

# **WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

**Declaration for the International Working Women's Day**

**8 MARCH 2013**

**We demand the right  
to maternity protection**



**On the occasion of the annual International Working Women's Day, the Secretariat of the WFTU wants to take the opportunity to once more highlight an issue that seriously concerns the contemporary working women and the young couples, a social issue that reveals in all its extent the rottenness of the policies implemented in the capitalist world: The violation of the rights of maternity protection for the women of the working class. A right that must be defended by both the female and male workers in their struggle against the exploitation of human by human through the class-oriented trade union organizations.**

Maternity protection is not only the legislation referring to the pre and postnatal period of a woman. For the WFTU, the issue of maternity protection concerns the general system of healthcare, from the early ages till the old age; the health and safety conditions in the working places; the educational system from the kindergarten until the university; the prices of food supplies and daily essentials; the quality and cost of housing; the high rate of unemployment. It even has to do with the imperialist wars, the catastrophe that they cause in households and families, the impact of the use of nuclear weapons to people's health causing teratogenesis.

The woman who is allocated from nature with a special and increased role in the reproductive process – motherhood – needs special care and protection. This **care and protection needs to be supplied to all women** for free and exclusively from the state services in the Public Healthcare System.

There is a need for special care for women from their early years of age until their old age, there is a need for special arrangements for women in the working place during their reproductive years.

**In the contemporary society which is based in the exploitation of men and women by the capital, maternity and labour are in conflict.**

The need of the working class to protect its reproductive process and the well-being of its descendants lead us directly to see that **capitalism cannot deliver**; it is an

obstacle to all the contemporary needs of the working people and the poor people.

One the one hand, capitalism pushed women massively in the production using them as the cheapest labour force, with less rights than the men. During the latest decades, with the struggle of the workers movement, women managed to gain a type of "equality" in the exploitation and they managed to have some special rights such as the early retirement age.

Today, especially in a period of a deep capitalist crisis, the living conditions of the vast majority are getting worse. Women are either working overtime or working part time or are unemployed in big numbers. The "flexible" working conditions are dominant opposed to stable work. Their working hours are completely defined by the needs of the capitalists according to their needs for profits. The possibility of pregnancy and motherhood prevents women from getting employment.

The dismissals, the flexible working hours and the overtime, the night shifts... In general the intensification and super-exploitation of women increase the precariousness, the anxiety of women affecting their physical or psychological health.

Their working conditions and the low wages, the poverty, the uncertainty of the future, the precariousness become basic criteria of a family in its decision to postpone maternity. These are main reasons why abortions rise in many countries. We need to fight for every woman and each couple to be able to choose freely their own future and we need to fight that there will be a free and public healthcare system able to support their decision. But we need also, to fight hard and confront the real social reasons that lead a woman/couple to abortion.

In the workplaces, the scientific and technological achievements for the health and safety are not implemented because of their extra cost creating serious risk factors in the work places. From lifting weight to inhaling bacteria and fungus, many of those factors create problems in conceiving, miscarriages, problems in the baby's normal development.

The scientific achievements in this area, in helping

women conceive, are not provided as a social service but as a way for capitalists owning hospitals and healthcare facilities to make profits. The public health care facilities around the world are undermined and function with private-economic criteria. The admitted persons have to pay for the services that are being provided to them. Many times these services are much less than expected.

But even after the natal, the family has to undertake a series of everyday activities that have to do with the reproduction of the labour force. The house of a poor family is at the same time a small restaurant, a laundry, a kinder-garden, an old-age home and so much more. These are all activities that usually women are undertaking in their free time, working for free for the whole society.

In most countries not even the ILO Conventions that define that maternity leave should be 14 weeks after and at no less than one week before the natal are respected. ILO Conventions also state that women should be entitled to the two-thirds of the previous earnings for these 14 weeks.

*“Out of the 167 countries, 97 per cent provide cash benefits for women during maternity leave and 42 per cent provide at least two-thirds of previous earnings for 14 weeks. What is more important is how countries finance cash benefits during maternity leave. We noticed a shift away from the systems relying entirely on employer responsibility. By 2009, half of the countries financed benefits solely through their social security systems or public funds in order to relieve employers. A share of 17 per cent relied on a mix of payments by employers and social security, while in one-fourth (26 per cent) of the countries payment is still covered entirely by the employer with no public or social security support. We found out that paternity leave provisions are becoming increasingly common around the world, with at least 49 countries providing paternity or parental leave policies that fathers can use around the birth of their child. In some countries, women in agriculture, domestic work or part-time work are still explicitly excluded from legal coverage and cash maternity benefits. In at least 54 countries, domestic workers are covered by maternity leave legislation, including Guatemala, which has recently extended social security services to these workers, such as maternal and infant health care.”*

## **Our maternity protection demands have to refer to all these fields of the life of the society.**

- Adequate pre and post-natal paid maternity leave. Banning of the dismissals of pregnant women. Parental leave with full healthcare and insurance. Banning of night-shifts and hazardous work for the women before and after giving birth.

- Decisive confronting of the unemployment rates through a development path that make use of the natural wealth-producing resources, the land and the industries to satisfy the needs of the peoples and not the profiting of the monopolies.

- Free, public and qualitative Healthcare System that will take care of all the people of all the ages in any of their needs; vaccinations, regular HIV tests, proper medication for all the occasions.

- Free, public and qualitative Education System from the kindergarten to the university. An educational process that would make sure that people receive general knowledge and specialized education, to grow up and become an integrated personality utilizing fully its capabilities for the benefit of the society.

- Full-time, Stable job with dignified salaries. 7hours a day, 5 days a week, 35 hours a week.

- Real and sufficient house subsidy or loans without interest for the young couples.

- A network of real free, public and qualitative services that will assist the family, the child, the elderly, the people with special needs, in order for the life of the woman to be improved. Free, public and qualitative kindergartens, old-homes, vacation-facilities, restaurants at the working places.

The right to maternity protection for the women of the working class is not only a matter of struggle of the working women but the entire working class. Men and women workers must jointly struggle against inequality, gender discrimination and maternity protection.



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