

Freedom of Association

Myanmar

ILO Worker Delegate Elected at Historic Conference

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Unions in Myanmar marked the first year of freedom of association with an historic two day national conference at the Myanmar Convention Centre on 28-29 April jointly organised by the ILO and the FES.

With close to 700 people at the opening ceremony it has been described as a typical union factional brawl and at one point resulted in a walk out by the FTUM group of unions. But it also established a precedent for democratic decision making.

Unlike other countries where ILO Worker Delegates are from the most representative central organisations, the Forum delegates had to decide the rules for electing the Worker Delegate and then undertake the election process. There was a high level of interest, the debate was direct and at times brutal, but nothing can diminish the achievement of deciding the rules by consensus with the exception of a secret ballot on whether candidates had to themselves be members of registered labour organisations (they decided they did).

The voting was a moving experience as nearly 400 delegates lined up, had

their names called one by one, took a voting paper, marked it solemnly and voted on stage, many of them for the first time in their lives.

Daw Than Than Htay was elected as Worker Delegate for 2013, supported by farmer unions, and the two elected advisers were U Than Swe supported by the FTUM, and Dr Sai Khaing Myo Tun, Secretary of the University Teachers Association.



Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun, Daw Than Than Htay and U Than Swe

Special points of interest:

There are now

- 531 Basic level unions
 - 14 Township level unions
 - 2 union industry federations
 - 19 Employer organisations
- and numbers are still growing*

FOA Programme— Bigger and Better

With new funding from Norway the FOA programme is growing.

To the successful two day weekly workshop for union leaders and their employers there will be an advanced level of modular

training added: in dispute resolution, collective bargaining and occupational safety and health. There will also be follow up education visits at enterprise level.

Government capacity will

get a boost with training and support for conciliators, arbitration bodies and the inspectorate.

At industry and national level social dialogue will be promoted through workshops and training.

International Labour Organisation

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THE ILO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION TEAM Introducing Moon Light Pan Po, Educator

Moon Light's application for the FOA training position in October 2012 stood out for its self-reflection and creativity. And it is these qualities and his energy and commitment to the job which make him such an outstanding trainer. Facilitating two day workshops every week on his own with follow-up factory visits to assess the impact of the training has been far from easy, as he himself admits. In the bipartite workshops with workers and employers he has to manage participants who are suspicious of each other.



However, Moon Light has a wealth of experience in breaking down barriers between people. His MA from Pannassastra University in Cambodia was in applied conflict transformation, exploring this process in Cambodia and the Philippines. He has also worked for five years for the Shalom Foundation on their Interfaith Youth Cooperation Project, and in his spare time he does training for youth from a range of beliefs.

At the ILO he has learnt about issues for employees and how to protect workers on the ground. But bringing people together is one of the main objectives of his FOA training work and his success in doing this, he says, is very rewarding: "When they come in they come with positions and when they go they go as human beings".

Making a Difference at the Paper Mill

The expectation that workers under 18 could do the same heavy work as older employees at his paper mill factory was the main reason that 25 year old Kyaw Myo got involved in union activity.



On May Day last year he went with others from the paper mill to a workers' seminar where they learnt about labour rights and how to form a union. Less than three months later they had established and registered their Basic Labour Organisation, and Kyaw Myo was elected President.

New knowledge and skills gained from the ILO training workshop he attended include understanding the labour laws, collective bargaining and the importance of communication and mutual respect between employers and employees.

Like many young workers in Myanmar, Kyaw Myo contributes from his earnings to help his family. However during the registration process when he was short of money, his family did not expect anything from him and supported his union work by covering his phone expenses.

Now the Labour Organisation is registered, it offers members a range of services from assistance obtaining social security cards to monthly computer training sessions. Members pay 500-1000 Kyat a month (about 50 cents-\$US1) and these funds can assist with loans for health costs.