

UNI Global Union

UNI Global Union - Why?

The world of work is changing. We have global businesses and global markets for goods and services. With offshoring, we see the emergence of a global labour market. In our seven years together we have globalised our action. It is time to take the next step.

UNI cannot stand still. UNI Global Union is a union innovation to address global challenges. UNI Global Union aims to have a bigger impact at the workplace, within companies, in global institutions and on public opinion and our members.

The change brings the message that unions are adapting to a borderless world; that we have strategies to deal with global labour markets; that we are reaching out in new ways to working people wherever they are.

If UNI is successful why change?

In the first five years of UNI we saw tremendous business concentration. In every UNI sector, a small number of dominant global companies have begun to emerge. There is a need to increase organizing levels in these companies. To represent the interests of members, UNI must help unions to organize by exerting influence over these companies at the global level.

When companies are local, unions can be local; when companies are national, unions must be national; when companies are global, unions must be global. Our aim is to build more effective alliances in multinationals.

What will change?

We want to make a step change in the global content of our work. This means a change in substance but also in the image we present to our members and the outside world. A union is strong when its members identify with it, and see it as their own union. As we say “your global union”, “my global union”, “our global union”.

The UNI World Executive Board is convinced that we can better build those links to workers by promoting UNI as a global union.

Getting people to think of UNI as ‘my global union’ is a step forward.

A step? So there’s more to come?

Yes. After members identify with the global union, the next step is to get them to participate actively in the life of the union.

Will sectors of UNI be identified as global unions?

It is easier to identify with people doing the same kind of job. So UNI sector organizations will stress their roles as global unions:

UNI Commerce Global Union

UNI Finance Global Union

UNI Property Services Global Union....and so on.

The sectors are the backbone of UNI so we are asking them to make the change. The global union concept is not just about focussing on our work in multinationals; it goes much wider.

Global agenda for global unions

The global union agenda will cover global organising, global framework agreements, global objectives for decent work and decent rates of pay, minimum standards for health and safety, ensuring collective bargaining rights for all, global solidarity action, global policy development and research and global representation.

What is the role of UNI's Regions?

UNI Regions have an important role.

They are the interface with the regional economic groupings such as the European Union, Mercosur, Asean, the African Union and others. These groupings increase in importance. It is up to the UNI regional organizations to insist that development has a social face, that trade agreements include the respect of trade union and employee rights.

In return for a free market, companies must answer to high standards of corporate social responsibility. UNI regional organizations must work to create the right social and political conditions in which unions can be developed.

There has been a growth of democratic regimes in the world. But still, in more than one hundred countries there are serious violations of human and trade union rights. UNI's regions must be in the forefront of the campaigns to right these wrongs.

There are big areas where a coordinated regional approach is a necessity. In Asia this means China, India and Indonesia taking up more than one third of the world's population; in Africa it means North Africa and the Middle East; in Europe, Eastern and Central Europe. In the Americas a single country like Brazil has enormous potential for the expansion of union membership.

Does changing the name make it a real global union?

The main purpose of trade unions is to represent members' interests and to negotiate with employers. To represent the interests of members it is necessary to win recognition as the legitimate voice of the workers concerned.

Already UNI is recognized by organizations such as the ILO, the European Union, and the OECD and union bodies such as the ICFTU or the ETUC. In Europe we have a social dialogue in ten different sectors where we are recognized by the Commission and our employer counterparts. We want this type of recognition with organizations such as Mercosur, Asean or the African Union.

Employer organizations, such as the UPU in the Postal sector, and individual global companies already talk to UNI.

A number of companies give recognition to UNI in Global Agreements. Thus we already play a strong representative role as a global union.

So if it walks like a duck and if it quacks like a duck we might as well call it a duck.

UNI is a global union

Is UNI Global Union going to recruit directly individual members?

Global unions must develop global organizing strategies.

Local and national unions are best placed to recruit members. But UNI can help unions to recruit.

Using its global presence, UNI can press global companies to agree to recognize everywhere their employees' right to join a union.

If there is a problem in a particular country, UNI can use its recognition by the global company to facilitate negotiations at the national level.

With global organizing campaigns, UNI pulls together the unions in a company where they are strong to help unions in areas where they are weak.

Sometimes just being able to explain to workers that they are not alone but are part of a global union with members in other countries in the same company can act as a spur to workers to organize.

It is not just about the corporate giants, it is also about looking at membership initiatives for small and

medium enterprises, for freelancers and in new areas such as call centres.

Who are the members of the UNI Global Union?

UNI Global Union members are the existing affiliated national trade unions. Being a global union should make it easier for national unions to carry news about their international activities to their members. It also makes it easier to explain to individual members what they get for their contribution and why that contribution is important.

A global union for what in most developed countries is less than the price of a beer or a cup of coffee. Not a bad deal.

Will UNI Global Union take power away from national unions?

No. The exact opposite is the case. UNI Global Union adds to the power of national unions. UNI Global Union has to develop activities which unions on their own cannot do or which together we can do better.

Will UNI Global Union negotiate wages, pensions and other conditions of work?

Even in global companies, wages, pensions and most conditions of employment are linked directly to national conditions and laws. UNI Global Union should deal with issues that cannot be effectively handled on a national level.

What sort of issues are those?

Most important is to get global companies to recognize effectively in practice the right of everybody employed by them anywhere in the world to join a trade union of their own choosing without fear of threats or reprisals or interference of any kind from the company.

It means agreeing to bargain collectively in good faith with the union chosen.

UNI Global Union with the unions concerned can negotiate global framework agreements which include, for example, right of access to the workforce for the purposes of recruitment; commitments by the company to ensure that the companies who supply them with goods and services observe the same standards. These issues become more important as companies outsource and off-shore work.

It is the UNI members who decide how far to go in these negotiations.

We would like the sector global unions to develop global labour standards for their areas of concern.

Could UNI Global Union call a global strike?

Never say never. The right of unions to call international strikes is controversial or simply illegal in many countries.

Without a right to strike can a global union be a real union?

UNI Global Union believes that all unions, national or global, should have the right to strike. If global companies can shift production or work almost with impunity from one country to another, their employees should have the corresponding right to withdraw their labour if they so decide.

Without the right to strike how can a global union effectively influence a global company?

UNI Global Union campaigns can affect their image and reputation, a very sensitive issue for many companies.

Companies will react when they think that a tarnished reputation will damage their business. Barclays bank withdrawal from South Africa during the days of Apartheid was one example; Wal-Mart's recently launched expensive publicity campaign to try to convince the public that it is good to its employees is the latest.

More and more companies realise that dialogue and constructive relations with their workers and their trade unions is good for their competitiveness.

Can UNI Global Union compete with the huge PR machines and lobbyists of companies like Wal-Mart?

UNI Global Union can mobilise the employees who work for these companies. For example with the second largest printing company in the world, Quebecor, UNI launched a campaign with members in the USA, Canada, France, UK, Sweden, Brazil and other countries all taking messages to their local management in the same week. It was an important reason why the company started to meet and talk with UNI.

With today's technology, it is difficult for a company to hide. If global companies exploit workers in one part of the world, the news can reach almost immediately a huge worldwide audience through the global union and the internet. We know that companies look at our website to find out what we are saying about them.

UNI Global Union will make even better use of this technology. If we can get members to identify with UNI Global Union campaigns, imagine the difference it would make to have messages arriving from thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people world wide.

UNI's pledge to answer calls for solidarity action within 24 hours will take on a new meaning with a global union mobilization.

If the companies mobilize more and more finance, UNI Global Union's response must be to mobilize more and more people.

How can we judge the results?

UNI Global Union will aim to promote organising into unions workers in the key multinationals in all sectors. Sectors will draw up the target companies in their sectors.

They will draw up global organizing campaigns.

UNI Global Union will increase the number of global agreements or understandings with global companies to recognize UNI as the voice of workers in the companies at the global level.

In a few years it will be possible to see if we achieved these objectives.

Five years after creating UNI are we going to rewrite the rule books?

The rules of UNI are flexible enough to develop our ways of working and the focus of our work without constitutional change.

What are other Global Unions doing?

Today the ICFTU, the world organization of trade union centres to which UNI and its predecessors have always been allied, is working to create a united World Trade Union Movement. UNI strongly supports this process.

For the first time, there could be a single clear voice for organized workers everywhere.

Imagine what an impact that voice might have on the WTO, the IFIs, on governments and employers.

UNI as a global union is also a key part of the union movement adapting to and providing new responses in new times.

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