



GMB AND BANANA LINK

WORKING TOGETHER IN SOLIDARITY

GMB International Solidarity Fund

Annual Report 2018-19

The **GMB International Solidarity Fund** enables branches and regions to directly support the organising, education and legal work of Latin American agricultural trade unions. Tropical fruit workers in Latin America continue to suffer basic rights abuses and live in poverty conditions. The unions that support these workers need our solidarity to defend the rights of workers, empower representatives to collectively bargain for Decent Work and engage in advocacy for legal reform.

Historic Moment in Costa Rica's Labour History

In January 2019 SITRAP (Union of Agricultural Plantation Workers), which represents tropical fruit workers in Costa Rica, signed an historic Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with Bandeco, a wholly owned subsidiary of the transnational fruit company Fresh Del Monte, at its Duacari 4 plantation near Guápiles, Costa Rica.

The agreement signed on 10th January is the first new CBA signed between an independent trade union and a multinational fruit brand since the industry and powerful allies attempted to wipe unions off the map at the height of the Cold War. The CBA includes a series of important clauses giving worker representatives on plantations the time and facilities to meet freely and present grievances and ideas to management through regular dialogue.



Photo: SITRAP negotiator Geilyn Arriola Araya signing the new CBA (SITRAP)

Didier Leiton, SITRAP General Secretary, expressed his gratitude for support and was thrilled the GMB were able to attend their AGM in January which brought 700 members and their families together to celebrate the historic moment for the Costa Rican union. Solidarity between GMB and SITRAP over the last 15 years has been invaluable in building the union's education and organising capacity. SITRAP's success of signing this CBA shows the powerful role of international solidarity in challenging union repression on a global scale.

SITRAP are optimistic that the signing of this CBA bodes well for organised workers being able to negotiate similar agreements at other plantations in Costa Rica. For all but the first 10 years of its existence, SITRAP has operated in a hostile environment with employers and large companies, and labour legislation that challenged the right to freedom of association. It is for this reason that members, and the union's leadership, see this as a critical breakthrough after years of patience, education, organising and constructive dialogue.

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Organisational Strengthening & Advocacy for Reform in Peru

The GMB has supported SITAG-Peru (Peruvian Agricultural Workers' Union) for several years as the union have had many challenges to overcome including devastating floods and imminent repossession of their office. The Peruvian government does not allow SITAG to hold a bank account in its own name meaning employers still cannot pay subscription deductions from workers' wages into a union bank account, despite wanting to do so; this of course leaves the union in a financially vulnerable position.



Photo: Members marching for the repeal of Law 27360 (FENTRAIR)

Despite the numerous challenges and thanks to GMB and Banana Link support, in the past year SITAG successfully sought legal advice which led to the reinstatement of 5 workers who were found to have been wrongfully dismissed by CEPIBO (Association of small scale producers of organic bananas in Piura, Peru) and have been able to continue defending many other workers who are fighting cases of unfair dismissal.

SITAG and other members of the union federation FENTRAIR have engaged in advocacy for the reform of Law 27360, which saw a reduction in social benefits for agrarian workers. The union has also been holding workshops to educate workers on their rights and how to secure them through a union, as well as engaging them in advocacy for this labour law reform.

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