

# International Newsletter



Update on UNISON's international work

September 2017

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## Child marriage

National conference called on the UN agency, the ILO, to count girls in [forced childhood marriage](#) as child labour. An array of speakers gave harrowing accounts of girls being forced into child marriage and no longer viewed by the ILO as victims of child labour. UNISON has said it will campaign to ensure the ILO responds, and works to end the practice of girls being married off at a very young age.



## Supporting workers in Qatar

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Qatar are being supported by UNISON in an innovative project that informs workers about their rights, provides practical advice, health and safety training and paralegal training.

To help migrant workers, tens of thousands of whom work in the construction industry in Qatar, the global construction federation, BWI, with the support of UNISON, is working with [community-based organisations](#) (trade unions are banned) to help them challenge abuses and rights violations. BWI has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Qataris which will give them access to construction sites and monitor health and safety onsite as well as provide training to the authorities on safety issues. The project will work directly with OFWs.

In the run up to the World Athletics Championship and the 2022 World Cup, the international trade union movement is keeping up the pressure to ensure that Qatar respects the rights of its almost 2 million migrant workers. If only the sponsors, multi-nationals and sporting federations took more action, we might see a World Cup delivered with workers' rights respected and laws enacted to protect those that are building the new Qatar.

## Slavery - did it ever go away?

According to the National Crime Agency, [slavery](#) is much more prevalent in the UK than previously thought, and the estimated figure of 10 to 13,000 slaves in this country is 'the tip of the iceberg'. This reflects the increase in slavery globally with the ILO estimating that more than 20 million people are victims of modern slavery.

Everyone has a part to play in ensuring that slavery is eradicated. There are [signs](#) we can look out for in the workplace that may indicate someone is being coerced to work. Employers have a duty to ensure that there is no slavery in their supply chains but as the recent Sports Direct case demonstrates, it can be difficult to detect unless stringent checks are in place.



With the passing of the Modern Slavery Act, organisations with a turnover in excess of £36m per year must produce a statement demonstrating what steps they are taking to tackle slavery in their supply chain. UNISON has produced a modern slavery [statement](#), the first trade union to do so. It does not guarantee that we will be able to easily identify slavery further down our supply chains but the commitment is there with a clear message to our suppliers that they must do likewise.

UNISON has also been working with Anti-Slavery International to ensure unions are at the forefront in the fight against slavery and has signed up to the Anti-Slavery Charter. General Secretary Dave Prentis wrote a [blog](#) explaining why UNISON has endorsed the Charter. He said: "Identifying slavery is not enough to eradicate it: we must look at the conditions that allow this barbaric practice to take hold, and eradicate the abuses that cause the downward slide to slavery."

Slavery was abolished in 1834 but still persists, and now is on the increase. Governments, businesses and consumers have choices about how our goods and services are provided. If the real price for what we consume is the exploitation of fellow human beings, then that is too high a price to pay.

## Open University closes its door to Cubans

UNISON has issued a [public statement](#) in light of the Open University's refusal to accept an application from a Cuban student, and is encouraging members to sign the Cuba Solidarity Campaign [action](#) which includes a suggested letter to your MP calling for the OU to reverse its decision.

The UNISON statement points out that the OU's position is contrary to that of the UK government which recently granted 16 Chevening Scholarships to Cuban students and has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Cuban government.

UNISON believes that the ban may be in breach of the Equalities Act 2010 which the Cuban Solidarity Campaign will invoke in planned legal action against the university.

## Regional international seminars this month

You might be interested in attending an international seminar in your region this month. They provide great opportunities to network with fellow activists, get to hear about regional international priorities and have an opportunity to listen to experts in specific areas that are of interest to UNISON.

- Joint Eastern and South East regional seminar at UNISON Centre, London, 21 September
- Joint North West, Northern, Northern Ireland and Scotland regional seminar at International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, 29-30 September
- West Midlands regional seminar at UNISON office, Birmingham, 30 September

For more details contact your regional international contact. If you don't know who it is, email [I.Relations@unison.co.uk](mailto:I.Relations@unison.co.uk) who will put you in touch.



### Holocaust Memorial Day - resources for trade unions

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is held on 27 January each year and more than 7,700 events took place for HMD 2017. UNISON has worked with The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in the past, and the organisation can support your branch in putting on an

activity for HMD 2018.

The free activity pack available from the HMDT website contains practical advice on organising your own activity, posters to display at your event and a guide to the theme: The power of words.

[Find out more and order or download your Activity Pack here](#)

There is also a [dedicated resource for trade unions](#) full of ideas for HMD events.

HMDT's [free workshops](#) offer guidance to those wanting to know more about marking Holocaust Memorial Day and are aimed at new and existing activity organisers, including trade unions.

The purpose of these workshops is to gain a better understanding of HMD and how to create a meaningful activity for your audience. The sessions cover the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and subsequent genocides, as well as challenges, such as hate crime, facing the UK today. The theme for HMD 2018 will also be covered: [The power of words](#).

Workshops are also a great opportunity to meet other activity organisers as well as the relevant HMD [regional / national support worker](#).

Workshops will be taking place throughout September and October around the country.

[Find out more and to book your place](#)

[Find your local support worker with their contact details](#)

## International Solidarity Organisations Focus on: Palestine Solidarity Campaign



**PALESTINE  
SOLIDARITY  
CAMPAIGN**

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

*Martial Kurtz, campaigns manager, PSC*

2017 is a busy year for Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and a momentous year for Palestine: 100 years since the Balfour declaration, when the British government laid the foundations for the dispossession of the Palestinian people; 50 years of military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem; 10 years since Israel imposed an illegal blockade on Gaza. These anniversaries remind us of Britain's historic role but should also focus our minds on the responsibilities of The UK government today, to uphold international law and to hold Israel to account for its continuing violations of human rights.

PSC is working to end the occupation, and to achieve justice and self-determination for the Palestinian people, whose collective voice is loud and clear in asking for solidarity to achieve, after 100 years, justice for Palestine. Now is the time to stand up and join the movement calling for an end to occupation and siege, calling for justice and equality.

Please join us by [affiliating your branch and region](http://palestinecampaign.org/history/other-organisations/affiliated-trade-unions)  
[palestinecampaign.org/history/other-organisations/affiliated-trade-unions](http://palestinecampaign.org/history/other-organisations/affiliated-trade-unions)

Join us as an [individual member](http://palestinecampaign.org/get-involved/join-renew-membership)  
[palestinecampaign.org/get-involved/join-renew-membership](http://palestinecampaign.org/get-involved/join-renew-membership)

Twitter [PSCupdates](https://twitter.com/PSCupdates)

Facebook [palestinesolidarityuk](https://www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk)

Please join and support the National March and Rally for Palestine on Saturday 4 November in central London: [JUSTICE NOW – MAKE IT RIGHT FOR PALESTINE!](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/national-rally-central-london)  
[palestinecampaign.org/events/national-rally-central-london](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/national-rally-central-london)

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