

## City of Stoke on Trent Branch



## International Officers Report to October 08 Executive Meeting

What is UNISON involved with at the moment?

### Colombian trade unionists under threat

UNISON general secretary, Dave Prentis today called on the European Commission to investigate evidence of Colombian government complicity in the murders, disappearances and torture of more than 600 trade unionists and thousands of its citizens.

"Contrary to claims made by the Colombian government that the situation faced by union members is improving, the reality is that in the first six months of 2008, 40% more trade unionists were killed compared with the same period the previous year," said Mr Prentis in a letter to EU trade commissioner Lady Ashton.



Colombia remains the most dangerous place in the world for trade unionists to operate. Between 2002, the year that President Uribe came to power, and August 2008, some 606 trade unionists were assassinated in Colombia – more than in the rest of the world combined during the same period.

"As for basic trade union rights," writes Mr Prentis, "the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations expressed its concern in 2008 about practices in Colombia such as the arbitrary rejection of applications to register new unions; compulsory arbitration to end a strike; the prohibition of strikes in a broad range of services; and the use of work co-operatives as a cover for denying the right to join a union."

Mr Prentis called on the Commission to confirm that they will ensure that Colombia complies with the requirement to implement core international conventions on human and labour rights when it applies for renewal of its European trade preferences in November.

Justice for Colombia is asking all trade unionists to support a campaign to get the EU to investigate Colombia. You can also sign a letter to Lady Ashton  at [www.justiceforcolombia.org](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org)

You can also send a letter to your MEP asking them to sign "Written Declaration 90" which also calls on the EU to open an investigation into Colombia's behaviour.

### Sanitation and Water – the missing link in international health and development

In the run up to the UN high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals on 25 September 2008, UNISON, as part of the End Water Poverty Campaign, called on world leaders to take action to tackle the global water and sanitation crisis which means that 2.5 billion people do not have access to sanitation, and 900 million people do not have access to clean water

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## Latest UNISON development fund projects

The UNISON International Development Fund (UIDF) continues to support trade union projects in developing countries to enable them to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic, capacity build, campaign for trade union rights and fight privatisation programmes.

The most recent projects to receive UIDF funding are in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

## Zimbabwe trade union leaders' case to go to Supreme Court

ZCTU president, Lovemore Matombo, and secretary general, Wellington Chibebe have been granted the constitutional right to have their case heard at the Supreme Court. The leaders are facing charges of speaking out about state-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe. The trial date has been moved to 5 December to give the Supreme Court time to make a decision.

Please take action and add your voice to support these brave trade unionists.

Visit: <http://www.unison.org.uk/international/index.asp>

## ZCTU voices concerns over power-sharing deal

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) General Council met with Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai on 27 September 2008 seeking an explanation on the contentious issues of the agreement between the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Zanu PF.

ZCTU raised concerns about the 'flawed process' which has led to an agreement that does not address the primary causes of the dispute that created the current economic and political deadlock. The deal is argued not to be all-inclusive, since civil society and interested groups, such as labour, were not given the opportunity to participate. Through the agreement, the power of President Mugabe is seen to be consolidated, with Zanu PF having power of veto over all issues. ZCTU contend that the power-sharing deal is a political settlement by the elite, and not about the welfare of ordinary people.

Following the meeting, the General Council resolved to maintain its earlier position on several issues. According to ZCTU President, Lovemore Matombo, the agreement is a far cry from ZCTU expectations and from a labour point of view, it is not acceptable. The current arrangement means that the people would be led by an unelected government for the next five years. There is therefore a need for a Neutral Transitional Authority to resolve the current electoral dispute, contend ZCTU. But, if the present arrangement is to continue, it must be a transitional arrangement that will lead to a free and fair election under a new, people-driven constitution.



## Passport Less Tsvangirai

Regional intervention to resolve Zimbabwe's political crisis had been sought by all sides after direct talks with President Robert Mugabe last week broke down over the distribution of cabinet posts, and principally who would control state security forces via the home office.

But the initiative ground to a halt in Swaziland due to Harare's failure to issue Tsvangirai -- due to become prime minister under a September 15 accord -- with a full passport, and the next scheduled meeting is not now due for another seven days, back in Zimbabwe.

What was the reason—according to the BBC news—given by Mugabe for the failure to issue a passport to Morgan Tsvangirai—a lack of paper!

Sounds fishy?

Maybe Mugabe could sell some of his gold knives or forks to buy a few sheets!

## Trade union response to HIV/AIDS in southern Africa

UNISON's HIV/AIDS project in southern Africa is going from strength to strength. 37 trade unions from 10 countries have now signed up to be involved, and the second structure to oversee the project's delivery was set up in Johannesburg in September 2008. Trade unionists from Botswana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa were selected for representation on the project coordination team based on their experience and expertise in HIV/AIDS work in a trade union environment. They will work with UNISON to ensure that the project activities identified by sister unions in the planning stages are implemented, monitored and delivered on budget.



At their first project coordination team meeting, members were able to share and develop ideas on key project activities, such as national seminars, developing a resource centre, how to involve leaders and membership and developing guides to provide training and advice on HIV/AIDS related issues. The first two national seminars will take place in Mozambique and Malawi and the project coordinator, based in South Africa, will work closely with unions there to identify specific areas of relevance to each country, in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

Ken Owen