

## **Speech at Institute of Employment Rights panel discussion on collective bargaining**

Bournemouth, Sunday 8 September, 7 p.m.

Speakers:

Carolyn Jones, Director of the Institute of Employment Rights

Bob Crow, General Secretary of RMT

Professor Keith Ewing, President of the Institute of Employment Rights

John Hendy QC, Campaign for Trade Union Freedom

Representative of Unite

Representative of NUT

Ian Richards, UN staff unions

Mrs. Chair and everyone here, thank you for organizing this very important meeting.

I am here to speak for the UN's staff unions. They represent 65,000 staff around the world. Most are in hardship locations, many in conflict zones.

One thousand colleagues are working in Syria as we speak. Some of them were shot two weeks ago as they went to collect chemical samples.

Now you know who we are.

On the 11th of July, days before eight of our colleagues were killed in Mogadishu, our Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, derecognized staff unions and took away our collective bargaining rights. This was passed by decree and our role is now relegated to advising him. In America they call this union busting.

The impact of this is that we now cannot negotiate on key parts of our terms and conditions. As we have made clear to Ban Ki-moon:

There are no proper guidelines on downsizing, who goes, who stays, why posts should be cut. Each department makes it up as they go along.

The UN wants to offshore to new "service centres" in cheap but not always stable locations, and is looking at making greater use of contractors with no labour rights. Staff will lose their jobs if this happens unless they are willing to move to these service centres and take a huge pay cut.

On security, we are seeing greater use of private military and security contractors at a time when our own security staff are losing their jobs. I guess you've heard of G4S, Saracen and DynCorp.

Our policy on whistleblowers isn't working. People are losing their jobs when they tell the truth and we want to change it. We can't.

We also want to improve the current system to make sure that violators of human rights don't get to work at the UN while also protecting innocent staff members from being falsely accused.

So what are we doing?

Firstly we are benefiting, and we are hugely grateful for this, from the support of the TUC and ITUC. Frances O'Grady and Sharan Burrow have both written to Ban Ki-moon but they've both been fobbed off. They've been told that UN staff don't have rights in the first place. As you know, this is nonsense.

So we need to reach out. We are working with unions, parties and members of parliament. In the UK but repeating this in several other countries.

We are also mounting a legal challenge. Unfortunately it can really only be done on procedural issues, not on the substance. This is despite General Assembly resolutions, international human rights conventions, ILO conventions, all of which were mentioned by John Hendy.

The UN is supposed to set the example. It knows this and set up the Global Compact to encourage private companies to become more responsible. One of the conditions to be a member is to practice collective bargaining.

So, if the UN were to apply to join the Global Compact it would be turned down for its poor labour standards.

Earlier, Bob Crow told you to look around to see how collective bargaining is being attacked. He mentioned Wisconsin, but you don't have to look further than New York and the UN. Thing is, if the UN starts ignoring international human and labour rights, why should your government bother upholding them?

We're all in this together. We need your support and we look forward to meeting with you all this week.

Thank you.