



# **INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM**

**BUILDING A JUST WORLD FOR WORKERS**



**2009 Annual Report**

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## 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS IN PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS

This past year was an important landmark in ILRF's history. In 1984, a group of labor activists recognized an opportunity to enforce international labor rights through the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program, and successfully advocated for the inclusion of the historic worker rights conditionality clause. Two years later, the International Labor Rights Forum was officially founded as an advocacy organization and we began our work to achieve just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. For more information about how ILRF has used the labor rights conditionality in GSP in our recent advocacy efforts, please see the Freedom at Work section of this annual report.

We celebrated 25 years of advocating for worker rights globally with a special event in Washington, DC on March 17, 2009. The celebration was held at the headquarters of the Communications Workers of America. US Representative Jan Schakowsky, Francisco Ramirez Cuellar (President of Colombia's National Mineworkers' Union)



Photo Credit: ILRF

and James Hoffa (President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters) were all honored at the event for their extraordinary commitment to workers in the US and around the world.

The celebration was an excellent opportunity to reflect on ILRF's history and recommit ourselves to keeping up the fight for workers for another 25 years!

## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



### *Strength in Numbers*

Fighting for social justice in the face of a world recession was ILRF's daunting task in 2009. With the global economic downturn, millions of workers were laid off. Workers worldwide faced the pressure of losing permanent jobs

and accepting casual and informal employment instead, making them easier prey for trafficking and other forms of exploitation. There was also significant pressure on poor families to take children out of school and put them to work. Our movement allies saw their funding base weakened as a result of the crisis, and even within the movement we saw unions and other social justice organizations losing staff and tightening their belts.

We at ILRF rose to the challenge by embracing our allies and working together more closely than ever, realizing that in the face of these obstacles, there would nevertheless be strength in numbers. ILRF could never tackle these challenges alone, so in March 2009, we brought together several of our longstanding friends and allies for a full-day meeting to tackle the critical question of what we could do to promote stronger respect for worker rights in the face of the global economic crisis. The day-long session was capped by an evening event, hosted by our friends at Communications Workers of America, celebrating ILRF's quarter century of effective policy advocacy. We looked back, but we also looked forward toward strengthening our work with new allies and partners.

Continuing with this theme, ILRF worked throughout 2009 to strengthen our alliances. Our campaign to end child labor in cocoa could not have moved ahead if not for strong allies in the environmental and fair trade

movements, such as Global Exchange, Green America, Oasis USA and Organic Consumers Association, fighting with us not only for labor rights but environmental justice and farmers' rights. Our work to end the terrible abuses of forced and child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton sector got an enormous lift from partnerships with the American Federation of Teachers and with many allies in the socially responsible investment movement, including Calvert Group, ICCR, and As You Sow. Our overall work to end forced and child labor enjoyed a boost from a new partnership with the anti-slavery group Not for Sale Campaign.

Most notably, our longstanding work to end sweatshop abuses around the world brought us into a close day-to-day relationship with SweatFree Communities. Recognizing the enormous challenges of maintaining small, non-profit social justice organizations in a difficult economic climate, and excited by the synergies in our work, throughout 2009 ILRF and SweatFree Communities worked toward a true partnership, and ultimate integration, of our organizations, believing that the whole would be greater than the sum of the parts. That integration was completed in January 2010, and our friends and supporters can look to hear more from us about how to get involved with SweatFree Communities campaigns in the coming months.

With this annual report, we celebrate our partners and the important ways in which our work together magnifies the effects of all of our advocacy. Even in these challenging times, the support and partnership of these friends gives us hope that we can change the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bama Athreya'.

Bama Athreya  
Executive Director



## STOP CHILD AND FORCED LABOR



Photo Credit: Robin Romano

Since our founding, ILRF has fought for an end to the abusive practices of child and forced labor. In 2009, we continued to campaign against corporations that benefit from these abuses and to advocate for policies to eradicate child and forced labor.

# STOP CHILD AND FORCED LABOR



Photo Credit: Michael Komba

## Stop Firestone Campaign

In 2009, ILRF continued our campaign efforts to support justice for workers on a rubber plantation in Liberia owned by the Bridgestone Firestone tire company. For over 80 years, workers on the plantation have been subjected to excessive production quotas that have forced them to bring their children and wives to work. Firestone rubber workers and their families live in poverty. After an inspiring organizing campaign, Firestone workers formed an independent and democratic union and signed an historic contract with the company in 2008. While this was a major step forward for workers, some abuses continued. ILRF helped to build international pressure on

Firestone to honor its contract and respect worker rights.

To raise awareness about the plight of Firestone workers in Liberia, ILRF organized several other activities throughout the year. Two of the Firestone union leaders came to the US to share their struggle with activists, the media and policymakers. ILRF released a report describing the relationship between the use of child labor and violations of other fundamental rights at work on the plantation. At the end of the year, ILRF worked to build solidarity with Liberian workers as they prepared for a new round on contract negotiations with Firestone management.

## Cocoa in West Africa

ILRF has worked for years to end child labor in cocoa production. ILRF's consumer campaigning has pressured chocolate companies to pay a fair price to farmers and to make sure they are eliminating child and forced labor in their supply chains. In 2009, a number of major chocolate companies announced new certification initiatives to implement labor rights standards in cocoa production.

ILRF views this significant rise in the number of companies using certification programs for their cocoa supply as an important step forward. However, not all these certification programs have adequate protocols in place to identify and eradicate child labor. ILRF developed a baseline document to share with consumers, companies,



Photo Credit: Robin Romano



# STOP CHILD AND FORCED LABOR

Photo Credit: Robin Romano



## Cotton Campaign

For the past five years ILRF has exposed the widespread use of forced child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton sector. Uzbekistan systematically mobilizes its school children each year for cotton harvests, forcing hundreds of thousands of children to work under terrible conditions. A handful of children die of exposure in this work each year.

In 2009, ILRF took the cotton campaign to a new level of attention, working with both global trade unions and global employers on a high profile case before the International Labor Organization. In June 2009, in conjunction with the ILO's annual conference, ILRF and its allies held a side event on Uzbek cotton, featuring testimony by human rights advocates from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and statements by global union leaders, employers, and representatives from the ILO. ILRF also released a new report on child labor in Uzbekistan in June 2009, and coordinated a global allies' statement

and certification programs entitled, "Roadmap for Ethical Product Certification and Standard Setting Initiatives," to address fundamental issues involving certification. In the coming year, ILRF will continue to encourage certification initiatives to improve their monitoring and remediation programs to end child labor.

In 2009, ILRF also worked with our grassroots supporters to hold a national call-in day to Hershey and supported a campaign where activists made thousands of Fair Trade Certified S'mores during the summer camping season. We also participated in the third annual Reverse Trick-or-Treating action where thousands of young people distributed information about child labor in the cocoa industry to their neighbors on Halloween.



Photo Credit: Juontel White

condemning this human rights abuse. In October 2009, at the height of the Uzbek cotton harvest season, ILRF worked with several US campaign allies to organize a demonstration outside the Uzbek Embassy in Washington, DC to continue to raise awareness of this abuse. In December 2009, we released a new report on the continued exploitation of children in the fall 2009 harvest, and convened a major policy roundtable with representatives from the US government, human rights organizations, trade unions, companies, investors, and industry associations to ensure high-level US policy attention to this ongoing exploitation.

# STOP CHILD AND FORCED LABOR

## Free2Work

An increasing desire for ethically produced goods has led consumers to seek educational resources about the supply chain practices of various companies. This year, ILRF collaborated with the Not for Sale Campaign to launch Free2Work.org – a website that rates products and companies based on their policies related to forced and child labor. In addition to profiling steps various



companies are taking to eliminate labor rights abuses, the website links readers to opportunities to take action and provides forums for visitors to share information and connect with each other. By publicly rating and communicating directly with companies, Free2Work helps to drive companies to improve their grades by taking stronger action to protect worker rights. While the site is currently in its early stages, it has proven to be a valuable resource for consumers to ensure that their purchases do not fuel forced and child labor.

### policy spotlight: List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor

In September 2009, the US Department of Labor (US DOL) released a list of 122 goods from 58 countries that are likely to be produced by forced or child labor as part of a mandate from the Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act of 2005. The list included many of the industries identified by ILRF as areas in which these abuses occur including cocoa, cotton, sugar, tobacco and rubber. The publication of the list is a major step forward in determining products imported into the US produced under highly exploitative labor conditions.

Following the publication of the List, the US Department of Agriculture announced that ILRF Executive Director Bama Athreya was named as a member of a newly formed Consultative Group to Eliminate the Use of Child Labor and Forced Labor in Imported Agricultural Products. Established through a provision in the 2008 Farm Bill, the Consultative Group is tasked with developing recommendations for voluntary, third-party certification efforts to reduce the likelihood that agricultural products like those listed on the US DOL's are produced with child and forced labor.



Photo Credit: ILRF



## CREATING A SWEATFREE WORLD



Photo Credit: Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network

From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, much of what consumers buy is produced by workers whose rights are not protected. ILRF continued to challenge sweatshop conditions and promote ethical alternatives globally through our Creating a SweatFree World campaign in 2009.



# CREATING A SWEATFREE WORLD

## China Rule of Law

In 2009, ILRF continued to strengthen the capacity of the Chinese legal system—from its labor lawyers to its grassroots officials—to respond to workers’ demands, while helping workers themselves to assert their rights and interests.

Our two pioneering labor law clinics at Northwest University of Politics and Law and Suzhou University took on dozens of workers’ cases. Law students at these universities gained first-hand experience speaking up for labor rights in formal legal settings. As a result, several of the students expressed an interest in making a career of public interest litigation upon graduation.

Other Chinese university partners organized workshops for judges, arbitrators and, for the first time, neighborhood-level mediators. One partner held a large-scale conference focused on protecting worker rights in the context of the global financial crisis. Another brought together arbitrators from across a particular province to



Photo Credit: ILRF

discuss some of the thornier areas of labor law and to enhance communication and mutual support.

In collaboration with Chinese non-profits, ILRF provided workers with basic training on national and local labor laws and effective legal strategies. Training sessions included mock arbitrations, quizzes and outings. A smaller group of workers received more advanced training sufficient to become legal resources to those around them.

## spotlight: Shop with a Conscience

<http://www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide>

Together with SweatFree Communities, ILRF released the updated version of the “Shop with a Conscience Consumer Guide.” The Guide features clothing produced in workplaces where workers are organized into democratic unions or worker-owned cooperatives and have an effective, collective voice in deciding their wages and working conditions. The highlighted companies produce clothing in adherence with international core labor standards, pay decent wages, maintain healthy and safe working conditions, and treat workers with respect and dignity.

The 2010 Guide features the following brands: Autonomie Project, DeMoulin Apparel, Donnelly/Colt, Justice Clothing, Just Shirts, Kenneth Gordon, Leather Coats, Maggie’s Organics, Metro Sportswear, Nicaraguan Garment Workers Fund, Rage Baby, SterlingWear, Traditions Fair Trade, and The Working World.

# CREATING A SWEATFREE WORLD

## Sweatshop Hall of Shame

Back by popular demand, ILRF released the latest version of the “Sweatshop Hall of Shame” in November 2009. This publication inducted companies such as Abercrombie & Fitch, Gymboree, Ikea, Kohl’s, Pier 1 Imports, Proper International, and Walmart. These companies continued to source from factories where workers lack a voice on the job, while suffering from below poverty wages, excessively long hours, and hazardous working conditions. An Honorable Mention was also granted to the American Apparel and Footwear Association, a national trade association representing apparel and footwear companies, which exhibited a flagrant disregard for workers’ rights by supporting trade with Honduras during the military coup.

Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) was highlighted for abandoning the Alta Mode factory in the Philippines where employees sought to form a union to address their workplace concerns. The day the Alta Mode Worker’s Union was to be certified, more than 100 union members and officers were placed on forced leave. A&F has a long history of disregarding labor rights in its global supply chain.

The “Sweatshop Hall of Shame” also highlighted Gymboree’s failure to respond to our calls to eradicate child labor in its cotton supply. While over 25 companies have committed to eliminating Uzbek cotton from their products until the government ends the widespread use of forced child labor in the production of its cotton, Gymboree is one of the few companies that ignored repeated calls to action.



Photo Credit: ILRF



Photo Credit: unknown photographer



## FREEDOM AT WORK



Photo Credit: TEKSIF

Workers globally face a broad range of systematic barriers to organizing collectively for a voice on the job. ILRF worked with our partners around the world in 2009 to highlight threats to workers' right to organize and to effectively protect freedom of association in the workplace.

Photo Credit: Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research Inc.



## Philippines

The Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries for union organizing. Over the past year, the ILRF worked with unions from across the country to secure an ILO high-level mission to the Philippines. We also worked with unions to stop government repression by seeking redress and remediation for serious violations of freedom of association by Dole Foods Philippine-based operations under the SA8000 standard.

ILRF continued to press in 2009 for continued review of the Philippine government's trade benefits due to rampant labor violations by the Philippine government. Our efforts prompted the US government to openly and officially call for the Philippine government to accept the proposed ILO high-level mission. Facing growing international pres-

sure, the Philippine government finally conceded to allow the ILO to conduct a mission to examine the complaints in October 2009. The ILO has called for an investigation into allegations of "intimidation by the armed forces," especially reports that the military, as part of its counter-insurgency campaign, has "taken it upon themselves to invite workers to community forums where they set out to educate the workers in the exercise their organizational rights." Despite these findings, the Philippine military continues to conduct anti-union programs across the country.

ILRF continues to support union workers at Dole Philippines in their fight to end worker rights violations and bring Dole Foods into compliance with international law and labor standards.



Photo Credit: ILRF

## Working for Scrooge

For the second year in a row, ILRF released "Working for Scrooge: Worst Companies of 2009 for the Right to Associate" as part of our Freedom at Work campaign. This year, the report named Dole, Kohl's, Kraft and Nestlé as companies that use a range of tactics to violate their workers' right to organize in the workplace. In recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states "everyone has the right to form and to join trade union for the protection of his interests," the report was released on December 10, International Human Rights Day.



# FREEDOM AT WORK

## Colombia

Colombia remains one of the world's most difficult environments for workers to establish and join unions. Union leaders are assassinated, attacked, or threatened at alarming rates. Leaders of paramilitary forces, who are accused of orchestrating the brutal murders of workers and labor leaders, enjoy broad impunity. Colombian workers are also threatened by expanding forms of labor contracting which means that more workers are denied the right to organize and bargain collectively. As a result, union density remains low.

In 2009, ILRF submitted comments to the United States Trade Representative urging the US government to require Colombia to uphold certain preconditions to ensure all workers can freely exercise their right to freedom of association prior to entering into a free trade agreement. ILRF advocated for the Department of Justice to work with the Colombian government to fully investigate and prosecute those responsible for the murder of trade union leaders, including US-based multi-national corporations. ILRF also voiced concern about the need for the Colombian government to fully dismantle the paramilitary



Photo Credit: ILRF

forces that commit labor homicides; end impunity for all those responsible for labor murders and other threats to workers; ensure that courts can act in an independent and unbiased manner; and effectively enforce laws and policies that ban labor “cooperatives” and reduce contractual forms of employment in Colombia.

## spotlight: Freedom at Work Toolkit

In 2009, ILRF released a new Freedom at Work campaign toolkit on Labor Day. The toolkit is a new guide to understanding the right to organize and how it is violated around the world – as well as how it relates to a range of other rights concerns. The toolkit is an invaluable resource for educating the public about freedom of association and inspiring people to take action.

## RIGHTS FOR WORKING WOMEN



Photo Credit: ILRF

Women workers are systematically denied their rights to equal pay for equal work, permanent contracts, safe and non-hazardous work environments and freedom of association. Sexual harassment in the workplace, and workplace-related sexual violence, is a particularly egregious and widespread form of discrimination against women. In 2009, ILRF's Rights for Working Women campaign continued to highlight the particular abuses that women face in the workplace and worked to ensure that US policies addressed issues, such as discrimination, that affect women.



# RIGHTS FOR WORKING WOMEN

## Stories from the Field: Working Mothers

Unskilled women workers have entered export-processing industries throughout the developing world at an alarming rate. Women overwhelmingly occupy the lowest paying, most unstable jobs, producing clothes, agricultural products and other luxuries for export to the US. ILRF highlighted the voices of working women globally leading up to Mother's Day by sharing the stories of working mothers from Peru, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, South Africa, Puerto Rico, and Colombia to highlight the discrimination, unsafe labor conditions, and obstacles women workers must face on a daily basis.

*Here is one example from ILRF's working mothers series.*

### Jolene, South African Mother: Long workdays, unsafe working conditions

My name is Jolene, I am 39 years old and I have 3 children. I work on a farm, which is located in the Elgin farming community in Grabouw, Western Cape, South Africa. I operate a machine on a dried fruit production line. I've worked here for 25 years. I started working to help my parents with their expenses. This is the reason why I left school. I get paid R95.60 per day (\$10 USD), about R956.00 (\$100 USD) a fortnight which results in about R1 912.00 per month (\$211 USD). I think I get paid minimum wage because my wage is not based on production or piecework, but I'm really not sure. The managers don't explain these things to us.

Men get paid far less than us, because they do less work. We work with machines, and we work all day, whereas the men finish between 11:00am and 12:00am. I work very long hours. I start at 7:30am and finish at 5:30pm. I work all year, from January to December. On an average day, I get up at 5:00am, then I start to clean the house, get the children ready, make breakfast, make sure they've all eaten, and that they're ready to go, then I go to work. When work is over I come back home and start to cook the food, then I wash the children, make tomorrow's lunch and then I can go to sleep. The next morning it starts all over again.

My salary is far less than my monthly expenses and I struggle to make ends meet. We get sick leave, and



Photo Credit: (REACH)

maternity leave – but we only get 3 months leave for 'maternity leave'. The kind of work we do is tedious and strenuous. We've asked the farmers to reconsider our salaries. That's when they promise us that they will reconsider and come back to us, but they never do. The women stuck in there jobs don't seem to mind or get too worried about it.

There are 16 women that work with me, and we work all year round. It's unfortunate that we get such little compensation for the amount of work done. We are constantly threatened by the farmers who fire those that stand up against the unfair pay. The farmers sometimes say they can't pay out increases and if concerns continue to be voiced they then tell us that they'll just close the farm.

There are various practices that seem unsafe and unhealthy at work. One of my safety concerns is that to achieve the roundness of the dried apple rings after they leave the machine; they are currently being cut by hand. If we had machines that could do all the cutting, people wouldn't be cutting themselves and exposing their bodies to various infections. Another example is that some of the women work without shoes and they're always standing. You wouldn't believe how many of my colleagues complain about their backs. One of the two things I'd like to change at work is that the apples (to make the dried apple rings) are not cut by hand. If we could have a machine that does that, then we'd be able to work efficiently, effectively and we'd reduce the amount of injuries experienced on this farm. The second thing I'd like to change is the rule that prohibits women from wearing shoes in the workplace. Our feet are always covered by water; it's unhygienic, and standing all day hurts my back.

Jolene is active with an organization in South Africa called the Rural Education, Awareness and Community Health (REACH).

## 2009 FINANCIALS

<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Faith Based Institutions	4,125	5,010
Foundations	801,679	687,014
Other Institutions	745	965
Individuals	44,319	24,545
Events	0	63,831
Trade Unions	13,313	500
Government	790,177	480,065
Honoraria	10,718	1,915
Interest	1,533	270
Reimbursements	6,563	0
Service Fees	2,494	0
Other	50	965
In-Kind	900	200
Gain or Loss on Investments	-164	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,676,452</b>	<b>\$1,264,315</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Program Services	\$1,109,539	961,545
Supporting Services		
Management and General	155,474	82,564
Fundraising	29,539	37,924
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,294,552</b>	<b>\$1,082,033</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$381,900</b>	<b>\$182,282</b>

**Net Assets in Beginning of Year**

**\$3,080**

**\$384,980**

**Net Assets at End of Year**

**\$384,980\***

**\$567,262\*\***

\*restricted for use in 2009

\*\*restricted for use in 2010



# ILRF SUPPORTERS

Our Work would not be possible without the contributions of the following supporters, who share our commitment to making social and economic justice a reality for millions of workers worldwide. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the following institutions and individuals for their generous support in 2009.

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General Services Foundation  
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New York State United Teachers  
Service Employees International Union, Local 32Bj  
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 1500  
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 348  
United States Department of State

We would also like to acknowledge the generous support of those who directly supported the celebration of ILRF's 25th Anniversary:

Amalgamated Bank	International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees	International Brotherhood of Teamsters
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