

# SIPTU GLOBAL SOLIDARITY NEWS



April 2020



Workers wearing protective gear spray disinfectant as a precaution against the coronavirus, at the main market in Gaza City. Photo: Adel Hana

## Gaza - No place to hide from Coronavirus

By Frank Connolly & Mags O'Brien

**T**HE people of Gaza are facing a potentially devastating health crisis from the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Already suffering from severe overcrowding, acute poverty and a shortage of medical staff, testing kits and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), the spread of the Coronavirus could wreak havoc in the traumatised territory.

By mid-April, thirteen people had contracted coronavirus in Gaza with several hundred more cases across the West Bank and Jerusalem. Two people have died from the Covid-19

virus in Palestine.

According to Dr. Mona El Farra, Director of Gaza Projects for the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), the broken health system and the lack of essential staff and equipment pose a major threat to almost 2 million people who live under a 14-year siege and blockade by Israel. Living conditions in Gaza, including in the 0.52 square kilometre Al-Shati refugee camp with 85,000 people, make social distancing impossible, she said.

"At present there are only 40 functioning intensive care beds for the entire population. There is also a shortage of staff, testing kits and protective equipment. Critically, we

know that social isolation can slow the pace of the virus but if you take the Al-Shati Camp which has only



Dr. Mona El Farra

one health and one food distribution centre, how can anyone practice social distancing?" Dr El Farra asked.

"These conditions are a sure breeding ground for Covi-19. The population of Gaza has suffered

psychologically over the years. Now they despair for their loved ones in a crowded land with a broken health system and, crucially, no escape."

Despite the health emergency, Israeli authorities have tightened restrictions on the movement of people and goods into an out of Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has complained that the Israeli government has permitted the spread of coronavirus in the West Bank and East Jerusalem through its failure to ensure essential protective measures and supplies. The PA claimed that some 50,000 labourers were allowed to travel from Israel back to their homes in the West Bank during the Easter Passover holiday without adequate testing.

On Friday, 17th April, the PA Minister of Health, Mai Keileh, confirmed 12 more cases of Covid-19 in the West Bank, bringing the total in Palestine to 307, in addition to 95 cases in occupied Jerusalem. More than 1600 people are also in quarantine in Gaza after arriving from Egypt in recent days.

Meanwhile, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called on the parties involved in the formation of the incoming government to ensure that the Occupied Territories Bill is enacted during the next Dáil. In a letter on Thursday 16th April, to Fianna Fáil leader Micháel Martin Congress general secretary, Patricia King, asked him "to continue to support the Occupied Territories Bill and ensure that you can fulfil your party's manifesto commitment to its progression during this Dáil term."

The Bill, which was introduced by Senator Frances Black passed all stages in the Seanad and its first stage in the Dáil before the general election was called.

In her letter, Patricia King continued: "I have every expectation that this will be reflected in the Programme for Government given the strong, cross-party support for the Bill to date. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions will also be contacting other political parties and groups to discuss their support for the Bill and its restoration to the Dáil order paper.

"Ireland has a proud history of leadership in human rights and peace-building, and the progression of the



Palestinian volunteers spray disinfectant in al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City last week during campaign to stem novel coronavirus outbreak.



Patricia King

Occupied Territories Bill is an important continuation of this work. As you are no doubt aware, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party and Benny Gantz's Blue and White party agreed earlier this month to formally annex a large part of the Palestinian West Bank during their negotiations to form a unity government in Israel. This demonstrates that despite the Covid-19 crisis, the relentless effort to illegally acquire as much Palestinian land as possible is only escalating. In response to these



Frances Black

disturbing developments, the case for enactment of the Occupied Territories Bill is even more urgent."

While there is a reference to the objective of securing a two-state solution in the Framework Document agreed and circulated to other parties by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in recent days, there is no explicit mention of the Occupied Territories

Bill.

In his reply to King on Friday 17th April, Fianna Fáil leader, Micheál Martin wrote: "In the Framework Document agreed between Fianna Fáil & Fine Gael there is a stated commitment to support efforts towards a durable, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Whilst there is not an explicit reference to the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill in this document, it is in many respects a work in progress and provides the basis for a discussion with other Parties, groupings and independents."



Protester at demonstration in Gaza City demanding coronavirus protection for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails on 19th March.

Photo: Getty Images

# Governments must put people first

**G**LOBALLY, trade unions know that the financial and humanitarian impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will stay with us for many years to come if governments don't protect workers, supply chains and small business. As shops close and demand falls in G20 countries which are the engine of the global economy, the impact on global supply chains and the millions of workers whose livelihoods depend on them will be felt in the weeks and months to come.

This pandemic has mercilessly exposed the deep fault lines in our labour markets. Often the first to lose their jobs are those whose employment was already precarious — sales clerks, waiters, kitchen staff, baggage handlers, cleaners and those in the gig economy.

The crisis has shown how government support for health is vital and the need to ensure adequate paid sick leave for all workers and income provisions to maintain jobs for when the pandemic restrictions can be lifted. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) only 58% of governments in countries that are in lockdown are offering additional funding for their public health systems.

They have also identified the top five policies that governments are putting in place to respond to the economic impact of the virus — provision of free health care; employment protection for those self-isolating; tax relief for businesses; paid sick leave for a period



of self-isolation and bailout funds for businesses or sectors of the economy.

They have identified five demands which will have the most direct impact

This pandemic has mercilessly exposed the deep fault lines in our labour markets

on working people — paid sick leave, wage support and income support for freelancers, self-employed workers,

gig economy workers, as well as loan relief for rent or mortgage payments and free health care.

The involvement of unions representing working people is key to ensuring that governments act to put people first in their response to the crisis. Direct government support for the real economy is the only way workers will be able to stay in their homes and feed their families while the economy is shut down. The ITUC has identified countries that have demonstrated positive response to the pandemic. It has been recognised that these have occurred as a result of either strong tripartite or social dialogue structures or traditions, or concerted and successful campaigning and lobbying by trade unions.

# Companies must lead the way, change or be shamed

■ By Yvonne O'Callaghan

**A**S the coronavirus pandemic deepens and the global lock down is imposed in more countries, companies and their employees are being greatly affected. But which companies are the 'good, the bad and the ugly' in their response to the crisis?

As Amazon workers across the United States test positive for the virus, employees believe collective action is the only way to get the company to meaningfully clean its facilities

Following shocking reports that Amazon warehouses were not practicing the protocols necessary to protect the well-being of their workers and the public, America's top unions wrote to the company demanding that they do better for its workers.

They were outraged when, not only did Amazon executives not promptly address the concerns by their own workers, but fired one of the leading whistle-blowers immediately following his action to speak out on the situation.

The unions have called for the reinstatement of the employee to reassure all workers in the company that speaking out about improvements needed to health and safety practices right now is not only tolerated, but welcome as critically important to the well-being of both employees and the general public. They have told the company that Amazon warehouses need to close until real solutions are put in place – with independent monitors – to protect the workers and the public during the public health crisis.

Although Amazon has claimed that it has adopted a number of practices to sanitise work-sites and protect workers, a compelling number of workers have come forward – even running the incredible personal risk of walking off the job – to report that the actual situation in warehouses does not match Amazon's public relations statements.



Strikers at the JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island demanded Amazon temporarily shut down for cleaning, after reports of multiple employees testing positive for Covid-19. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

They have reported crowded spaces, a required rate of work that does not allow for proper sanitising of workspaces and empty containers

Employees believe collective action is the only way to get the company to meaningfully clean its facilities

meant to hold sanitising wipes.

On the other side of the world, workers have claimed that Amazon contractors are enduring 'subhuman' conditions in Philippines, where workers at a call centre in Cebu have been left sleeping in close quarters on office floors and makeshift beds as a result of the travel ban imposed in the country.

The Amazon-contracted workers at the site, which is managed by French outsourcing company Teleperformance also have contracts to provide

services to Netflix from call centres in Cebu.

Workers have reported that conditions have become "subhuman" after the travel ban meant staying at the location was their only option if they wished to get paid. They are only able to leave the site to buy groceries or use showers at a nearby hotel. In a letter to their employer workers have said: "Our choices are only between going to work or else to starve. And you are all aware that in this desperate time, we will choose the former. But that does not excuse you from your responsibility to treat [us] fairly, as human beings."

**Amazon shares have jumped by one third since the pandemic began bringing the value of the company to \$1.15 trillion.**

# ICTU calls for urgent IFI response to pandemic crisis

**T**HE Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Congress) has joined with the global trade union movement by writing to Ireland's Finance Minister, Paschal Donoghue, in advance of the spring meetings of the international financial institutions (IFIs) which are taking place on 17th-19th April.

Unions are urging international financial institutions to implement urgent measures to equitably respond to the economic and public health crises facing the world by producing a plan to co-ordinate economic stimulus and public health action. Covid-

19 is creating a crisis of unprecedented proportion. As the shocks caused by the public health crisis ripple through global supply chains and depress demand, layoffs and loss of



income are devastating working families.

The pandemic lit a match next to an existing powder keg of debt burdens, inadequate financial and labour market regulation, increasing inequality, and years of austerity that undermined public health, social protection and the ability of states to fulfil their human rights obligations.

Unions have called on the IMF and the World Bank to join governments in executing a co-ordinated and sustained stimulus as the launchpad of a reformed multilateralism that puts working people, shared prosperity and the real economy first.

*By Yvonne O'Callaghan  
SIPTU Global Solidarity Committee*

## UN calls for lifting of sanction measures

**A**S the crisis grows, sanction measures are greatly affecting the ability of medical efforts in countries such as Iran, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Obstacles to the import of vital medical supplies, including over-compliance with sanctions by

banks, are creating long-lasting harm to vulnerable communities in these countries during this pandemic.

Ireland's policy for international development which sets out a vision for a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world built on human rights must remain the cornerstone of international action in these turbulent times.

On this basis, Congress has called on the Irish government to urgently

support the call of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, for the authorisation of humanitarian exemptions to sanction measures. This, she said, must include essential medical equipment and supplies to avoid the collapse of any national healthcare system as progress in upholding human rights is essential to improving healthcare for vulnerable populations.

# Garment Workers face des

By Yvonne O'Callaghan

**A**S western brands face the financial implications of efforts to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, workers within the industry's supply chain face a grim reality of unemployment, hunger and poverty.

Across much of Asia, Europe, and the US, Covid-19 has brought shopping for anything but necessities practically to a standstill. One of the industries most at risk is clothing. The impact is rippling through fashion's supply chain, putting at risk the livelihoods of garment workers, who are already some of the most vulnerable workers in the global economy.

As the Covid-19 virus spreads within the underdeveloped garment producing countries, more factories are being forced to close, putting potentially millions of people out of work and creating an existential crisis for the garment industry.

To keep costs down, mass market fashion companies such as Primark and H&M do much of their manufacturing in low-wage countries across Southeast Asia, on the peripheries of Europe, and in locations such as Ethiopia. The pay is often barely enough for workers and their families to survive, providing little or no protection from poverty.

In Bangladesh, factories which employ almost 4.1 million workers have already seen \$138 million in orders cancelled or postponed due to the crisis. In a typical month last year, the country's garment exports ranged from about \$2.7 billion to \$3.1 billion. It has been reported by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) that 20 factories collectively had \$10 million in orders cancelled in one day at the beginning of the global shutdown. Cambodia has announced a plan for garment workers to receive 60% of the minimum wage if their factories closed with 40% coming from the factory owners and 20%



provided by the government. Myanmar's government will give loans to factory owners if they can't pay salaries, and Turkey has announced a

Garment workers are expected to pay the price for the clothes they have already made

stimulus package to shore up several sectors, including its garment industry.

The Global Union Federation,

IndustriALL is working with its affiliates that organise garment workers to gather information on and monitor the numbers of factories that are closing down, the number of workers affected and any measures being taken by governments and employers to mitigate the impacts.

The picture emerging is devastating. Social distancing measures taken in countries currently most affected by the virus are driving wholesale closure of thousands of garment factories with millions of workers being laid off without a social safety net.

While garment retailers are shutting up shop in affected countries, garment workers are expected to pay the price for the clothes they have already made.

Not only are major brands and retailers cancelling future orders, they are refusing to take responsibility for garments that have already been produced, using emergency provisions in contracts to stop shipments and

# stitution as factories close



The US based Workers Rights Consortium estimates that global brands have cancelled £20 billion in orders in countries including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam since the pandemic began.

avoid paying for the goods they ordered. This is leaving factories holding the goods, unable to sell them to the customer that ordered them, and in many cases unable to pay the wages of the workers who made them. Measures announced by companies to protect the wages of retail and other direct workers have been welcomed by unions, but the security and well being of the workers in their supply chains, who have made the products on which their business is built, must not be ignored.

Unless measures are taken now to protect factories and workers to enable them to survive the crisis, the short-term decisions being taken by brands and retailers to renege on existing contracts will end up destroying the very businesses they are seeking to protect. Brands, employers and governments must come together urgently with trade unions to find ways to support garment workers during this unprecedented period to ensure the future viability of the industry once the crisis has passed.



# Desperate exodus of India's migrant workers

**M**ANY of India's estimated 100 million internal migrant workers have been left trapped in cities far from their homes as their lives were upended by being laid off due to government measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Internal migrants are crucial to India's economy. They make up about 20% of the workforce and contribute an estimated 10% of India's economic output. But, without formal work contracts, they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many earn little more than a subsistence wage and have no social security to protect their incomes if they lose their jobs.

Travelling long distances from remote villages seeking work in India's bustling cities to support families they usually leave behind, they form a crucial lifeline for the economic wellbeing of hundreds of millions, particularly in rural areas.

Lacking jobs and money, and with public transportation shut down, hundreds of thousands of migrants unable to pay for rent or food were forced to the streets to trek often hundreds of miles back to their home villages – with some dying on the journey. The lockdown turned a public health crisis into a larger humanitarian one.

As they walked, some were beaten brutally and humiliated by the police. Others were herded together and hosed down with chemical spray. After a few days, worried that the fleeing population would spread the virus to villages, the government sealed state borders even for walkers. People who had been walking for



days were stopped and forced to return to camps in the cities they had just been forced to leave.

Although the central government

announced a \$23bn welfare scheme for India's poor, there was really nothing for the landless, daily wagers and migrant workers. Many workers in cities are unable to access food via the government's Public Distribution Service since all their identity documents show their out-of-state address. Fundamentally, the crisis has greatly exacerbated the existing inequalities in India's economy and the measures imposed in response to Covid-19 have uprooted the lives of many, placing them in very precarious situations.

In response to the situation, India's Supreme Court stated that "migrants be treated in a humane manner, including providing them with enough food, water, beds and supplies as well as psychosocial counselling in shelters that are run by volunteers and not security forces."

**“As an appalled world watched, India revealed herself in all her shame — her brutal, structural, social and economic inequality, her callous indifference to suffering.”**

**Arundhati Roy,**  
Indian Author and political activist





# Green New Deal in a time of crisis

**T**HE positive changes in the environment have been among the few silver linings of the enormous global upheaval caused by the coronavirus. Cities around the world are reporting unprecedented improvements in air quality and, incredibly, Europe's carbon emissions have fallen between 40 and 60% in recent weeks – the result of global air traffic being halved in a matter of weeks and road traffic reducing to virtually nothing in most cities.

Poor air quality has caused a crisis for public health and workers' rights for many years now – exacerbating respiratory illnesses and contributing to early deaths of more than a thousand people per year in Ireland alone.

The important gains we have seen

in our environment could prove to be temporary as polluting activities seek to regain their foothold. But the Just Transition, which places workers and the planet at the centre of the recovery, offers an alternative path forward. These gains benefit the health of all while we rebuild a fairer and more caring economy that truly values the workers and the communities which are so vital to

Poor air quality has caused a crisis for public health and workers' rights for many years

sustaining us through this time. Like no other event this century, this crisis offers all of us the opportunity to reshape the ailing neo-liberal economic policies that have dominated our world and wrought

destruction on the planet for far too long.

Trade union action on climate change and for a Just Transition come into much sharper focus as we look toward to the decisions that will be taken in the coming months: about what shape the recovery should take after the greatest global shock of our lifetimes.

The incoming government in co-operation, with other EU member states, must accelerate its work on a comprehensive recovery plan integrating the green transition. The European Green Deal which constitutes a new growth strategy for the EU must be used to enable it to deliver on the twin benefits of stimulating economies and creating jobs while accelerating the Just Transition in a cost-efficient way.

It is vitally important that we do not revert to a state of "normality" whereby people and planet are doomed to another inevitable and unfolding crisis.

*By Janet Horner,  
SIPTU Equality Committee*



# Cuban Solidarity hindered by US Blockade

■ By Jack McGinley

**A**S the world fights an international battle against the coronavirus pandemic, Cuba has once again proved itself a paragon of internationalism and solidarity. In recent weeks the island has sent highly skilled medical brigades to many countries including Italy, Grenada, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Venezuela to support foreign health services overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis.

On 18th March the Cuban government offered haven to passengers of the stricken British cruise ship MS Braemar allowing it to dock in Havana when many other countries, including the US, had refused. It has also made its anti-viral drug Interferon Alpha B available to nations around the world to help in the treatment of patients infected with Covid-19. Cuba's pride in Interferon Alfa 2b is a natural reaction given the international prestige enjoyed by the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology which produces the medication. Recombinant Human Interferon Alpha 2b continues to make headlines around the world given its effectiveness in treating patients

with the new SARS Cov-2 coronavirus, which causes the illness known as Covid-19.

Latin America and the Caribbean report more than 188,000 cases, 24.2% globally and 3,700 deaths by early April Cuba had 212 positive cases. Twelve were discharged after their recovery, including a 94-year-old woman. Six people had died, 2,742 'Covid-19 suspicious people' were hospitalised and received special medical follow-up, while another 26,278 are monitored from their homes for primary healthcare.

Continuing its tradition of solidarity, Cuba has offered medical assistance to other nations with 14 medical brigades from the contingent "Henry Reeve"\* of doctors specialised in disasters and epidemics, including 593 health professionals working to confront the epidemic in various countries.

At this time of international crisis, the US blockade is criminal, not only for its impact on the Cuban people, but also for hindering their ability to assist in the worldwide battle against the virus. Cuba has suffered the effects of the 58-year old United States blockade which causes daily shortages of food, fuel and other necessities. Last year the cost to the Cuban health sector alone amounted to more than \$104 million.

The SIPTU Solidarity with Cuba

Forum (SSWCF) has already sent fraternal best wishes and solidarity via the Cuban Ambassador in Dublin, Hugo Ramos, as well as eternal gratitude to the Cuban medical teams for their inspirational example of global solidarity. At the same time we are calling on the EU governments to make urgent representations to the US to end its blockade immediately, or at the very least to temporarily suspend it to allow vital supplies of food, fuel and medical equipment to the Cuban people. This is a chance to demonstrate our appreciation for Cuban solidarity. When he was in Liberty Hall last year, Fernando Gonzales of ICAP (Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples) advised that "Barack Obama partially lifted the blockade but did too little too late. Now is the time for the USA to do the right thing and lift the blockade."

In the last year, the US blockade cost Cuba more than \$4.3 billion. The blockade deprives Cuba of 12 million dollars every day and prevents the acquisition of essential goods for the Cuban people, including sanitary supplies, medicines and food. The most recent example is the refusal by North American carriers who, alleging the restrictions of the blockade, refused to transfer to Cuba a medical donation made by the Ali Baba company from China.

# Fundamental rights under threat in Europe

**A** CROSS Europe, restrictions on civil and political fundamental rights and freedoms are increasing. Bans on assembly, traffic subject to authorisation, limited movement of individuals, use of drones to track offenders, collection of geo-location data and governing by emergency laws are putting severe tests to those fundamental freedoms and rights which are at the heart of our democracies.

Some governments are using the crisis, as it was done in the framework of the 2008 economic crisis, to "temporarily" undermine and curtail human rights. Such legislative initiatives aim to reduce trade union rights and workers' rights and protections, particularly related to dismissals, working time, minimum wages, collective agreements and social

In Hungary, the government has basically eliminated the entire labour code and related autonomous collective agreements

dialogue, which are only increasing inequalities and placing the burden of the pandemic outbreak



Hungarian police officers at the Austrian border checkpoint in Hegyeshalom, northwestern Hungary, 17 March 2020. [EPA-EFE/Csaba Krizsan]

on the shoulders of workers.

On 31st March, the Polish Parliament 'Sejm' voted for a Bill which seriously restricts the independence of social partners and even allows the Prime Minister to dismiss members of the Social Dialogue Council, which Polish trade unions consider as the possible end of social dialogue in Poland.

In Hungary, the government has basically eliminated the entire labour code and related autonomous collective agreements. Hungarian trade unions have strongly criticised these measures regarding working life as they have been unilaterally made without any consultation with the social partners.

On the 30th March, a further step was taken when Prime Minister Viktor Orban acquired powers to extend the state of emergency for an indefinite period of time, without requiring the consent of the national parliament and through special decrees to suspend certain laws and take exceptional measures to guarantee "public health, the safety of citizens and the economy".

The indefinite and uncontrolled state of emergency measures will not guarantee the basic principles of democracy and clearly questions Hungary's respect and commitment to EU employment law, international labour conventions and the European social charter.

# MASI – Humane response needed for Direct Provision



**E**fforts of states' to tackle Covid-19 must not forget migrants and others who are particularly dependent on the state. This pandemic does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. Everyone in our community is at risk.

The Movement for Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) has said: "As has been widely documented, people living in Direct Provision often live in very close quarters, sharing living spaces and other facilities with multiple families and individuals. HSE guidelines have been posted on notice boards in Direct Provision centres and efforts were made to translate them into some foreign

languages. However, the HSE posters on social distancing are useless to an asylum seeker sharing a tiny bedroom with a stranger or as many as seven other strangers, having to use communal bathrooms and congregate in a canteen for meals three times a day.

The Government cannot leave those in direct provision at the mercy of private operators. This has already led to massive disparities in the way each centre is responding to the pandemic. Some centres have ceased the congregation of residents in canteens at mealtimes while others continue as normal with just Covid-19 notices on walls. There is growing anxiety among asylum seekers who have little or no control over their lives given their dependency on the State which needs to act fast to ensure the safety

and health of this vulnerable group in our society.

This current crisis must ensure that solidarity in our society is delivered equally. The discriminatory decision taken by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to exclude asylum seekers from the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment after they lost their jobs as a result of the crisis must be re-examined."

People should not be deprived of their rights to services just because their application has not been processed. In these exceptional times, the rights of migrants must be guaranteed. Humane and compassionate leadership must be shown by the Irish government during these difficult times. If we are truly 'all in this together' then urgent action is needed now.



Photo: A banana producer organisation in Ecuador has adapted its washing station to protect workers.  
(Photo courtesy: Fairtrade International)

# Global Fairtrade uses its system to protect vulnerable communities

**T**HROUGHOUT the world the global pandemic is affecting producer organisations, family farmers, and workers within the Fairtrade system.

The flower market in Africa, especially Kenya, is facing unprecedented challenges due to the inability to ship their goods to Europe via commercial airlines, which have stopped their routes. As a result, workers – whose livelihoods are already fragile – are being laid off or furloughed with uncertainty. Similar issues are facing flower farms in Ecuador.

Retail sales of bananas, coffee, and cocoa are still strong, but overall product sales numbers are suffering due to the lack of out-of-home sales from cafes and restaurants. Worldwide, shipping containers are in short supply, making supply chain continuity difficult.

Amid the chaos, the Fairtrade

system is acting quickly to ensure it mitigates any potential negative effects on farmers, workers, and their communities:

- In Ecuador, banana producers are sharing the bananas left over from their production with their local communities, where food is scarce.
- Sports ball producers in Pakistan have sewn face masks for their communities from cotton reserves in their factories.

Fairtrade International announced that certified producer organisations can use their Fairtrade Premium more flexibly during the crisis. The Premium is an extra sum on top of selling price

that producer organisations earn on every Fairtrade sale and invest in projects of their choice to benefit their businesses and communities.

This will allow worker-run Fairtrade Premium Committees in agreement with the local companies, to distribute up to 100% of their Fairtrade Premium funds as direct cash distributions to workers. (The normal guideline is 20% or 50% in certain circumstances.) In addition, the Fairtrade Premium will also be used to minimise the spread of disease, e.g. to purchase and distribute face masks or implement hygiene campaigns.



# Chilean Barbara Figueroa awarded Arthur Svensson Prize 2020

**I**N 2012, Barbara Figueroa became the youngest trade unionist and first woman to be elected as president of CUT Chile and, overall, at the top position of a major trade union centre in Latin America. One of her main tasks in the job was to lead the negotiations over a labour reform that would start the deconstruction of the laws imposed on workers by the Pinochet dictatorship.

Last year, as Chile experienced a wave of mass protests, Figueroa was on the front line of the struggle against inequality and demanding free public services for all. Despite the government's brutal crackdown on activists, pressure from trade unions and civil society eventually forced political parties to agree to a referendum on replacing the country's Pinochet-era constitution.

"Barbara belongs to a new generation of trade unionists and is committed to organising and fighting injustice side by side with working people. Chile is right now at a crossroads, and this prize is a deserved recognition to a leader



Chilean trade union leader Barbara Figueroa has been awarded the prestigious Arthur Svensson International Prize for Trade Union Rights, in recognition of her commitment as the leader of CUT Chile in fighting for social justice.

who is fully devoted to ensuring a fair and equal society by building workers' power," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

The privatised nature of public services and social security in Chile makes it one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent weeks, Figueroa denounced emergency laws passed by the government

suspending employment contracts, salaries and extending working hours through telework.

**For more information  
about the award visit:  
[www.svenssonstiftelsen.com](http://www.svenssonstiftelsen.com)**



To celebrate International Women's Day 2020, SIPTU held a joint event with the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) to raise awareness of the situation in Palestine. Over 300 people watched a documentary by Palestinian journalist and documentary filmmaker Rula Salameh to highlight the leading role played by Palestinian women in the first Palestinian intifada (uprising) in the late 1980s. Funds were raised for equipment for the Women's Union in Rafah, Gaza, pictured (left) sending their thanks for the support and solidarity.



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