

Banana workers get whole industry to the table

After over a hundred years of harsh treatment, exploitation and damage to the health of generations, the men and women who work in the world's banana plantations have achieved what nobody thought possible a few years ago. They have managed to bring all the players in the global industry – from plantation to supermarket shelf - around the same table to talk about the issues that matter most: trade union rights, collective bargaining, decent wages, fair prices for small producers, health & safety, women's employment, reducing chemical use, and improving the industry's impact on the natural environment on which we all depend.

After over a decade in gestation, the World Banana Forum was born in Rome on 8th December 2009, when the world's eyes were focused on another European capital and issues of climate justice. Two days later, the government members of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed their support for the new multi-stakeholder forum on the future of one of the world's most important crops.



Adela Torres - Colombian trade union leader and former packhouse worker, Women's Secretary of the Latin American Agro-industrial Workers' Union Coordinating Body and member of IUF's Global Agricultural Workers' Trade Group – took part in the Forum and the FAO Inter-Governmental Conference on Bananas and Tropical Fruit: *“For the tens of thousands of men and women plantation workers that we represent, this is a very important moment in an industry that has an infamously violent and exploitative history. Our challenge now is to*

translate the commitments made by all the major players to work together to really change things for people on the ground in their workplace, in their farms."

The Latin American workers' delegation was also able to meet for the first time with the governments of the United States of America, the Dominican Republic and Uganda, the world's second biggest producer of banana and plantain. All three countries voiced support for the Forum, as did European producing countries like France and Spain.



Latin American trade union delegation talk with US government representative at FAO in Rome

The British government's Department for International Development, together with Norwegian fresh produce company Bama and Dutch development agency ICCO, funded the preparation of the Forum and the participation of some 35 representatives of trade unions, small farmers' organisations and NGOs from 15 banana exporting countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

Global retailers like WalMart and Tesco and the big fruit brands like Chiquita, Dole, Fyffes and Bonita joined trade unions and small farmers' organisations in welcoming the Forum's focus on creating a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable banana industry.

One article in the fruit trade press was entitled: "Hasta la victoria siempre!", referring (rather ironically) to the leading role played by trade unions in the Forum. The hope for workers is, though, that the fruits of a victory for banana justice could be shared.

[500 words]

For further information or to support the trade unions involved in the World Banana Forum, contact the Norwich-based non-profit cooperative Banana Link on 01603 765670 or info@bananalink.org.uk or visit our website at www.bananalink.org.uk