



Welcome to the first edition of the ACTU's renewed International Solidarity newsletter. We plan to release these newsletters regularly to update you on our international solidarity work and international issues, and welcome feedback and contributions from unions and union members in Australia and around the world. We encourage you to forward this newsletter to interested union members, and to send any feedback or content to [ACTU International Officer, Clare Middlemas](#).

It has been a difficult start to 2020, with workers in Australia on the front line of responding to the bushfire crisis. We have been incredibly grateful to the international union community for their solidarity with Australian workers in response to the bushfires, and to the firefighters from around the world who put their lives on the line to join Australian crews in fighting the fires. We have received many solidarity letters and generous donations to the ACTU's Bushfire Relief Fund that will go towards providing much needed support to union members impacted by the fires.

We join unions around the world in calling on governments and employers to take urgent action on the escalating Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its Global Union Federation partners have released a [joint statement](#) calling for governments to implement economic stimulus measures that include paid sick leave; the maintenance of income to cover housing, food, electricity and other essential items; and the extension of social protection to workers regardless of their employment status. They are also calling on employers to provide protection for workers throughout their supply chain, including through guaranteeing sick leave regardless of employment status and enabling flexible working arrangements.

The impacts of COVID-19 are going to be far-reaching, with insecure, vulnerable, and poor workers and communities most at risk. [Workers in supply chains in Southeast Asia](#) are already feeling the economic impacts of COVID-19: the economies of Bangladesh, Cambodia and Myanmar are heavily reliant on the garment sector, which uses raw materials from China, and exports goods to China and other countries. The COVID-19 crisis has already forced many garment factories to close, with many more on the brink of closure, and left thousands of workers out of a job. Governments around the world must step up and act immediately to safeguard the health and livelihoods of workers and our communities.

In Unity,

Michele O'Neil

ACTU President

Hong Kong: drop the charges against the Secretary of the HKCTU

On 28 February, the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) Lee Cheuk Yan was [arrested](#) and charged, along with two other prominent democracy advocates Yeung Sum and Jimmy Lai, with ‘unlawful assembly’ for participating in a public rally on 31 August last year. We have written to Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam calling on her to drop the charges against Lee and the other 7000 peaceful protesters associated with the anti-extradition bill protests, respect the right to freedom of assembly, end the repression against unions and reinstate dismissed workers, and establish an independent inquiry into excessive police violence and arbitrary detention. Lee, Yeung and Lai will appear in court on 5 May – stay tuned for solidarity action plans.

The Philippines: stop the attacks on trade unions

The ACTU met with leaders of the KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno) Filipino trade union confederation, Mr. Elmer Bong Labog (Chairperson) and Ms. Meryl Quero-Asa (International Officer), during their visit to Australia in February to hear about the attacks on trade unions in the Philippines. The KMU solidarity tour, supported by the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU), Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, and Philippines Australia Union Link (PAUL), highlighted the brutal repression of trade unionists under President Duterte’s regime, and [lobbied](#) the Australian government to pressure Duterte to respect worker and human rights.

Over the past three years of President Duterte’s administration in the Philippines, 46 trade union members and officials have been killed by extrajudicial violence, and trade union repression has increased. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) ranks the Philippines among the [worst](#) 10 countries in the world for workers’ rights. Australian unions participated in the ITUC’s global day of action with [rallies](#) around the country in December calling for an end to the attacks on trade unions.



L-R: Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA Philippines organiser Tom Reddington; KMU Chairperson Elmer Bong Labog; ACTU President Michele O’Neil; KMU International Officer Meryl Quero-Asa; AMWU Assistant National Secretary Glenn Thompson; ACTU International Officer Clare Middlemas

Ban asbestos campaigners meet with the ACTU

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA hosted a [delegation](#) of nine ban asbestos campaigners and union leaders from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Vietnam in February. The delegation participated in CFMEU training on best practice asbestos removal and regulation, and during their visit held a briefing with the ACTU International and

Work Health and Safety Committees. We heard about the barriers workers face in their campaign to ban asbestos, including limited public awareness of the health impacts of asbestos, how to safely remove and dispose of asbestos, the lack of medical expertise around diagnosing asbestos-related illness, and the influence of the asbestos industry lobby. We also heard about the progress the ban asbestos campaign is having, including the recent win of Bandung City Assembly voting to become the first region in Indonesia to specifically name asbestos in a list of prohibited products to be used in future building construction.



Ban asbestos campaigners with ACTU President Michele O'Neil, international and work health and safety committee members

News From Around the World



The Ukrainian government has [promised](#) to consult with unions in the drafting of new labour laws, following [international union pressure](#) and mobilisations by Ukrainian unions in response to the draft laws that would have violated workers' rights.



A [new report](#) has identified 83 companies, including Apple, Nike, Adidas, BMW, Samsung and Uniqlo, that are linked to factories in China where Uyghur workers are employed under forced labour conditions.



[Global unions have expressed their disappointment](#) at the political declaration adopted as the outcome of the 64th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which fails to advance the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), the visionary blueprint for women's rights and gender equality adopted by governments 25 years ago.





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