union Confederation, supports this growing movement. Unions are among Iraq's most active civil society organizations, advocating legal reform, worker rights, social inclusion, and independently operating institutions.

To connect Iraqi unionists with the global labor community and to document union and worker rights violations, the Solidarity Center launched the *Iraq Trade Union Rights Bulletin*. The *Bulletin*, published in English and Arabic, draws on direct reports by Iraqi labor groups. Contributors include the **Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions**, the **Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq**, the **General Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq**, the **General Federation of Iraqi Workers**, the **Kurdistan United Workers Union**, and many of their affiliates. The *Bulletin* is part of the Solidarity Center's global effort to highlight the stories of Iraqi workers, build support for union campaigns, and achieve social protections and a fair and just labor law.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FWCUI

**Union members in the city of Samarra protest decrees banning unions in Iraq's electricity sector. From the July-August 2010 issue of *Iraq Trade Union Rights Bulletin*.**

# Righting the Balance of Power

International legal mechanisms offer an opportunity to create pressure on governments and corporations to uphold worker and human rights. The Solidarity Center's rule of law programs help bolster the capacities of unions, worker centers, legal aid offices, and networks of human and worker rights organizations and activists to advocate for fundamental rights in courts, before

legislatures, in international organizations, and with media. The Solidarity Center also helps unions and their allies in civil society empower grassroots workers and union leaders to assert their rights. In 2010, the Solidarity Center carried out dozens of rule of law programs, including in **Georgia**, **Pakistan**, and **Thailand**.

**Georgian** labor laws fall abysmally short of complying with international labor standards. According to the International Trade Union



PWF members attend a Solidarity Center rule of law workshop.

Confederation, the Georgian government has allowed significant harassment and firing of union members and activists. Solidarity Center legal experts trained lawyers representing the **Georgian Trade Union Confederation** (GTUC) and its affiliates how to use international legal mechanisms to stimulate support for

fundamental rights in Georgia. These mechanisms included the International Labor Organization (ILO), U.S. and European Generalized System of Preferences trade benefits, United Nations human rights systems, and worker rights related language in a number of other international agreements. Solidarity Center staff worked with the presidents of GTUC national affiliates from strategic econom-

ic sectors to develop a framework for ongoing reporting of violations of ILO conventions. As a result, GTUC leaders are working to integrate international human rights legal strategies into their efforts to defend the rights of Georgian workers.

Gaps in legal protections and a pervasive failure to remedy violations of **Pakistan's** worker and human rights laws exacerbate Pakistani workers' challenges. Furthermore, recent constitutional changes limit the central government's ability to legislate on labor issues and establish critical national-level institutions, allowing for the erosion of national norms.

In this daunting environment, the **Pakistan Workers' Federation** (PWF) is poised to lead the way as a worker and human rights champion. With more than 800,000 members, PWF is a powerful grassroots force. PWF works to ensure an industrial relations system that protects and respects human and worker rights for all, as well as remedies for violations of these rights.

**The Solidarity Center conducted trainings for PWF leaders on how to use UN human rights mechanisms in worker rights campaigns.** Adding the strategic use of international human rights law gives PWF members and affiliates another tool for securing fundamental worker and human rights in this critical country.

More than 3 million migrants from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia work in **Thailand's** dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. This huge migrant labor



PHOTO COURTESY OF GTUC

GTUC members, led by President Irakli Petriashvili, march in Tbilisi during a rally to promote union rights.

force is essential to propelling the booming Thai economy forward. Yet these workers are barred from access to education, health care, and basic rights at work.

**Burmese** migrant workers are legally eligible for workers' compensation under clear provisions of Thai and international law, but Thailand refuses to compensate them or their families for workplace deaths, injuries, and diseases. In 2010, the Solidarity Center worked with the **State Enterprise Workers Relations Confederation** of Thailand, Thai human rights organizations, and lawyers to mount a litigation and advocacy campaign aimed at guaranteeing workers' compensation benefits for Burmese migrant workers.



PHOTO BY EARL BROWN

Although Burmese migrants work in Thailand's dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, they are barred from access to education, health care, and basic rights at work.

Solidarity Center rule of law work has also helped to improve the often desperate situation of Burmese migrant workers through direct support of legal aid clinics and paralegal training. The international law initiative of the **Migrant Justice Program** (MJP), a Solidarity Center partner, has galvanized domestic and UN opposition to an unfair and corrupt "nationality verification program." Through this ill-conceived program, Thailand would send hundreds of thousands of migrants back to Burma to secure identity papers, despite the reality that most are ethnic minorities denied basic citizenship rights in Burma. If they were forced to return, many fear the Burmese military regime might brutalize them, or at best, exact bribes in exchange for official papers. With Solidarity Center support, MJP has created pressure against this program and has pushed the Thai government to improve the treatment of vulnerable migrant populations.



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Police armed with tear gas and batons prevent Zimbabweans from exercising their right to freedom of assembly.

## Righting Parliamentary Advocacy

In a country where the political climate is volatile, workers bear the brunt of oppressive laws and failed policies, and those who raise their voices are persecuted, the **Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions** (ZCTU) is a torchbearer for democracy, worker rights, and economic and social justice. The ZCTU represents approximately 300,000 formal and 1 million informal economy workers, many of whom exist on below-poverty earnings. In 2009, the ZCTU requested the Solidarity Center's assistance in establishing a Parliamentary Labor Advocacy Desk and training a desk officer. The aim was to give workers a clear and direct link to their government representatives.

In its short existence, the Parliamentary Desk has made noteworthy achievements. The desk officer is a conduit for daily communication between the ZCTU and Zimbabwe's parliament. As a result of this ongoing relationship, the parliament has taken into consideration the ZCTU's recommendations on revitalizing Zimbabwe's economy in a manner that benefits workers and reduces barriers for businesses that want to invest in the country.

**The Parliamentary Desk's single most important effort has been its ongoing campaign to abolish the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which the Zimbabwe government misuses to violate worker rights.**

Citing POSA, security forces have violently interrupted union gatherings and arbitrarily arrested and harassed union activists and leaders. POSA has not yet been repealed, but Zimbabweans are one step closer to justice.

Through the Parliamentary Desk, the ZCTU successfully lobbied to set up a commission of inquiry into the operations of the National Social Security Authority, which administers the pension and workers compensation insurance systems and last year reduced monthly retirement pensions to an untenable \$25. The commission also will investigate the September 25, 2010, police shooting of peaceful demonstrators at a government-run mine. Zimbabwe's workers still face numerous challenges, but they now have an important tool for making their voices heard.



**Parliamentary Desk Officer**  
**Vimbai Zinyama**

# Righting “Protection” Contracts

In May 2010, after nearly four years of struggle, a three-day work stoppage, and a groundswell of international labor support, 480 workers at an auto parts plant in Puebla, **Mexico**, believed they had achieved an agreement with their employer to recognize their local union, a section of the independent **National Union of Mine and Metal Workers** (or “Los Mineros”). The workers had been under an employer “protection” union contract, which they had neither seen nor signed.



PHOTO BY JENISSEE VOLPINTESTA/WISCONSIN STATE AFL-CIO

**Los Mineros official Carlos Esquer (left) and Milwaukee Area Labor Council Secretary Treasurer Shelia Cochran attend a press conference outside the auto parts company's U.S. headquarters.**

When the time to begin collective bargaining arrived, however, the company reneged and took repressive action. In August, two members of the

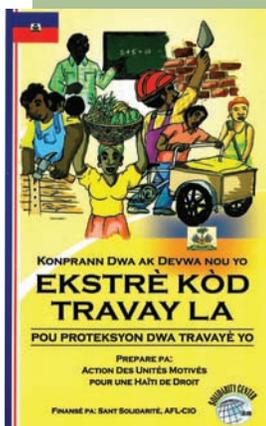
new union's executive committee were beaten in a company office and forced at gunpoint to sign letters of resignation.

Worker rights groups, with the help of the Solidarity Center in Mexico, swiftly denounced the company's actions and called for support. AFL-CIO central labor councils and major U.S. unions, including the **United Autoworkers** and the **United Steelworkers**, along with metal and auto unions in Canada and Europe, demanded that the Puebla plant do right by its workers.

**After three days of international pressure and tense negotiations, the company and union reached an agreement formally recognizing the union as the workers' representative.**

The two sides met in Mexico City on August 27 to negotiate a new contract. Members of worker rights groups, Solidarity Center staff, and national and local union representatives observed at the meeting. The company acceded to the workers' request to oust the illegitimate “protection” union. With support from the Solidarity Center, they have moved ahead with collective bargaining.

## Righting Access to Labor Law



**Haitian workers and unions now have free access to the first abridged Haitian Labor Code in Creole, the language of the people.**

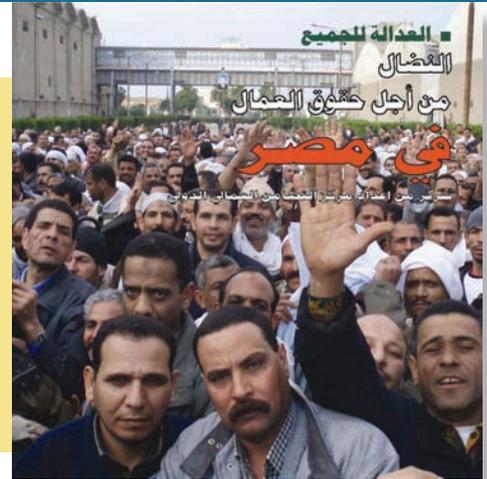
**H**aitian workers need legal mechanisms that ensure the enforcement of their fundamental worker rights. Until recently, however, ordinary working people could not access these mechanisms. The Haitian labor law was available only in French, the official language, whereas the majority of Haitian workers speak Creole. Moreover, the only way to get the document was to buy it at an exorbitant \$50 per copy—a sum well out of reach in a country where the official minimum wage is \$5 a day.

In May 2010, the Solidarity Center and its partner, **Action des Unités Motivés pour une Haïti de Droit** (United Action for Human Rights in Haiti), published the first abridged Haitian Labor Code in Creole, to be distributed free of charge. Haitian labor leaders are urging citizens to read the labor code, talk about it, and organize workers around it so that all workers will know their rights.

# Communications

## Justice for All: The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt (2010)

In the latest report of our “Justice for All” series, author Joel Beinin examines Egypt’s current labor laws, their alignment with international labor conventions, the Egyptian government’s record of enforcing those laws, and whether its actions comply with international core labor standards. Thousands of Egyptian workers have been holding an unprecedented number of strikes over the freedom to form and join unions, wages and salaries, discrimination against women workers, and other worker rights issues. Available in English and Arabic



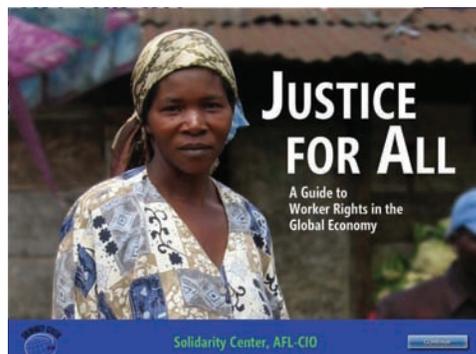
## New Media and Online Learning

Three key programs placed the Solidarity Center on the cutting edge of communications in 2010:

In countries where repressive governments routinely shut down media outlets and Internet accounts, our **Global LaborWeb** project trained union communications staff to create and maintain their own websites, hosted by a U.S.-based server.

Our **New Media** program trained union activists in Colombia, Pakistan, Nepal, and Algeria to conduct compelling video interviews with workers about key campaign issues.

Selected sections of our **Economics for All** and **Justice for All** manuals were developed into web-based and electronic tutorials. In 16 lessons, these self-directed union education tools present complex global economic and worker rights concepts in an interactive format and simple language. Union members, leaders, activists, and staff can study in the comfort of their homes or in a workshop setting.



## Peruvian Society, Workers, and Labor Law (2009)



This 23-page report explains why Peru’s business-friendly economic policies have not been beneficial for Peruvian workers, who seek labor law reforms that will enable them to have decent work, a healthy environment, and protection of human and worker rights.

## Our Website Is a Winner

The Solidarity Center website, redesigned in 2009, won first place overall and second place for content in the 2010 **International Labor Communications Association’s** Media Award contest. Visit [www.solidaritycenter.org](http://www.solidaritycenter.org) to see why judges thought our site had the best balance and quality of content, design, and navigability.

# American Center for International Labor Solidarity

## Consolidated Statements of Activities Years Ended December 31, 2009 and 2008

	2009	2008
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>		
Federal awards	\$28,875,063	\$28,475,408
In-kind contributions for federal awards	611,595	1,080,361
Contribution from the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)	600,000	600,000
Other contributions	62,522	106,208
Interest income	145,372	130,279
Net appreciation (depreciation) in fair value of investments	5,714	(17,299)
Other revenue	82,818	189,058
Total support and revenue	30,383,084	30,564,015
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Program expenses	24,545,582	24,953,220
Indirect expenses	5,919,606	5,764,953
Total expenses	30,465,188	30,718,173
<b>CHANGE IN NET ASSETS</b>	(82,104)	(154,158)

# Who We Are

- ▶ In 2010, our programs reached more than 200,000 workers in 56 countries.
- ▶ We have 141 staff members.
- ▶ We work in Washington, DC, and 23 offices worldwide.
- ▶ Our staff speaks 110 languages and dialects.
- ▶ 43 of us have master's degrees, 3 have doctorate degrees, and 4 have law degrees.
- ▶ 33 of us have worked for unions and 16 have worked for non-governmental organizations.

## Solidarity Center Management Team Executive

Nancy Mills, *Interim Executive Director*

Kate Doherty, *Deputy Executive Director*

Neha Misra, *Senior Specialist on Migration and Human Trafficking*

## Government Affairs

Mark Hankin

## Regional Programs

### Africa

Marc Bayard

### Americas

Teresa Casertano/Molly McCoy (Acting)

### Asia/Europe

Tim Ryan

### China

Earl Brown

### Middle East

Heba El Shazli/Shawna Bader-Blau (Acting)

## Technical Programs

### Trade Union Strengthening

Hanad Mohamud

### Rule of Law

Earl Brown

### Communications

Danuta Dobosz (Interim)/Kate Conradt

### Office of Program Reporting and Evaluation

Danuta Dobosz

## Administration and Finance

### Administration

Darcy Wertz, *Director of Operations*

Lisa Humphries, *HR/IT Officer*

### Finance

Lystia Santosa, *Director of Finance*

Michael Lawrence, *Controller*



**The Solidarity Center's mission**  
is to help build a global labor movement  
by strengthening the economic and  
political power of workers around the  
world through effective, independent,  
and democratic unions.

**Solidarity Center**  
888 16th Street NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: 202-974-8383 • Fax: 202-974-8384  
E-mail: [information@solidaritycenter.org](mailto:information@solidaritycenter.org)  
Website: [www.solidaritycenter.org](http://www.solidaritycenter.org)