

Peace, Freedom and Democracy

“ **Freedom of peaceful assembly and association are foundational rights precisely because they are essential to human dignity, economic empowerment, sustainable development and democracy. They are the gateway to all other rights; without them, all other human and civil rights are in jeopardy.** **Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association** ”

Trade unions have stood at the frontlines of struggles for democratic change and social justice throughout history. In many countries we are the only organised voice of opposition to governments attacking their own people or operating at the behest of corporate power and vested interests.

The escalation of geopolitical conflicts and proxy wars, a crisis of people seeking refuge, the growth in inequality, the now systemic unemployment of young people, the persistence of the informal economy, the rise in violence against women and the threat of climate change all make the need for a strong, democratic, unified trade union movement more relevant and urgent than ever.

The failure of governments to support and defend their people from the effects of unbridled corporate power has led to a complete breakdown of trust, spreading popular anger and fear which in turn fuel the rise of populism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, patriarchy, misogyny and homophobia. Young people feel disenfranchised and abandoned by the “political class”. The gains made towards gender equality and women's autonomy are in danger of being reversed

by regressive policies and politics. When governments fail their people, the role of civil society becomes even more important. Alliances across social movements are deepening and strengthening – even in the face of sometimes violent government crackdowns.

“ **Education either functions as an instrument to...bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.** **Paulo Freire.** ”

By placing education in the hands of privateers, we have moved away from education systems that foster conscientisation, common bonds of citizenship and the encouragement of critical thought, making it still easier to marginalise, dehumanise and oppress.

Grabbing of land and natural resources by multinational corporations is displacing women farmers and indigenous communities, violating their right to land, food, water and a livelihood. The extraction of natural resources through agribusiness, hydropower, and large scale mining leads to ecological damage and contributes to climate change that will disproportionately affect women, particularly in the global South.

Working for peace means securing a decent standard of living for all. It means taking care of our environment. It means social justice, equality and equity. It means accessible quality public education, health, care and housing services. It means finding a human alternative to the “globalisation of indifference” and putting economies at the service of the people. It means leaving no one behind.

♀ [ITUC Freedom Report: Peace, Democratic Rights \(2016\)](#)

♀ [ITUC Global Rights Index](#)

♀ [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association \(2016\)](#)

♀ [UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment: How to strengthen visibility, collective voice and representation \(toolkit\)](#)