



INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WITH TROPICAL FRUIT WORKERS' UNION



Supporting the Union of Agricultural Plantation Workers, SITRAP, in Costa Rica

Historic Signing of Collective Bargaining Agreement

In January 2019 SITRAP signed a historic Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with Bandeco, a subsidiary of the transnational fruit company Fresh Del Monte, at its Duacari 4 plantation, 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 new ideas to management through regular dialogue.



Didier Leiton, SITRAP General Secretary, expressed his gratitude for UNISON support. Solidarity between the unions over the years has been invaluable in building the union's education and organising capacity. The signing of 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. In fact, SITRAP have agreed a second CBA on a second Del Monte plantation, at the time of writing negotiations are still on-going.

This is an incredible achievement, bolstered by international solidarity, as for all but the first 10 years of its existence, SITRAP has operated in a hostile environment where freedom of association is constantly challenged.

Recruiting a New Member Every Day!

SITRAP have gone from strength to strength with support from UNISON over the past year, with the capacity building of union reps driving forward change and improving the lives of even more workers and their families.

- A drive to increase union membership has been enormously successful with an increase of 454 members in the past year alone. This equates to more than 1 member recruited every day.
- Members of the SITRAP executive committee have been able to conduct recruitment visits at packing plants, in the field, at bus stops where workers await transport to work, in worker accommodation and at worker homes.
- With UNISON support, the union has been regularly distributing a newsletter called 'El Rodin' to assist with recruitment and educate workers, unionised or not, on their rights and the importance of organizing.
- Two communications workshops with members of the executive committee, led by a university lecturer, have improved the efficacy and strategy of SITRAP's digital and print media and has significantly aided the ability to recruit and educate a wider audience.
- Extensive meetings with workers from different banana and pineapple plantations owned by the likes of transnationals DOLE, Del Monte and Chiquita as well as those from Costa Rican corporations such Grupo Acon and Grupo Galinda.



Legal Challenges and Advocating for Reform

In December 2018 a workshop was held on Procedural Labour Law Reform, delivered by an employment law lecturer at the University of Costa Rica. As well as SITRAP representatives and SITRAP's lawyer, a group of current law students also attended. SITRAP General Secretary, Didier Leiton, welcomed and celebrated engagement with the students and University as these will be the law-makers and defenders of the future.

SITRAP has also taken part in a number of private hearings at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS) concerning the unfair dismissal and treatment of employees for reasons including: dismissal for breastfeeding, psychological aggression/bullying and abuse of authority directed at women employees.

Between the months of December 2018 and March 2019 SITRAP raised 15 cases of health-related or discrimination-based dismissal. Under the new law on labour procedural reform, for which SITRAP and other unions strongly advocated, 6 of those workers have since been reinstated. These success stories demonstrate the enormous impact of SITRAP's advocacy work and the benefits of being able to work closely with their employment lawyer.

Strengthening Women's Leadership

In the past year SITRAP have continued working to strengthen women's leadership skills as part of work towards gender equity in the workplace. On March 10th, to mark International Women's Day, SITRAP held a women's workshop comprised of representatives from the grassroots executive committees, union members and executive committee discussing issues of health and safety at work. The women discussed the issues they



face, the affect work has had on their health and the lack of response from their employers. The session highlighted the integral role the union can play in defending the rights of women and men workers with regard to occupational health and safety.

Women's Officer Mireya Salas Rodriguez was invited by the Minister for the Status of Women, Patricia Mora Castellanos, to speak at the Costa Rican Labour and Social Security Ministry to raise the issues women workers face at work, including: no time allowed for breastfeeding, dismissal for pregnancy and sexual harassment. The Minister then

came to a subsequent SITRAP workshop for women and discussed a proposal for an education project to strengthen women's leadership for workers in the banana and pineapple industries.

SITRAP hope to continue their dialogue with the labour ministry to ensure the rights of women are respected across all workplaces and that employers stop viewing women workers as a 'cost' but recognise them as an asset to the workforce and to the business.

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