

MAY DAY 2026 – JOINT STATEMENT

A FEMINIST LABOUR JUSTICE AGENDA IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Access to justice for women and structurally marginalized populations is a cornerstone of human rights and a resilient democracy. However, for low income and working-class women, true justice requires more than just functional legal systems; it demands collective power and robust mechanisms to ensure economic accountability and equitable social outcomes. Independent unions and democratic worker organizations enabling fundamental rights including freedom of association and collective bargaining serve as vital engines for civic participation, strengthening the "democratic muscles" necessary to defend justice both within and beyond the workplace. In this context, freedom of association and collective bargaining are not merely labour issues, but essential tools for combatting inequality and realizing democracy and broader human rights.

This May Day arrives in a moment that demands clarity. Across the world, we are witnessing unprecedented rollbacks on democracy, a rise in authoritarianism and a deliberate weakening of collective worker power and civic space. Corporate power is consolidating while economic precarity is being weaponized to polarize communities and strip away the rights of women, workers, immigrants, and the LGBTQI+ community, among others.

At the same time, the very institutions and infrastructures that have historically enabled worker organizing and rights-based progress are being weakened, defunded, or dismantled. The global labour movement and workers' rights infrastructure faced a staggering and abrupt loss of \$750 million in funding from the United States with similar retrenchments in international cooperation investments from Europe and other parts of the world. This contraction in funding represents a broader erosion of the movement infrastructure needed to sustain long-term systems change- particularly in support of low wage workers. As international cooperation around the world turns to military infrastructure, the responsibility for labour and broader human rights is being sidelined.

For large parts of the global workforce this is not a new crisis. Rather, it is a deepening of something with which they are already familiar: being essential to how economies and societies function, while being excluded from how they are governed. This is not an accidental situation. Certain forms of work and certain groups of workers remain unrecognized in law and policy, shaped by the gendered, racialized, and colonial hierarchies which have in turn shaped the economic structure. These structural inequalities are reinforced by economic systems dependent on informality, migration, and the invisibilization of care work.

That is why this moment is not only about defending what exists; it is also about seeing the opportunity for change. Changes that are essential to addressing economic inequality, eradicating violence in the world of work, combatting xenophobia and racism, defending against authoritarianism and building more inclusive and participatory forms of democracy.

This is a critical feminist labour justice agenda. It recognizes that access to justice is inseparable from the ability of workers to organize, to bargain collectively, to participate effectively in decision making spaces, and to shape the organizations that represent their voice. It starts from the realities of workers' lives and insists that justice be measured in what is experienced, not only what is promised. It asks whether the rule of law holds in practice or bends to the rule of power. And it keeps the focus on who shapes the system - and what it will take to shift it.

In the current context, it is an agenda calls for four urgent shifts:

First, we need to stop treating different groups of workers as if they are separate problems. If there is a divide between those who are recognized and those who are not, the system will continue to use that divide. While acknowledging differences, we have to build a shared struggle between those whose rights are being abused, and those who never had rights. Bridging formal and informal, citizen and migrant, organized and unorganized workers is not an aspiration, it is critical to building the needed change.

Second, we need to be more honest about the limits of our current strategies for systems change. Legal frameworks and global norms and standards matter, and they have been hard won - but they do not hold on their own. Without organized worker power behind them, they are unevenly applied at best and ignored at worst.

Third, we should not accept the current direction of economic and technological change as inevitable. It is the result of an imbalance of power and policy choices about regulation, investment, ownership, and whose interests count. Those choices can and must be contested – we have to push back against corporate power that behaves as if there are no rules.

And fourth, we need to do the essential work of a critical labour feminist agenda – connecting the dots that are disconnected. The separation between labour, feminist, climate, democracy and human rights work does not reflect how people actually live and experience these issues. It does, however, make it easier for concentrated power to go unchallenged.

And so, the shifts we are calling for are not abstract, they are practical:

- Put resources into worker organizing, especially where workers are currently and historically excluded from economic and political power and benefits
- Invest in movement infrastructure, including leadership development, coordination spaces, and long-term alliance-building across sectors

- Rebuild labour institutions – centring the struggles and the strategies of workers on the frontlines and building the levels of intervention needed- from the local to the global, in key sectors of our economy and across global value chains, so they reflect the full reality of the working class
- Take on economic and corporate power to be accountable to workers and their communities more directly, across supply chains, technology, and finance
- Treat care, social protection, and public infrastructure as central economic issues, not residual ones
- Build bridges across movements so that we are better able to act together, even where perspectives differ

Across many countries, women workers and their organizations are already doing this work of organizing, negotiating, building new forms of representation, and linking issues that are usually kept apart. Thinking and fighting creatively with their heads, their arms and hearts – all together.

But this work is still not where power sits. It is not where resources flow, and it is not shaping the system at the scale it needs to. If this is a moment where power is becoming more concentrated, then the response has to be equally deliberate: building power that is collective, grounded, and connected.

That is what we mean by critical feminist labour justice.

It is not a future idea; it is a way of working that already exists. The task now is to back that work, consistently, at scale, and across borders, so that it can shift the system, not just survive within it.

This May Day is a call not only to defend rights, but to build the collective power that is necessary to redefine justice in our own terms.

This joint statement stems from the insights and reflections of nearly 100 representatives from trade unions, informal worker and labour support organizations, feminist advocates, philanthropy, and human rights champions from around the world who came together on the sidelines of the 70th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) in person and online to deliberate on a shared path forward to ensure access to social, economic, legal and political justice for workers and their communities on the frontline of the global economy during this time of historic disruption.