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Congratulations to Sharan Burrow on her election to head the global union movement

Australian unions warmly congratulate ACTU President Sharan Burrow on her election as the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation.

Ms Burrow was elected to head the global union body at its Congress in Vancouver overnight.

The Brussels-based ITUC is the world's peak union body, working to advance and protect workers' rights across the globe.

It directly represents 176 million workers from 156 countries and territories.

Ms Burrow, who has been President of the ITUC President and its predecessor, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, since 2004, was elected unopposed to a four-year term.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said her election was a monumental achievement for Australian unions.

"Sharan has been a great advocate for working people in Australia throughout her career," Mr Lawrence said.

"We will never forget the magnificent role she played during the Your Rights at Work campaign to ditch the Howard Government's disastrous WorkChoices.

"It is fitting that one of Sharan's final achievements in Australia was to see the national paid parental leave legislation passed by Parliament. This has been an issue she has campaigned tirelessly on for decades.

"It has been hard to see Sharan go, but this is an incredibly proud time for Australian unions to see a woman from regional New South Wales elected to such an important post.

"We look forward to seeing Sharan continue her passionate advocacy for workers around the world."

Ms Burrow's term as ACTU President will end on 30 June.

She has been President of the ACTU since May 2000.

Ged Kearney, outgoing Federal Secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation, has been elected the next ACTU President from 1 July.

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