

# IFWEA 21<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL CONFERENCE

28<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

## Cape Town, South Africa

### **Closing address by IFWEA President (TRANSCRIBED VERSION)**

I am quite sure that I speak for the entire new Executive that we are honoured, to be re-elected and by your confidence in us. We believe that the programme of work and priorities as set forth by the General Secretary is sound and solid. We believe that the financial status of the organisation will prosper over the next four years with your help. I want to restate very briefly what I said to you on the opening evening of this conference. I reminded you then that the theme of the conference is 'facing flexibility'. That we organised the conference around this theme in the workshops and the priorities of IFWEA over the next four years. I will remind that the forces of global capitalism are relentless. I will say to you again that the Neo-liberal policies that have their birthplace in my country and in Great Britain have now invaded every country in this room and many who are not here. I want to underscore the notion of relentless.

Even when we met in Ahmedabad in 2007 we were still puzzled as worker organisations by what this all means. In the past four years we have learned what globalisation really means. We now understand, as some of our colleagues in South Africa have taught us, that what it means is the absolute pressure to deregulate all over the world, all those policies that we have struggled and that our parents have struggled for and our grand-parents have struggled for. Policies that gave us social protection, that gave us a decent wage, that gave us what we now understand is the formal economy, the standard job. Now we know that the only things that made it formal, was our efforts in the trade union movements to regulate capital through collective bargaining or through the legislative frameworks in our countries. So when we hear the term deregulation this is really about the destruction of everything that we have thought about as a good job. So our task, together with our trade union colleagues, our political parties, our allies, is very simple - it's a dirty word in my country - our task is to re-regulate capital. We now know that no country is safe. That if you have a formal economy left, you will not have a formal economy left four years from now when we meet if we do not start our action now.

We now know that many in our trade unions have been slow to grasp that this is invading everywhere. Our trade union movements in the North thought they were safe if they stayed in their own countries and focused on their own countries. We now know this is false. We now know that the kind of north, south, east, west, global effort that we make here in the IFWEA is essential to all trade unions around the globe.

We, members of the IFWEA, are the worker educators of the world. Our task is to help workers and their unions to understand this process which initially tries to destroy regulation in the formal economy pushing formal workers into the informal economy and pushes informal workers into even more precarious and sometimes illegal activity. That is our challenge. We have proposed a programme of education that is a beginning. We have asked you to think about what the Trade Union Vow means in your country. How can we use this? How can we help workers understand what

it means to join a union? The most fundamental thing that we mean is that I will not work for less than you will in our efforts. I will not be part of driving the wage floor down till we are all destitute. This is what our task is.

We are the educators of the labour movement, we are the educators of workers trying to build the labour movement and we, your new Executive, together with you are dedicated to that task. We will do it, we will help you develop programme. We look forward to working with you in the next four years. Thank you very much.