



## BWI European Regional Women's Conference:

# Amandla! Power to the Women!



work with their union to increase women trade union membership by 10%, outreach to young women into trade unions and promote women in leadership positions. In addition, there was an emphasis on the need to include women in collective bargaining teams and incorporate gender clauses in agreements. The conference also reiterated the need to continue to campaign for gender equality and campaign to stop gender-based violence with the goal to improve working conditions for women.

On 6-7 September, over 80 women from 21 countries around Europe came together in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the BWI European Regional Women's Conference to discuss trade union strategies to ensure gender equality and fight against gender based-violence and campaign towards pay equity.

overall society. One of the key objectives of the Conference was to discuss the gender convergence of the BWI 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, adopted at BWI's congress last year in Durban, South Africa.

The Conference concluded with a commitment by the participants to

“The Conference demonstrated true power of women in trade unions. We believe that our fight for gender equality is the fight for better life and better society for everyone,” concluded Rita Schiavi, Chair of both the European Regional Women's Committee and the International Women's Committee.

The Conference was hosted by the Independent Trade Union of Forestry, Wood Processing and Paper of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SSSPD-PBIH) whose President Lejla Catic welcomed the Conference participants.

The Conference started with an opening panel on how trade unions and community organizations are working to stop gender-based violence at the workplace and in

The Independent Trade Union of Forestry, Wood Processing and Paper of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SSSPD-PBIH) brings together public and private sector workers in the fields of forestry, wood processing, furniture manufacturing and other wooden products, and paper processing and paper product manufacturing. The Union has a long tradition of 113 years of existence.

According to data from 2017, the Union membership is 5,109 members, and 25% of members are women. The President of the Union is a woman – Lejla Catic, and there are two women members in the union's governing body. There is well functioning women's association in the union.

## #Herstory

# Women leaders share stories of struggle and success

At the BWI European Regional Women's Conference one of the sessions brought together women from different countries to share their stories on the challenges they faced in their unions, workplace, and community. They also highlighted the important role trade unions played in overcoming these challenges.

### #Herstory

#### Ivana Dimitrova, Macedonia

Ivana Dimitrova was told that she was "too cute to work in a construction company" when she applied for a job at a construction company in Macedonia eight years



Ivana Dimitrova (left)

ago. Her persistence paid off. Today she is in charge of the largest construction project in Macedonia and oversees a workforce of 700 workers. She is also the President of the local trade union organization with 2,000 members.

### #Herstory

#### Zamaney Menso, Netherlands

"When I was a kid I was inspired by the struggle of Nelson Mandela. My grandmother who I admired tremendously introduced me to his struggle. When I was fourteen I had the amazing opportunity to meet and hug Nelson Mandela who was visiting Netherlands, as I was part of the welcome band.

I will never forget the hug which was warm and precious to me. At that moment, I decided to dedicate my life for the fight for justice and better life for all people," stated Zamaney Menso of the Dutch union, FNV and member of the BWI World Board.

Menso who started her trade union career when she was nineteen, talked about the constant discrimination she faces. "As a woman of colour and as a child of immigrants, I knew I was going to



Zamaney Menso (right)

face discrimination in my work and daily life. Unfortunately, it still happens, and because of this my goal is to make our society free from all forms of discrimination and racism," she said.

### #Herstory

#### Elena Rubtsova, Kyrgyzstan

Elena Rubtsova from Kyrgyzstan was appointed as shop steward at the building materials company she worked. "There were



no elections, so people were not able to exercise their right to elect their own trade union representative. I was told by the company management that my responsibility as a shop steward was to organize sport and cultural events. I did so, but I started to educate myself what was the real role of trade unions and how unions can play a role in improving workers' lives. As a result, I started to assist workers with their grievances, so I was recognized by workers as their defacto representative".

Today Elena works at the national trade union center, the Building Workers Trade Union where responsibilities include negotiating collective bargaining agreements, organizing training programs and coordinating youth and women activities.

## #Herstory

**Secil Saricoban,  
Turkey**

"I am in the union because I want to help other women who are going through the same situation I had experienced," said Secil Saricoban from Turkey. Secil faced sexual harassment by her supervisor and despite her attempts to get him to stop by complaining to the management and her co-workers, it did not stop.

"Turkey is a very conservative society, and even my co-workers, who knew my story, tended to blame me. They thought I provoked such behavior from my boss," Secil stated. She turned to BWI Turkish affiliate, Tarim Orman-Is to seek assistance for her struggle against her harasser. With the help of the union, her supervisor was immediately fired. Secil proved to all workers in her branch, that



Secil Saricoban (3rd from left)

sexual harassment is unacceptable behavior in the work place.

**Statements**

"The BWI Strategic Plan includes gender equality but it is important to ensure that there are gender dimensions in all areas of BWI's work and policies."

**Rita Schiavi, Chair of both the European Regional Women's Committee and the International Women's Committee.**

"Today, as a result of strong activism from women, unions are joining the call to fight against all forms of sexual harassment and discrimination at work and in the community."

**Gail Cartmail, Assistant General Secretary, UNITE the Union-UK and BWI World Board member.**

"Women in wood and forestry sectors are working in hazardous conditions but receive low wages and face violations in the work place. Our union is fighting to change this situation and improve working conditions for all women."

**Lejla Catic, SSSDPBIH-Bosnia and Herzegovina**

"It is important that trade union leaders are willing to make organizational changes to open up more positions for women to become leaders."

**Josefine Krantz, Swedish Painters Union-Sweden**

"Women in our company are not afraid to stand up themselves and for their colleagues – 95% of our trade union members are women."

**Olga Lebezkina, IKEA Tikhvin Industry Trade Union, RTWU-Russia.**

"We should negotiate "gender sensitive" collective bargaining agreements, and to do this, we need to educate both women and men how to work together in collective bargaining teams."

**Mercedes Landolfi, Fillea-CGIL-Italy.**



## Key outcomes of the BWI European Regional Women's Conference

### 1. How to increase women trade union membership by 10%?

- Outreach and organize young women in apprenticeship programs and professional schools.
- Utilize mass media to raise awareness on gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and work-life balance.
- Raise awareness regarding benefits of being a trade union member to women workers through information campaigns.
- Collaborate with Works Council structures.
- Campaign to increase wages and quality of jobs for women.
- Conduct trainings for women and trade union organizers.
- Include specific clauses pertaining to women in collective bargaining agreements.;

### 2. How can women structures promote women in trades?

- Nominate women as delegates to union governing structure meetings.
- Change trade union statutes to reach 30% of women representation in the union governing structures.
- Enforce 30% quota for women in trade union governing structures and participation in trade union activities.
- Ensure that women are part of collective negotiating teams.
- Conduct trainings for negotiators (men and women) to negotiate “gender sensitive” agreements.
- Include women in collective bargaining negotiating teams.

### 3. What campaigns, events, and actions can help your union to fight gender inequality?

- Implement “Value Women’s Work” campaign.
- Campaign against gender-based violence.
- Conduct sub-regional women network meetings to provide support, network and share best practices.
- Develop alliances with civil society, women’s groups, non-profit organizations.
- Conduct forums for women workers.

