

Spring 2008

# International Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter on UNISON's international work



## HIV/AIDS - the trade union response

### Major project to support southern African unions in the fight against HIV/AIDS

UNISON has just signed a contract with the Department for International Development (DFID) to expand its work on HIV/AIDS with sister unions in southern Africa. The contract, valued at £370,000 over the next 3 years, will fund a major project aimed at strengthening the response of public sector trade unions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region.

The project involves 32 unions in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It will enable them to take forward their own work on HIV/AIDS, strengthen the regional response to the disease and challenge stigma and discrimination. In particular the project will provide education and training, enabling unions to develop policies and negotiate the inclusion of HIV/AIDS related issues in collective bargaining agreements; share skills and best practice; and improve networking among unions and NGOs working on HIV/AIDS.

It is planned to set up a resource centre, hold national and regional seminars and provide one-to-one support and advice during the project.

UNISON hosted a very successful workshop in



Visit to Barnet branch who are twinned with NEHAWU in SA

London in February 2008 to enable participating unions to further discuss and agree how the project should be delivered. Colleagues from the southern African trade unions were also able to learn more about UNISON's work and priorities, meet with MPs and UK-based organisations working on similar issues, and representatives from the group attended women's conference.

The project takes forward UNISON's work on HIV/AIDS to support southern African unions' response to HIV/AIDS.

The project website is [www.psufasa.org](http://www.psufasa.org)

## Connecting with international activities

### Research project in North West aims to gauge members' perceptions of UNISON's international work

UNISON North West region is supporting a research project into members' perceptions of UNISON's international activities.

The study is being conducted by Rebecca Ryland at the University of Liverpool over the next two and a half years. The project findings will give an insight into the extent to which members connect with the

union's international activities.

Anyone interested in participating in the study or wishing to say what international events your branch has planned should contact Rebecca at [r.ryland@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:r.ryland@liverpool.ac.uk)

More details at [www.unison.co.uk/international](http://www.unison.co.uk/international)

# Zimbabwe election crisis

## Concerns election rigged as presidential votes withheld

Zimbabwe held elections for the President, House of Assembly, Senate and local councils on 29 March. Only the results of the House of Assembly and Senate have been declared so far, with President Mugabe's Zanu-PF party losing its majority for the first time since independence in 1980. In the Senate, Zanu-PF and the combined opposition have 30 seats each. The results for the presidential elections have yet to be released leading to concerns about vote-rigging. There are increasing reports of violence against MDC supporters.

Zimbabwe trade unions have strong links with the

MDC, notably through MDC's President Morgan Tsvangirai, is a former president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). A number of Zimbabwe trade unionists who have visited the UK in recent years, stood successfully for election to the House of Assembly including Thabitha Khumalo and Lucia Matibenga of the ZCTU.

UNISON has been in regular contact with our sister trade unions in Zimbabwe throughout the election period. We will continue to monitor the situation and wait for advice from our sister trade unions on how to support them as the situation unfolds.

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# Sewerage works!

## 'Public investment in sewers saves lives' argues UNISON

UNISON's international unit teamed up with Business and the Environment Department to mark World Water Day (22 March) with a new report, called 'Sewerage Works', which explains how public investment in sewers saves lives.

The research, undertaken by Public Services International Research Unit, argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, sewerage systems are an affordable investment and would save the lives of 326,000 children who die from inadequate sanitation provision every year.

We need a combination of international aid and in-country taxation programmes to make sewerage systems affordable. The sanitation crisis will continue if donors and service providers continue to insist on full cost recovery. The private sector cannot be relied

on to provide investment in much needed sewerage systems. Only public investment will work. A programme to construct public sewers in the cities of the South would also help boost local economies and cut poverty and create meaningful jobs.

In the long term, sewerage systems would significantly contribute not just to the achievement of the millennium development goal on sanitation but on health. Schemes would go a long way to tackling poverty and supporting the productive, healthy workforce crucial to development. Public services underpin the values that hold society together, so in strengthening public sanitation we help to create a fairer society for all.

The report will soon be available for download from our website.

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# Gaza siege escalates humanitarian crisis

## UNISON protests against Israeli siege of Gaza

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis has written to foreign secretary David Miliband protesting against the continued Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip and the large number of deaths caused by incursions by the Israeli army at the end of February. He wrote, 'UNISON is opposed to the use of violence by either side and condemns the rocket attacks on Israel. However, the Israeli response has been completely disproportionate and the level of destruction caused and civilian casualties inflicted by the Israeli Defence Forces can not be justified.'

The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions have issued the following statement; *'Israel's collective punishment of the people of Gaza is a clear breach of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is, in effect, a war*

*crime and Israel must be held to account. It is not sufficient for the International communities and the UN to express 'concern'. The International Community and UN must take firm and immediate action to stop this catastrophe.'*

UNISON echoes the views of the PGFTU. Dave Prentis has urged the British government to condemn the Israeli actions in Gaza, to call for an end to the siege of Gaza, as well as an end to the rocket attacks on Israel, as the necessary pre-conditions for peace negotiations.

A national demonstration will take place in Trafalgar Square in London on 10 May calling for peace and justice for Palestinians. UNISON has given its support to the event.

# Day for Darfur

## International Day for Darfur marks fifth anniversary of the conflict

An international Day for Darfur took place on 13 April to mark the fifth anniversary of the conflict in Sudan, and maintain international pressure to resolve the crisis. UNISON was one of a number of organisations which supported the UK rally outside the Sudanese Embassy.

The conflict began in the arid and impoverished region early in 2003 after a rebel group began attacking government targets, saying the region was being neglected by Khartoum. The rebels say the government is oppressing black Africans in favour of Arabs. The situation in Darfur remains critical. Not less than 200 000 people are estimated to have died as a result of the conflict. Over 2 million people are living in refugee camps, without adequate food, water

and medicine. The humanitarian situation remains catastrophic, due to ongoing state-sponsored violence, layers of aid obstruction, the lack of an overall humanitarian strategic plan, and the weakened state of displaced Sudanese. Refugees and internally displaced persons a disproportionate number of them women, are in terribly weakened states, subject to sexual abuse and without adequate shelter. The numbers of at-risk civilians continue to increase. And as need far outstrips the ability of agencies to deliver aid, and access is restricted due to instability, localised famine is feared.

UNISON is continuing to monitor the situation and identify how, as a UK trade union, we can promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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## UNISON branch funds training in Burma

### UNISON branches assist Karen trade union federation to run organising workshops inside Burma



Building on established contacts Northumberland Local Government branch twinned with the FTUK, Federation of Trade Unions - Kawthoolei (Karen people in Burma) late last year. The FTUK is based in the Thai border town of Mae Sot as trade unions are banned within Burma.

Northumberland Tyne & Wear Health and North of Tyne Primary Care, have become involved in the twinning, and with help from the region have set up a fund to support capacity-building projects by the FTUK. In January FTUK ran a training programme for activists within Burma led by FTUK officers including general secretary Ywa Hay who was a guest of the Northern region last year. The recent programme provided training in union organising and human rights for 42 activists working in the health, education and agricultural sectors.

Associated with the training, the FTUK carried out humanitarian activities (providing supplies for rural health clinics) and human rights monitoring.

UNISON branches twinned with FTUK are also looking to provide funding within the near future for an income generation project which the FTUK plans to set up to help address its financial needs.

The twinning is still at a very early stage, but branch international officer, Mick Bowman said, 'We feel it is a mechanism which has the potential to make a real and concrete contribution to the struggle of trade unionists in Burma - solidarity in action. It is also mutually beneficial as we have a lot to learn from the great courage, resourcefulness and ingenuity of our fellow trade unionists who are operating in circumstances of great adversity and the twinning provides a concrete focus for raising awareness about the situation in Burma amongst our members.'

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## War on Want Elections

War on Want is holding elections for its Council of Management. Polly Jones, UNISON international officer, is standing for election as a UNISON representative. Affiliated branches and War on Want members are urged to support Polly and other trade union nominees in the postal ballot which takes place between 14 May and 19 June 2008.

[www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org)

# UNISON solidarity with Colombia

## Region plays key role in bringing over Colombian delegation

UNISON played a key role organising a highly successful visit by three Colombian activists to the North of England which has strengthened region-to-region links and produced proposals to explore a number of practical projects.



Ariel Diaz of the CUT, Carlos Gonzales, SINTRAUNICOL and Olga Araujo who works with marginalised groups visited the North West and North East during March. They belong to the umbrella organisation NOMADESC an exciting

coalition of trade unions and social movements promoting human rights and social justice and opposing privatisation.

The 10 day tour was nothing short of a whirlwind. In total there were 26 meetings in Newcastle, Northumberland, Liverpool, Manchester and London. The visitors spoke to a wide range of audiences including the Third World Solidarity Group in Parliament, the Northern TUC's International Conference and an event for International Women's Day. UNISON's recent international seminar also had an opportunity to hear from them.

The delegation employed the strategy of region-to-region link ups. This allows for the building of direct bridges of solidarity. Lawyers, UNISON health workers and university workers were among the groups who met the Colombians. The emphasis was on discussing direct and practical measures of solidarity in action including developing direct links between health, university and other public sector workers in the regions; increasing the participation of women in trade unions and providing computers to trade unions and community organisations.

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## Events and publications

### 10 May, central London

Peace and justice for the people of Palestine  
[www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org)

### 18 May, Birmingham

Journey to Justice - breaking the chains  
[www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk)

### UNISON International Unit Annual Review

[www.unison.co.uk/international](http://www.unison.co.uk/international)

Hard copies available from the unit on request

### Sewerage Works, a report by PSIRU

[www.unison.co.uk/international](http://www.unison.co.uk/international)



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## International Unit

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