

Alliances within the civil society

Trade unions do not have a monopoly on solidarity. They often join forces with movements and organisations that share their core values.

For example, through the participation in the international Clean Clothes Campaign with its Belgian counterparts achACT and Schone Kleren Campagne, the FGTB contributes to the improvement of the working conditions in the garment industry and its supply chains. Within the socialist movement, the FGTB collaborates with SolSoc (Solidarité Socialiste) and FOS – Socialistische Solidariteit, both NGO's.

To support advocacy on specific themes such as climate change or the promotion of Decent Work the FGTB has set up coalitions with other civil society organisations. The FGTB is an active member of the umbrella organisations 11.11.11 and the CNCD (Centre national pour la coopération au développement).

The FGTB participates in World and European Social Forums. These events enhance the visibility of the trade unions within the social movement. Its purpose is to find alternatives for capitalism and the current neo – liberal politics. In those forums the FGTB exchanges ideas, expertise and testimonies with other civil society organisations. It's also a place where future co-operations and alliances are forged.

Mobilisations for international solidarity

The FGTB organizes or participates in joint solidarity campaigns in the defense of human rights, including labour rights. Tragic events like the numerous conflicts in Palestine, the Rana Plaza disaster killing garment workers in Bangladesh or the killing of trade union activists in Guatemala called for a strong denouncement.

The FGTB holds political responsables accountable for the murders or unlawful imprisonment of unionist. By writing letters to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, heads of state or ambassadors we plead for proper protection of those activist. Smaller scale demonstrations at the doorstep of the embassy or consulate of the country involved is an often used strategy. Some victims regained their freedom, while others escaped a certain death or saw their detention conditions improved.

Certain long-term mobilisations in which the FGTB has taken part have contributed to encouraging results, as in the case of Myanmar (Burma). Trade-union freedom is not yet a reality in that country, but the recourse to forced labour and the imprisonment of political prisoners have strongly receded.

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For more information:

FGTB – International and European Relations

Rue Haute 42 | 1000 Bruxelles

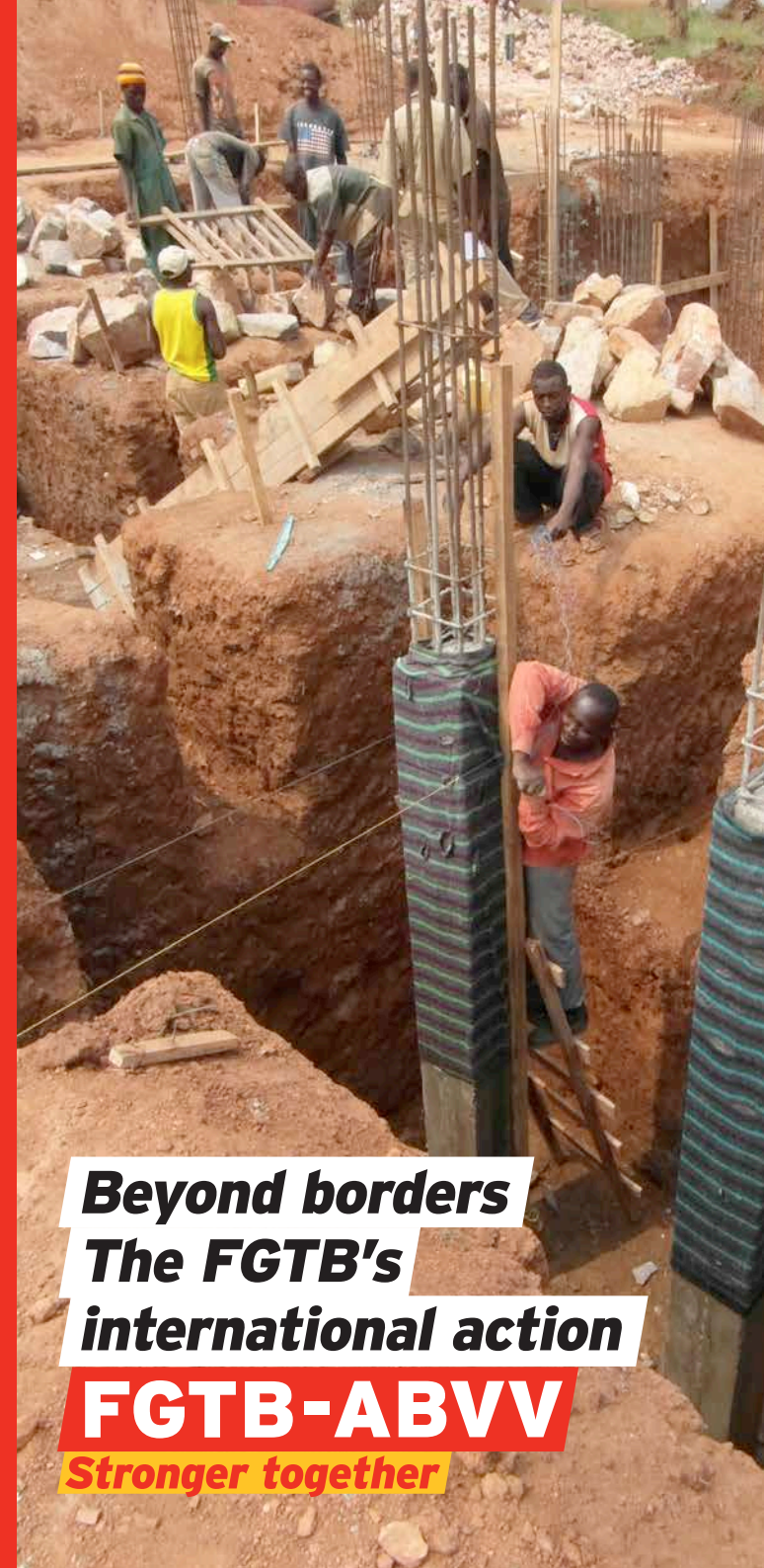
Tel. +32 2 289 08 66 +32 2 289 06 61 | Fax +32 2 550 14 09

intern@fgtb.be | www.fgtb.be

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Beyond borders
The FGTB's
international action
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Projects throughout the world

The FGTB (General Federation of Labour of Belgium) is very active in the South. It is committed to strengthen unions in their organizational and organizing capacity. Independent unions are stronger unions. Its cooperation program is co-financed by the Belgian Directorate for Development Co-operation (DGD). It enables the FGTB to set up the co-operation projects.

In Colombia the FGTB supports the USO (Union Sindical Obrero de la Industria del Petroleo) by facilitating the training of activists and union leaders. This resulted in an important increase of membership and the capacity to negotiate collective agreements, including for subcontracted workers. The USO managed to organize up to 40% of the workers in the petrol sector, an unusual high rate in the region.

In Rwanda, the FGTB has been collaborating with Cestrar (Centrale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Rwanda) in the tea sector and the construction industry. The core of this project is also training and capacity building. CESTRAR contributed to the development of a new and improved Health and Safety Act and negotiated the country's first Collective Labour Agreement. In the tea plantations the labour force consists predominantly of women, often accompanied by their babies. While working the fields, if not carried on their mother's back, they are left in the shade of a tree to play, often risking lethal snake bites. The FGTB project contributed to the creation of day care nurseries on the plantation sites so children can now play safely.

Decent work as common theme

The FGTB participates actively in the ILO (International Labour Organization), the only global tripartite organization.

The ILO adopts binding international conventions in work related areas. It monitors and reports about the implementation of those conventions by their Member States. The trade unions regularly make use of the existing procedures to denounce the often recurring violations of the conventions by the ILO's Member States: murders of trade unionists and the impunity that goes along with it in Colombia, unlawful arrests of union activists and leaders in Turkey, etc.

One of the latest adopted conventions protects the rights of male and female domestic workers (Convention n° 189). The FGTB and other trade unions worldwide campaigned intensively for the ratification of that important convention. The fight against forced labour, affecting more than twenty million people in all continents, has also been reinforced by the adoption of a new ILO protocol.

In 1999 the ILO defined the concept of Decent Work and it constitutes the core of FGTB's international commitment. It is based on four pillars: job creation, respect for worker's rights, social protection and social dialogue.

The FGTB promotes the work of the ILO in Belgium and in other countries where it has cooperation projects. It advocated for the integration of the concept of Decent Work in the new Belgian Development Cooperation Act. The FGTB has also fought for the ILO's principles to be used as a basis for the Belgian Government's foreign policy. It is also pushing Belgian companies to respect these principles in their activities abroad.

A solid opposition force at the international level

In order to maintain or even restore the balance between the interests of multinationals and the well organized employers' federations and those of the workers trade unions must organize them internationally as well. Our counterforce strives for a more just globalization.

The FGTB is a key actor within the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) and the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation). Its affiliates play key roles in their respective Global Unions.

ITUC represents 176 million workers in 161 countries. It has a major role in the defense of trade union rights worldwide, promoting equal opportunities and non-discrimination policies. ITUC mobilizes to influence the decisions of institutions as the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WTO (World Trade Organization).

At European level, the deterioration of the social situation proofs the need for a strong trade union counterforce. The FGTB is allied with other European trade unions through the ETUC in order to develop alternative propositions to the neoliberal European policies. Mobilizations and demonstrations are organized regularly to demand the protection of social and labour rights, as we saw on the 4th of April 2014 when 50 000 people took to the streets.

The FGTB also takes part in the activities of the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) within the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The TUACs' mission is to influence the OECD with the objective to have the social dimension incorporated into its analyses and recommendations to the greatest possible extent. The TUAC also coordinates the preparation of the trade union position for the G8 and G20 summits.