

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2013

### *Promoting decent work for women & men that is free from violence*

The primary goal of the ILO is to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Self-evidently, violence in the workplace is at odds with this mandate. For decades the ILO has advised on policy and executed programmes to eliminate sex discrimination at work. Given the 2009 ILC Conclusions instructions<sup>1</sup> to develop policies, programmes, legislation and other measures aimed at combatting gender-based violence, ILO uses the 2013 IWD theme to raise awareness on how the world of work is both an excellent channel for prevention and for remedies and enforcement of policy proscriptions.

Since the mid-1990s increasing international attention has been paid to the issue of violence against women; the data that are now being collected show that it is widespread.

#### FACT BOX

##### **Sexual harassment**

- *Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace.*
- *In the United States, 83 per cent of girls aged 12 to 16 experience some form of sexual harassment in public schools.*
- *Small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries indicate that 30 to 40 per cent of women workers report some form of harassment - verbal, physical or sexual.*
- *One in five (21%) people in Australia has been sexually harassed since the age of 15; one third of women (33%) have been harassed, compared to less than one in ten (9%) men.*
- *A majority (68%) of those people were harassed in the workplace. A quarter of women (25%) and one in six men (16%) have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in Australia.*

*Violence against Women Factsheet  
United Nations, Secretary General's Campaign, UNiTE, 2012  
and 2011 Australian Human Rights Commission Telephone Survey*

Sexual harassment and other forms of harassment and abuse (physical, verbal or psychological), bullying, mobbing, work-related stress and violence affect all professions and sectors, and both women and men. However, there is still no explicit international human rights treaty prohibition on violence against women, and the issue remains poorly defined and understood under international human rights law.

<sup>1</sup> ILC: Provisional Record No. 13, Conclusions on Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work paras 5, 45, 52 and 54.

Often in the world of work, violence is based on unequal power relations. ILO's standards on gender equality and those covering workers in situations where violence may go un-noticed – domestic workers, indigenous peoples, child labourers, rural workers, migrant workers, to name but a few – help define international rights on the matter. The ILO's tripartite structure adds weight to workplace responses by drawing workers' and employers' organisations and ministries responsible for labour into the debate. Existing programmes have already supported constituents' work to end violence where it has proven a factor in HIV infection among women and girls. So all the other measures available from the ILO should be used to end this scourge. This year's International Women's Day discussion builds on the totality of ILO's expertise.

### *Making the Human Rights and the Business Case*

Violence in the world of work is a human rights issue, as well as a health, education, legal and socio-economic problem. There is also a strong business case for eliminating violence against women and men. The costs to enterprises include absenteeism, increased turnover, lower job performance and productivity, negative public image, legal/litigation fees, fines or high settlement costs, and rising insurance premiums. For workers, it can lead to heightened stress, loss of motivation, increased accidents and disability, and even death. The potential strain on health, welfare and social security systems can be avoided through the promotion of integrated, gender-responsive occupational safety and health policies and a preventive culture in the world of work.

### *Current ILO research, guides and tools*

Office-wide tools and guides have been developed over the last decade, and now comprise a formidable package of approaches to end violence against women at work. Sectoral dimensions have been addressed e.g. the ILO, WHO, ICN, PSI Joint Programme on Workplace Violence in the Health Sector was launched in 2000 and has since carried out a series of research activities and published *Framework Guidelines* for addressing workplace violence in the health sector. 2010 ILO research highlighted the challenges faced by women in hotel, catering and tourism, who make up 60 to 70 per cent of that labour force; unskilled or semi-skilled women tend to work in the most vulnerable jobs where they are more likely to experience poor working conditions, inequality of opportunity and treatment, violence, exploitation, stress and sexual harassment.

ILO also works on better tracking of incidence of violence at work. Safework's 2012 database *The Global Database on National OSH Legislation* includes occupational violence as an indicator. Better Work, present in many factories that are women-dominated, has been measuring its own impact on reducing gender-based violence by collecting enterprise-level data through worker surveys, which cover a range of issues including sexual harassment at the workplace. Baseline data in 2011 show that such harassment is a concern for 85 per cent of workers in Indonesia, 26 per cent in Jordan and seven per cent in Vietnam. Better Work undertook training for managers, supervisors and workers themselves aimed to prevent and address sexual harassment. Gender-based violence should be addressed through social dialogue, including collective bargaining, at the enterprise, sectoral or national levels and ILO training courses are addressing this. In addition, work needs to be accelerated to build the capacity of labour statisticians, improve labour market information systems in areas such as violence against women in the world of work.

### *Technical cooperation addressing violence at work*

There are currently two ILO projects where the explicit purpose is to combat gender-based violence in the workplace: "*Promoting Gender Equality and Preventing Violence against Women at the Workplace in Bangladesh*", and "*Joint UN Programme on Prevention of and Response to Gender-based Violence in Sri Lanka*".



Several other projects include efforts to combat gender-based violence and sexual harassment as part of a larger workplace programme or of a UN Joint Programme. The project *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the World of Work in Brazil, Angola, South Africa, India, China (BASIC)* has worked on this e.g. it supported Angola's advocacy campaign which led to an Act of Parliament specifically outlawing domestic violence; in China the project supported constituents to draft and use a guide on preventing sexual harassment at the workplace. Projects promoting the rights of domestic workers in Lebanon and the Middle East include building support structures for domestic workers who are violently abused in their places of work. In Pakistan a study on how workplaces operate to minimize sexual harassment has been conducted by the ILO, while in Nepal the ILO runs a project that is explicitly linked to supporting the National Plan of Action against Gender-based Violence. The project *Empowering Women for Peace & Recovery in East Sudan* addresses masculinities and non-violent approaches in its delivery. And lastly, training under a women's leadership programme in Indonesia, builds capacity in enterprises on how to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace.

### *Time to speak out*

Of the varied ways in which sex discrimination manifests itself across the globe, gender-based violence is particularly dehumanizing and oppressive. No other form of sex discrimination violates so many fundamental human rights, as articulated in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Workplace violence and harassment present a significant barrier to women accessing and progressing through the labour market. It is worth repeating that workplace violence is a hidden problem, but with very tangible consequences. It erodes decent working conditions and reinforces gendered and other power relations to the detriment of both women and men in the world of work. It is time to speak out against the unspeakable: violence, sexual harassment and abuses at work.

At a time when ending violence against women has taken centre stage in the international media, is high on the political agenda in many countries, and is the topic of this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, International Women's Day 2013 presents an important opportunity for the ILO to host a world-of-work discussion on how to stop violence at work. This tripartite discussion will allow for concrete good practice to be shared and for the ILO to take further concrete steps in supporting government, workers and employers in our joint imperative to *stop violence at work*.

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