



International Labor Rights Forum

Building a Just World for Workers



2008 Annual Report

The **International Labor Rights Forum** is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide.

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Letter from the Executive Director



As I write this, President Barack Obama has just completed his 100th day in office - and it is clear that 2008 was indeed a year of change.

In 2008 we critiqued a “free” trade policy, embodied in the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, that encourages developing countries to

dominate their economies with unstable export industries. We promoted fair trade policies as an alternative that would provide permanent, decent jobs to workers around the world. We released new reports on the pineapple, cotton, cocoa, rubber and soccer ball sectors that pointed out human rights abuses in these industries, and initiated change by companies in those industries. We also worked to develop a new standard for “sustainable agriculture” that incorporated basic worker rights guarantees into the definition of sustainability.

We welcomed the change in government here at home, and believe that the new Administration and Congress will be importantly and substantially different in their objectives for trade, seeking to balance corporate interests with the interests of working people at home and in the developing world. The new Administration’s commitment to international engagement in the arena of human rights is also notable, and provides an important and striking difference from the prior Administration.

These changes will help us chart an exciting new course for our work in 2009, as we will be asked to rise to the challenge of proposing new alternatives to trade, development and human rights policies to protect workers around the world. It is always easier to critique what is wrong than to suggest better alternatives, but the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) is prepared with specific and detailed new proposals for a blueprint for trade agreements that would ensure sustainable and decent jobs for workers around the world. ILRF will engage in campaigns to ensure that both the US government and its trade partners around the world uphold and strengthen their commitments to fundamental labor rights, as defined by the International Labour Organization and through other international instruments. ILRF will also use campaigns and policies to ensure that multinational corporations fully respect workers’ rights throughout their operations everywhere in the world.

ILRF has played a unique role in the human rights and labor movements, as an innovator of effective new strategies to create accountability for human rights abuses in the workplace. We look forward to the challenges of the coming year and creating new tools with our partners worldwide to press for meaningful protections for workers’ rights.

Sincerely,

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

Bama Athreya
Executive Director

Stop Child Labor



Photo Credit: Robin Romano

According to the ILO's most recent estimates, there are 218 million child laborers worldwide with 126 million engaged in hazardous work. Seventy percent of child laborers work in the agricultural sector globally. Children working under the worst forms of child labor are denied access to education and are subjected to conditions that lead to physical, mental and emotional distress.

In 2008, ILRF continued to hold major US multinational corporations accountable for their abuse of child labor. Using policy advocacy, public education and corporate campaigning, ILRF's Stop Child Labor campaign works to end the global exploitation of children in the labor force, particularly in the production of agricultural goods like cocoa, rubber and cotton.

Rubber in Liberia

For years, ILRF has played a leading role in the global Stop Firestone coalition which is working to end the widespread use of child labor and abuse of workers' rights on the world's largest rubber plantation in Liberia. The rubber plantation is owned by the Firestone tire company, a subsidiary of the Bridgestone Corporation. After over 80 years of severe exploitation, workers finally held the first free and fair union elections on the plantation in 2007. Throughout 2008, ILRF helped to put pressure on Firestone to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the Firestone Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia and to agree to important improvements in working and living conditions in Liberia. In August 2008, the union signed an historic contract with the company that will reduce child labor and improve labor rights. However, ILRF is maintaining its campaign efforts on Firestone to ensure that the company respects its contractual obligations to take further steps to stop the exploitation of workers.



Photo Credit: Michael Komba



Photo Credit: Robin Romano

Cocoa in West Africa

ILRF continued to play an important role in bringing together advocacy organizations, shareholders and ethical chocolate companies to end child and trafficked labor in the cocoa industry in West Africa. As the major chocolate companies reached an important deadline in their commitment to eliminate child labor from their cocoa supply chains in July 2008, ILRF released a new report analyzing the failure of the chocolate industry over the past seven years. While smaller, fair trade companies are leading the way in ethical sourcing, the big companies have continued to drag their feet. ILRF launched public campaign efforts including the second annual Reverse Trick-or-Treating action where children across the US educated their neighbors about child labor in the chocolate industry and distributed Fair Trade certified chocolate. As a result of sustained campaigning by ILRF, companies like Cadbury and Mars have recently announced new certification programs to improve labor and environmental sustainability in their cocoa sourcing. In 2009, ILRF will continue to pressure more companies to make a stronger commitment to improving labor standards.

Cotton in Uzbekistan

Over the past five years, ILRF has obtained growing evidence of widespread use of child labor, which has affected millions of children in countries including India, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Egypt, Pakistan, and China. ILRF has been instrumental in building awareness of the worldwide problem, promoting the use of trade policy to combat child labor in global cotton production, and developing ethical alternatives to cotton produced by forced and child labor. In 2008, we released new reports on forced child labor in Uzbekistan and launched a new coalition of brands and retailers, socially responsible investors (SRIs), human rights and labor organizations to promote US advocacy on this issue. We also encouraged the International Organization of Employers to bring a new complaint against Uzbekistan before the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The coalition of brands and retailers, SRIs, and human rights groups, led by ILRF, converged on the US Department of State in May 2008 for a breakthrough discussion of joint advocacy to pressure the Government of Uzbekistan to end child and forced labor. The combined pressure of corporations, governments, and human rights advocates took effect,



Photo Credit: Environmental Justice Foundation

and in July 2008, the government of Uzbekistan submitted to the ILO its official ratification of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The Government of Uzbekistan has also signaled its intent to ratify the UN Trafficking in Persons protocol and taken steps toward the ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 on child labor. While for the moment these are only steps on paper, ILRF is hopeful that they may open the door to more meaningful engagement in the future.

Policy Spotlight: US Farm Bill

In addition to corporate campaigns, ILRF works to improve US policy related to child labor and support legislation which promotes education for children world-wide. In 2008, despite strong opposition from corporations like Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland, ILRF successfully advocated for the passage of section 3205 of the US Farm Bill which would establish a voluntary, independent, third party monitoring and verification program to ensure that agricultural commodities imported into the US are not produced by child or forced labor. The successful implementation of this provision will improve the ability of businesses to identify and remove forced and child labor from their supply chains, as well as provide consumers with the choice of purchasing goods free of forced and child labor.



Photo Credit: Robin Romano

Create a Sweatfree World



Photo Credit: Adeel Halim

In 2008 ILRF trained workers on their rights, educated the public about corporate abuses of workers worldwide, and worked with government officials to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not contributing to the use of sweatshops.

Policy Spotlight: Footloose Investors - Connecting Global Trade Rules to the Realities of Workers around the World

As part of ILRF's focus on the impact of US trade policy on workers, ILRF held a day-long event in January 2008 to discuss development, trade and labor rights in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2000, the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has allowed specified goods produced or processed in the poorest countries of Africa free access to the US market. However, while large investments were made in the African garment industry, wages paid by the garment companies to their employees were insufficient to lift them out of poverty. Partners from South Africa, Lesotho, Kenya and the Netherlands came to the US to participate in a series of public events about the impact of footloose investors on workers in Africa.

China: Rule of Law

China's labor laws have been reformed substantially in recent years. New regulations have mandated a contract for all employees, streamlined the country's arbitration process and limited discrimination in the workplace. Legal representation for workers, however, has lagged behind these legislative achievements. In 2008, ILRF partnered with the Northwest University of Politics and Law and Suzhou University's Ken-



neth Wang Law School to establish China's first labor law clinics. Today, workers in Xi'an and Suzhou can receive free legal representation through the clinics, while law students gain hands-on experience representing workers in arbitration and court.

In addition to the clinics, ILRF provided training on Chinese labor laws to workers directly through partnerships with Chinese NGOs. The focus of this effort has evolved from basic instructions to advanced training aimed at cultivating workers who can act as legal resources to others in their community. As the program develops, ILRF is also giving technical assistance to its NGO partners so that they can learn how to make the trainings a sustainable part of their programs.

In October 2008, ILRF co-sponsored a discussion on "Walmart Workers in China" with the National Labor College. This event, which was led by renowned scholar of Chinese labor and ILRF advisory council member, Dr. Anita Chan and the former president of Research Associates of America, Jeff Fiedler, drew a large turnout of union members and supporters of labor rights.

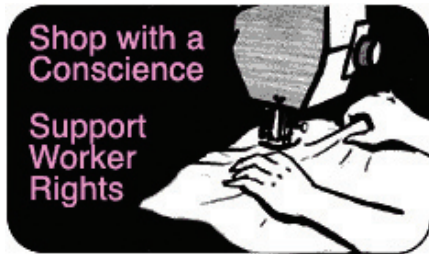
Walmart "Nailed" Campaign

For years, ILRF has been pressuring Walmart to change its sourcing policies so that a sustainable supply chain could be developed. In April 2008, ILRF and Sweatfree Communities toured Michigan and Ohio to highlight the real stories of workers producing for the retail giant. The tour featured two workers: Savin Phal, who worked at a Walmart factory in Cambodia before being fired for forming a union, and Didier Leiton, who worked for many years on pineapple plantations in Costa Rica that supply to Walmart.

In addition to educating US consumers about the impact of Walmart's sourcing policy on workers, in June 2008, ILRF addressed Walmart's shareholders at their annual shareholders meeting in Arkansas. ILRF emphasized the need for shareholders to think about the worldwide impact of a company like Walmart, and urged the company to pay a fair price to its suppliers so that suppliers can afford to pay a living wage to workers.



Sweatfree Procurement



In response to high demand from supporters looking to buy from companies that respect the rights of workers, ILRF released an updated Shop with a Conscience Consumer guide in December 2008.

ILRF also took the task of shopping with a conscience to local governments, and campaigned to ensure that the uniforms issued to state employees were from "sweat-free" factories. ILRF worked with local organizations in Maryland to push for a new state sweatfree procurement policy, and with high school students in Washington, DC seeking to make sure their school uniforms are "sweat-free."

Fairness in Flowers Campaign

After years of solidarity support, ILRF celebrated with cut flower sector unions in Colombia as they signed contracts on two Dole flower plantations in July 2008. In their new contracts, workers were able to negotiate for an increase in pay, additional wages for fumigation workers who are exposed to hazardous chemicals and an education stipend so that flower workers can send their children to school. The incredible struggle of the workers at Fragancia and Splendor farms lasted for more than four years.

Prior to Mother's Day, in May 2008, ILRF released the Fairness in Flowers Campaign Toolkit, which included a compilation of worker case studies, facts about the cut-flower industry, photographs and action ideas that can be used by activists, student groups, florists and others. ILRF also continued to pressure the Colombian flower industry and various certification initiatives to adopt and implement higher standards.



Photo Credit: Nora Ferm

Sustainable Agriculture Standards



As part of ILRF's overall work on labor rights violations in the commercial agriculture sector, ILRF became involved in a dialogue with Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) in 2005 regarding labor standards in the VeriFlora cut flower certification program. Over the next two years, the VeriFlora standards were significantly strengthened in a number of areas such as freedom of association, safety trainings for workers, the appropriate use of subcontractors, and protection for female workers against sexual harassment and discrimination.

SCS then transformed the VeriFlora standard into a general draft standard for Sustainable Agriculture. ILRF participated in stakeholder gatherings and was invited to present on the importance of labor rights protections in the definitions of sustainability. In July 2008, ILRF was formally selected as a member of the new Standards Committee convened by the American National Standards Institute to review the new proposed standard.

Agro-Export Industries: Sweatshops in the Fields

As the agricultural landscapes of developing nations become increasingly dominated by crops for export, ILRF, in collaboration with its international partners, works to expose the exploitative working conditions in industries such as sugar, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, and other agricultural commodities.

In October 2008, ILRF released a report on the exploitation of pineapple workers and their communities in two of the largest pineapple producing nations, Costa Rica and the Philippines. ILRF highlighted abuses such as being forced to work extremely long hours without overtime pay, poverty level wages, and health and safety threats due to high production quotas and agro-chemical use. The report also documented violence, intimidation and harassment of workers seeking to exercise their right to organize.

ILRF also organized a panel at the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala in October 2008 with union leaders and other farm worker advocates. The panel, titled "Agricultural Workers and the Failures of International Food Systems," brought a large audience to discuss the root causes of the practical realities of exploited agricultural workers.



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

Case Studies from the Field: Stories of Pineapple Workers

Costa Rica

The following is an excerpt from a letter hand-written by a group of Nicaraguan pineapple workers working in Costa Rica.

"We work in sub-human conditions: very long and exhausting working days... wages that suit the company. There is no freedom of association – those who join the union are treated like terrorists and we're not included in the negotiation of piece rates since the company only negotiates with the so-called 'permanent committee' (made up of three non-unionized workers). We are forced to sacrifice our own health because we are in constant contact with chemicals and we have to work in the sun or rain, bent over all day. (The seedlings are soaked in Diazanone which eats away our fingernails.)"

Philippines

Gloria Perez, 37 years old, has been a pineapple harvester at Dole Philippines for 13 years. She started to work because her husband's income as a truck driver was not enough to feed the entire family. On August 7, 2006, she suffered from a stroke as a result of working long hours under stifling heat during the peak harvest season. With a daily wage of \$6.32, she is still unable to pay off the \$200 debt that has accumulated as a result of her medical needs. She barely has enough to send her six year old daughter to school.



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

End Violence Against Trade Unions



Photo Credit: TEKSIF

Throughout 2008, ILRF worked harder than ever to demand justice for labor activists worldwide. By linking foreign aid to human rights, blocking the extension of trade benefits against companies and countries that violate the right to associate, reporting on abuses, and mobilizing supporters to take action, ILRF targeted countries and companies alike.

The Philippines

Since 1989, ILRF has been working to expose the use of government-sanctioned assaults by military and paramilitary groups against union leaders in the Philippines. In 2008, in an effort to prevent the death of more union leaders, ILRF spearheaded a diverse grassroots coalition of church and human rights groups in the US and the Philippines and successfully pressured the US government to tie human rights conditions to military appropriations allocated to the Philippines. The Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines has credited the pressure put on the Philippine government by international organizations such as ILRF as one of the main reasons behind the decline in the number of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines in 2008.

ILRF also petitioned the US Trade Representative (USTR) in

2008 to consider withdrawing trade benefits for the Philippines because of continued impunity for labor rights abuses. As a result, the USTR has placed the Philippine government under “active scrutiny.”

In October 2008, ILRF broke new ground by becoming the first NGO to successfully argue that trade benefits must be conditioned on corporate accountability. Since 2007, members of the trade union representing Dole’s 4,500 regular workers have faced constant harassments and threats by the Philippine military as a result of their union affiliation. By exposing labor rights violations in the company’s production of pineapples, ILRF was able to successfully intervene in the request of Dole Philippines, a subsidiary of Dole International, to receive extra trade benefits from the USTR. ILRF’s

testimony at the USTR hearing marked the first time that the labor consideration was applied to the trade benefits associated with a product under the GSP system. A final decision from the USTR on ILRF's request to deny Dole Philippines extra trade benefits is expected in mid-2009.



Security Station at the Entrance of Dole Philippines

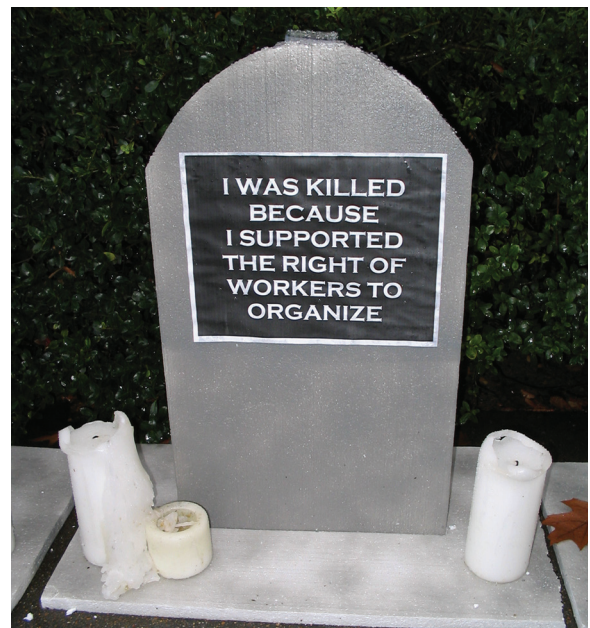
Case Study: The Story of Remigio Saladero



In October of 2008, a close ally of ILRF, Remigio Saladero, the chief legal counsel for the KMU (an independent labor federation in the Philippines and the union representing Dole Philippines's workers), was illegally arrested by the Philippine government. Responding quickly to Saladero's situation, ILRF mobilized hundreds of supporters to send letters to the US and Philippine governments, asking the Philippine government to release Saladero and create an independent team to investigate the threats. Although he has since been released, the false charges against Saladero of committing murder and rebellion have not been dropped.

Working for Scrooge

On December 10, 2008, the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations, ILRF released a new report titled "Working for Scrooge: Five Worst Companies for the Right to Associate," which highlighted labor abuses committed by Nestlé, Dole, Del Monte, Russell and Walmart around the world. The report detailed worker intimidation, illegal firings, and murders of union leaders. The report also exposed common strategies used by companies to eliminate union members in their workforce.



Labor Violations at Home

An ILRF report released in November 2008 found that Oak Harbor, a trucking firm headquartered in Washington state, violated ILO conventions on the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining when it permanently replaced all of its employees as a tactic to prevent the union from bargaining for a new collective agreement. A panel of experts convened by ILRF also found that African-American and female employees working for a labor contracting firm hired by Oak Harbor were routinely discriminated against in their work assignments. Although ILRF's research typically focuses on conditions in developing countries, this report highlighted similar abuses that exist closer to home.



Photo Credit: Shawn Skager, Seattle Auburn-Reporter

Rights for Working Women



Over the past several years, the Rights for Working Women Campaign has sought to bring together allies throughout the developing world to promote viable remedies for the problem of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. In 2008, ILRF worked with local NGOs in Peru and China on new research and support to sectors where labor violations against women workers are the most prevalent.

China

In many plants in the Guangdong Province's Pearl River Delta, the vast majority of workers are young women. These women are responsible for producing a large share of the world's shoes, clothes and electronics, as well as a majority of the world's toys. A study conducted by Li Bo and Chi Wei of Qinghua University in late 2008 found that blue collar female workers in China earn significantly less on average than their male counterparts, despite doing the same tasks. In addition, maternity leave, though guaranteed by law, is rarely provided.

In June 2008, ILRF supported a series of special classes combining reproductive health information with training female workers on their rights in the workplace. Topics included legal wages and overtime, work injury compensation, arbitration rules, maternity leave and sexual harassment.



Photo Credit: Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network

Peru

In Peru, women constitute seventy percent of asparagus farm workers and ninety-five percent of the workers in the asparagus processing plants. With the assistance of ILRF, Asociación Aurora Vivar was able to conduct research, identify labor violations experienced by the Peruvian working women and engage in legislative advocacy on their behalf.

Through personal interviews with workers, Asociación Aurora Vivar found that female workers are more likely to receive short-term contracts than male workers, which precludes them from health insurance, vacation time, or social security coverage. In addition, maternity rights of female workers are

routinely violated in the asparagus industry. Pregnant women are often fired or pushed out of the job market, and many female workers are required to take a pregnancy test or provide proof of sterilization as a pre-requisite for employment.

In response to the labor violations that it found, Asociación Aurora Vivar is helping two asparagus female workers who were fired as a result of becoming pregnant file a lawsuit against their company. Asociación Aurora Vivar is also using this lawsuit to raise awareness among the general public about the discrimination and violations that female workers face in the non-traditional agro-export industry.

Partner Spotlight: Asociación Aurora Vivar



Photo Credit: Asociación Aurora Vivar

Asociación Aurora Vivar has been working for twenty-two years to promote and defend the rights of women workers in Peru. Its activities include awareness-raising, trainings, organizing and advising workers. It also promotes gender awareness within unions, and engages in legislative advocacy for new labor policies and norms. In recent years, in light of a potential US-Peru trade agreement, Asociación Aurora Vivar has been focusing on studying the working conditions of female workers in the non-traditional agro-export industry and strengthening the capacity of working women in those sectors through training programs on political advocacy, gender, leadership, and economic/social/cultural rights.

2008 Financials

Revenue	2007	2008
Churches	\$7,000	\$4,125
Foundations	308,860	401,679
Other Institutions	31,914	745
Individuals	51,773	44,319
Donor Advised Funds	150,000	400,00
Trade Unions	12,000	13,313
Government	295,237	790,177
Honoraria	13,425	10,718
Interest	3,183	1,533
Reimbursements	16,052	6,563
Service Fees	4,549	2,494
Other	203	50
In-Kind	1,000	900
Gain or Loss on Investments	2,245	-164
Total Revenue	\$897,261	\$1,676,452
Expenses		
Program Services	\$735,557	\$1,109,539
Supporting Services		
Management and General	223,020	148,718
Depreciation	7,908	6,756
Fundraising	18,994	29,539
Total Expenses	\$985,479	\$1,294,552
Change in Net Assets	\$(88,218)	\$381,900
Net Assets in Beginning of Year	\$91,298	\$3,080
Net Assets at End of Year	\$3,080	\$384,980*

*(\$325,000 restricted for use in 2009)

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 2008.

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