

Freedom Report 2022:

Unions Building Peace



CLIMATE-FRIENDLY JOBS
WAGES
RIGHTS
SOCIAL PROTECTION
EQUALITY
INCLUSION

A New Social Contract



ITUC CSI IGB

Contents

Introduction	3
Colombia: Confederación De Trabajadores De Colombia (CTC)	4
Chile: Towards a new constitution	6
Myanmar: Confederation of Trade Unions, Myanmar (CTUM)	7
Recommendation 205: Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience	9
Northern Ireland: Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	10
Common Security 2022: For Our Shared Future	12
Tunisia: Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT)	13
ITUC Global Poll 2022	15
Conclusion	16

Introduction

Russia's illegal and abhorrent invasion of Ukraine has focused global attention on the brutality of armed conflict and its global consequences, even as long-standing wars in places such as Tigray and Yemen continued to rage with devastating consequences.

International humanitarian trade union solidarity, such as the major efforts to support workers in Ukraine, Myanmar and elsewhere, is part of a broader framework of trade union efforts to build and sustain peace and to avoid conflicts and rebuild in their aftermath.

Some two billion people live in conflict-affected countries, with 56 state-based conflicts in the world today.

The **2022 ITUC Global Poll** demonstrates that 62% of people want their government to do more to work with other countries to promote peace, jobs and human rights.

A majority of people are again worried about the threat of nuclear war and half the world's people would trust their government more if they committed to an international treaty to ban nuclear weapons and worked for common solutions with other governments.

People want action on peace and this requires new global architecture, based on the realisation of the new social contract for all people, to tackle the root causes of armed conflict and ensure sustainability and resilience.

If the world can come together to look at addressing the threats from climate change, then it should also invest in global dialogue for agreement on measures to prevent conflict, to end existing conflicts and to rebuild in the aftermath of war in a just and sustainable way.

The ITUC, with the International Peace Bureau and the Olof Palme Center, launched a report in April 2022, **For Our Shared Future**, outlining key recommendations for common security.

It provides a powerful call for renewed common security measures including elimination of nuclear weapons, disarmament and demilitarisation more broadly and, crucially, a strong social contract.

This Freedom Report and its case studies remind us of the critical role unions play in opposing conflict, authoritarianism, oppression and exclusion:

- In **Colombia**, unions have been at the forefront of decades of struggle for peace and social justice.
- In **Northern Ireland**, the trade union movement has long been a motor for peace and overcoming division and sectarianism.
- In **Myanmar**, the unions continue their longstanding peace and democracy struggle in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances under a ruthless military dictatorship.
- In **Tunisia**, the UGTT and others were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work to build a post-dictatorship country with a new constitution. A commitment that remains just as strong as the country faces new challenges.

There are many such examples of trade union action for peace, justice and democracy, both today and throughout trade union history. We take pride in these achievements and the inspiration we draw from them will help unions everywhere plan and campaign for fundamental freedoms, democracy and peace.

Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary



Colombia

Confederación De Trabajadores De Colombia (CTC)

The war in Colombia is a dispute for land, power, representation and social change. At the beginning of the 19th century the working class mobilised against the transnational companies that exploited the country's natural resources, such as oil, bananas and gold. These strikes and protests resulted in massacres of working people demanding their rights.

The assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948 unleashed unprecedented political violence.

From 1956 to 1974, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party signed an agreement establishing

a system of political alternation between the two forces that faced opposition as it excluded other parties.

Most of the guerrillas that emerged in this period combined political and armed struggle that met with official repression aligned with the United States.

The most notorious guerrillas of the second half of the twentieth century are the FARC-EP, the ELN, the EPL and the M-19. These armed groups have justified the use of violence as the only method to transform society. The social and political dynamics of Colombia have been marked by socioeconomic

exclusion, a lack of space for political participation, the accumulation of land by a few families, drug trafficking as a fuel for war and the use of violence.

According to data from the Human Rights Information System of the National Trade Union School (ENS) there have been an estimated 15,481 human rights violations of unionised persons, including 3,295 murders.

Most of the victims were dedicated, driven by their ideals, to defending human and labour rights as workers and citizens. But this dedication inconvenienced some people who saw their profits threatened.

This violence has profoundly affected the development of trade union organisations. Trade union activity in Colombia has been stigmatised and met with violence. As the oldest labour centre, the CTC has suffered this through the different periods of violence that the country has experienced.

Since August 7, 2022, we have a progressive and democratic government that is trying to solve the serious economic, political and social situation. However, we are concerned about the return of violence in rural and urban areas, exclusion, the growing phenomenon of migration and the violation of labour rights. Furthermore, the right continues to promote an economic model that has clearly failed, pushing human life to the verge of extinction.

Throughout its history, the CTC has contributed to building peace as a fundamental human right. We have raised our voice against corruption and in defence of equity and social justice through decent work, the defence of natural resources, national sovereignty and opposition to poverty and social exclusion.

A central objective of the CTC has been to support all peace processes. In the specific case of the agreement with the FARC, the CTC supported the initiative of former President Juan Manuel Santos



to initiate a dialogue, supported the Havana process and was present at the signing of the agreement.

Together with the CUT and the CGT, we launched a strong awareness campaign on the importance of signing the agreement, with events in different cities.

Once the agreement was in force, the CTC has firmly defended it and denounced the breach of the pact by the government of former President Duque through events such as “The Peace of Colombia at risk”, carried out jointly with the CUT at the ILO International Labour Conference, June 2019, with ITUC support.

The CTC firmly believes that social dialogue and decent work are the way out of poverty to a stable and lasting peace. We have supported and promoted spaces for social dialogue throughout the country, with the aim of defending decent work, equity, social justice, social security and the health service.

The CTC has actively participated in the reconstruction of the truth of what happened to the trade union movement during the conflict, through submissions to the commissions investigating the events. Through the CONARE (Commission for the Promotion of Collective Reparation for the Trade Union Movement), we are seeking full reparations for the trade union movement.

A new social contract is the only way to achieve total peace with social justice and to strengthen social dialogue.

Chile: Towards a new constitution

In 2019, a massive popular uprising led by trade unions and social movements brought the government to its knees and paved the way for a process to draft a new constitution.

Although the country had transitioned to democracy in 1990, the rules set by long-time military dictator Augusto Pinochet remained in place.

Pinochet's policies were heavily influenced by the discredited "Chicago Boys" economists who preached that vital services such as health, education, pensions and even water had to be privatised.

But successive attempts to rewrite the Pinochet constitution had failed up until President Sebastián Piñera was forced to agree to a vote to establish a constitutional convention.

A Constitutional Assembly was eventually elected in 2021 with an equal proportion of women and men and reserved seats for indigenous peoples.

After almost a year, the Assembly presented a draft that recognised the rights of indigenous peoples, added environmental protections, increased gender parity and guaranteed rights to public education, pensions and health care.

Furthermore, the draft recognised "the right to decent work as the right to fair working conditions, to health and safety at work, to rest, to leisure, to digital disconnection, to the guarantee of indemnity, and full respect for fundamental rights."

This was the result of the intensive participation of CUT Chile that set up a broad consultation among workers and labour law experts – including the former ILO Director General Juan Somavia – to produce a trade union amendment that surpassed the 15,000 citizen supporters it required to be discussed within the Constitutional Convention.

To the disappointment of many, the draft constitution was rejected by a referendum in September 2022, mainly due to the fearmongering tactics of the right-wing media and the widespread use of fake-news through social networks.

However, trade unions and social movements were not deterred and vowed to continue the struggle until the last legacy of the Pinochet regime has been well and truly buried.



(Myat Thu Kyaw/NurPhoto/AFP)



Myanmar

Confederation of Trade Unions, Myanmar (CTUM)

In Myanmar we have moved from a military regime to democracy and back. We did not have much choice because the military decides what it wants the country to be.

The conflict is mainly about equality between, and with, the ethnic nationalities that form Burma. These communities always had their own culture and territory, until they were forced into the Indian administration of the British Empire. In 1948 Burma won its independence and chaos broke out. Since 1962 the military has taken advantage of this and staged coup after coup, ruling through brute force.

The result is a society low in trust and high in corruption. The economy is based on cronyism

built-up through huge military infrastructure contracts managed by military-run corporations, and the education system is based on coercion and bribery and the doctrine that the military is superior to all.

The trade unions became an organised unit in the 1988 people's struggle as we participated in demonstrations, marches and strikes. We lost this fight in the cities, but regrouped in the ethnically controlled areas. In 1992, we founded the Federation of Trade Unions Burma (FTUB) and started to make international contacts with the IUF, the ITUC and many others.

Then we were able to use the ILO complaints mechanism to bring pressure on the military regime. Our international trade union friends guided us in this process and we know that, whatever they may say, the regime is concerned about the ILO. Our experience is that the decisions and resolutions of the ILO have an impact and provide results.

To bring cases to the ILO, our members started working with the ethnic communities and documented forced labour by the military regime. As this evidence was produced time and time again by the workers group at the ILO, the military was forced to respond and said there were violations but they could be worked out. Eventually, they changed tactics and arrested many of our members in Burma and Thailand.

When the FTUB became more structured we sent activists to the ITUC AP youth leadership programme. Two of the women from this first group are still with the CTUM leading their own sectors.



Now we are living in a revolution again, but before this we had started to build a democratic culture through the principles of the new social contract. With our mix of ethnic nationalities, inclusion was key.

At first, our representative on the national tripartite forum to review the social security law was met with disbelief and resistance. But by the end of the process, the participants understood that it is the workers that keep the system running, they are the experts and they have something important to contribute to the negotiations.

It also worked the other way. Through these forums, members of the trade union met doctors and academics and realised that they were also struggling with the same challenges, such as privatisation and precarious work. A sense of solidarity between working people was emerging as they realised that they had more in common with each other than they thought.

A strong, new social contract is key to keeping people in work and maintaining peace.

Right now our country is living under a dictatorship that wants to become a vassal state of Russia to survive. However, since the coup of 1 February 2021, we have achieved a lot internally and internationally. In Myanmar, people have been murdered and whole villages burned down, but large areas of the country remain under local control. At the United Nations' General Assembly, the permanent representative speaks for the National Unity Government (NUG) not the military junta.

In the future we are worried about not having enough experienced trade unionists. Our recent experience has shown that even under a democratic political party, labour rights have to be fought for inch by inch.

When democracy returns, we will be less concerned about pushing hard for the interests of working people. In the past, we were too patient, waiting for the political party to take action.

Trade unions are in a unique position as they have no hidden agenda and the capacity to bring about real change for working people.

Recommendation 205: Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience

The ILO was created in the wake of the First World War on a key principle: “Universal and lasting peace can only be established if it is based on social justice.” It has more than 100 years of experience in assisting societies to transition from conflict to peace through decent work and the participation of social partners.

This role in promoting peace was reaffirmed in 2017 by **Recommendation 205**, which provides guidance for building peace and resilience through employment and decent work. It focuses on reconstruction and recovery, but also on prevention and preparedness to mitigate the impact of crises through a number of decent work themes:

- Occupational safety and health.
- Social protection.
- Decent working conditions.
- The transition from the informal to the formal economy.
- Vocational training, skills development and lifelong learning.
- Special attention for migrants, refugees and returnees affected by crisis situations.
- A just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy.

It gives workers’ organisations a voice and tools to have an impact in the context of conflicts and disasters because all of this is supported with intensive social dialogue in the design and implementation of recovery strategies.



(Kevin Cooper/Photoline)



Northern Ireland

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

The civil conflict in Northern Ireland emerged from the global upheavals of 1968 and took 30 years to largely resolve. It involved nationality, national identity, religious sectarianism, population transfer, state violence, repressive legislation, random assassinations, ‘protection’ rackets, armed robbery, coercive control by paramilitaries and the reordering of an economy around security concerns.

Over 3,600 people were murdered, thousands were injured physically or psychologically. Most of them were at work, or on the way to work, when they were attacked. They included soldiers, police and prison officers, civil servants, private contractors identified as ‘collaborators’, door attendants at shops and pubs, shop assistants, fire

fighters, taxi drivers, a woman collecting census forms, people working alongside people from the ‘other side’, postal workers and milk delivery people who did a few hours a week as a part-time reserve in the army or the police.

Thousands were forced to leave workplaces that were tolerable for a while, and then became gradually unsafe.

The economy was ruined. Foreign investors fled, especially after some expatriate business leaders were kidnapped and murdered. The state filled some gaps with reconstruction and security work, but unemployment was large and stubborn, especially for the Catholic community.

Under the leadership of the ICTU, the trade unions remained united in a single confederation despite the efforts to divide the movement along sectarian lines. This unity was achieved by working class people seeing a bigger picture than that offered by the local political class, or their paramilitary proxies.

What emerged was a series of trade union campaigns for secure jobs and secure workplaces, with secure streets outside. A 'Joint Declaration of Protection' was agreed with employers to challenge and tackle workplace sectarianism. Twenty years later, a similar initiative was negotiated focusing on racism.

The unions organised large public demonstrations after sectarian murders, allowing ordinary people to express their shared horror at an atrocity.

Many union campaigns for investment in peace and the economy were developed with employers' groups and even government ministers. Union leaders were hailed as peacemakers even by politicians in the British Conservative Party government of Margaret Thatcher. However, many of the tactics developed to suppress civil disobedience in Northern Ireland were later used to suppress strikes by English and Welsh miners and printworkers.

The trade unionists of the 70s and 80s were brave and hardworking. They stood up to sectarian bullies in workplaces, led efforts to 'stand by my mate' (the name of an ICTU campaign against intimidation), removed sectarian symbols from workplaces, and some were shot for doing so. But the unions carried on. A British/Protestant shop steward persuading their co-religionist to remove the symbols of their identity in the workplace had a lasting legacy that no law or state agency can match.

These examples of trade union values, recognisable anywhere in any kind of society, are still needed today. The worst violence has fizzled out since the 1998 peace agreement, but society is still dysfunctional with a political culture dominated by two blocs of competing grievances.

The devolved government was designed to be shared by politicians from both sides, but has remained suspended for almost half its 24 years of precarious existence.

The consistent line from trade unions for 50 years is that economic injustice feeds the resentments that lead to resource competition, which is then easily filtered through the prism of sectarianism by cynical political entrepreneurs for their own ends.

When unions campaigned for the 1998 peace agreement, they called for comprehensive equality legislation and enforcement, so women and minority groups could fully contribute to society. They worked for an inclusive Bill of Rights to protect social and economic rights and to recognise identity.

They campaigned for universal public services funded through progressive taxation and collective bargaining benefitting all working people. They stood for a meaningful partnership between 'traditional' communities, as well as between capital, labour and civil society.

However, this agreement has been only partially implemented by political parties that oppose its progressive and transformative possibilities, and further undermined by Brexit and a Conservative Party government in Britain focused on its English nationalist base.

There is much to do, and unions remaining true to the principles of the past decades will continue this quest.



Common Security 2022: For Our Shared Future

This year, a group of influential civil society leaders launched a call to action to set the world on the path to peace based on the concept of common security.

In 1982, the Palme Commission had developed the concept in its groundbreaking report, *Common Security: A Programme for Disarmament*, which contributed greatly to easing tensions at the height of the Cold War.

Common Security 2022: For Our Shared Future urges world leaders to return to the path of disarmament and peaceful progress and cooperate to overcome contemporary security risks and causes of conflict, especially climate change and global warming, inequality, current and future pandemics, and authoritarian regimes shrinking democratic space.

The recommendations are focused on four main areas:

1. Strengthen the Global Architecture for Peace.
2. A New Peace Dividend – Disarmament and Development.
3. Revitalised Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament.
4. New Military Technologies and Outer Space Weapons.

“A world in peril requires us to reimagine peace. *Common Security*, where security is not built at the expense of others, contributed to ending the Cold War, to conventional and nuclear disarmament. *Common Security* today requires global cooperation to build a peace architecture that includes a social contract for our human security as well as paths to deescalate a dangerous arms race.

Philip Jennings
Co-President, International Peace Bureau



Tunisia

Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT)

The revolution of January 2011 was a historic moment that marked the beginning of the process of democratic construction in Tunisia after decades of political dictatorship.

Progress to democratic governance led to transparent elections in October 2011 and a constituent assembly charged with drafting a new constitution.

However, since mid-2013 the country has been in a political crisis fuelled by the unprecedented rise of religious radicalism and recurrent acts of terrorism, violence and political assassination. The crisis peaked in July 2013 with the assassination of activists Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi,

resulting in an institutional deadlock and violent demonstrations that threatened civil war.

In this context, in 2013 the UGTT launched its National Dialogue initiative in partnership with the UTICA, the Tunisian League of Human Rights, and the Bar Association. After a long course of negotiations it succeeded in uniting all political and civil forces in the country around a political roadmap.

This will lead to a new progressive and democratic constitution that fully recognises individual rights and freedoms, gender equality and economic and social rights, including the right to organise and the right to strike.

The National Dialogue has established the pillars of an innovative mechanism for resolving conflicts between completely opposed political entities. In recognition of this the UGTT and its partners were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2015.

Despite all the progress made towards an enduring, inclusive democracy, the transition process is under threat. There has been a disconnect between political institutions and popular expectations due to persistent economic and social crisis and the inability of political parties to implement relevant programs and strategies.

This led to protest movements and a total rejection of political parties by the majority of citizens.

A populist discourse and a mentality of exclusion has replaced the inclusive dialogue on consensual and practical solutions to Tunisia's stifling political, economic and social problems.

The atmosphere of rejection was intensified by the COVID-19 health crisis that had disastrous repercussions on the living conditions of Tunisians.

In July 2021, the President of the Republic announced a series of exceptional measures, including the suspension of Parliament and the monopolising of all executive and legislative powers.

While we understand that this was in response to an unprecedented crisis, we consider that the concentration of all power in the hands of one person threatens the democratic achievements and the progress made in political governance since the revolution. Our concerns became even stronger in July 2022 when the president unilaterally adopted a new constitution without consultation with political parties or social partners.

National consensus has always been one of the pillars of social cohesion in Tunisia and a basic element of its political governance for decades. Tunisia is at a crossroads and the risk of a return to conflict cannot be excluded.

Overcoming this situation will require an inclusive national dialogue that engages with political, economic and social issues. In our view, a consensual national rescue programme is the only way to achieve the institutional reforms needed to put the country back on the road to democracy, peace and social justice to ensure full respect for individual and collective freedoms.



ITUC Global Poll 2022

People say that they want governments to prioritise peacebuilding over militarism. In the

ITUC Global Poll 2022:

- 62% of people want their government to do more to work with other countries to promote peace, jobs and human rights.
- 50% would trust their government more if they worked for common solutions with other governments.
- 51% are worried about the threat of nuclear war (an increase from 42% in 2020).
- 50% would trust their government more if they committed to an international treaty to ban nuclear weapons.

People realise that this is not just a question of peace, it is also about social justice built on a new social contract:

- Jobs: 58% of people want their government to do more to promote a Just Transition to a zero carbon future.
- Rights: 62% want their government to do more to work with other countries to promote peace, jobs and human rights.
- Wages: 68% want their government to work towards a pay rise for workers.
- Social protection: 87% support affordable access to healthcare.
- Equality: 66% are worried about inequality in earnings and opportunities between men and women.
- Inclusion: 81% want international laws that hold companies to account for environmental and labour rights abuses in their supply chain.

Conclusion

This report stands in recognition of the decades of action for peace and democracy by trade unions around the world. It reminds us that without peace, democratic rights and freedoms, decent work and social protection, remain unattainable.

Unions on the frontline of the struggle for peace find themselves engaged in the broad scope of resistance.

We salute their courage and their collective activism to make the world safer for all of us, and pledge to support, through humanitarian, political and organising action, trade unions working for peace and democracy, wherever they may be. Support for reconstruction and global solidarity from the rest of our trade union family is vital.

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