

Cosatu International Solidarity Conference

Global unity renewed!

In June this year Cosatu held its first international conference. Cosatu's international officer **Bongani Masuku** gives background and tells how honesty and a lack of sacred cows is attempting to move global unity forward.

Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) represents a critical force in a global wave for the affirmation of working-class power and the struggle against global capitalism. This carries with it political responsibilities, which if not discharged properly, could be costly to the struggles of working people all over the world.

The Federation was born out of a struggle against apartheid capitalism and concluded that no struggle will defeat exploitation unless rooted in a class analysis of society. Cosatu has accumulated experience from its interaction with global forces and in the process, has advanced the political and organisational traditions of solidarity, both as a beneficiary and as a part of the forces ranged against imperialism.

After the defeat of apartheid in 1994 the federation intensified its international role, working with revolutionary forces all over the world. It supported the East Timorese struggle against the Suharto Junta, Nigerian workers against the Abacha military regime, Swaziland workers against the Mswati monarchy and a host of other working-class struggles, including in Palestine and Western Sahara. More recently solidarity with Zimbabwe has become a key part of our work.

In 2007, the federation realised the need for a review of its international work to identify how much has been done, what is being done, by whom and what the impact is. This led to Naledi (Cosatu's research wing) conducting a review its report informed our International Solidarity Conference in June.

Related, was an effort to coordinate solidarity efforts being waged by different forces in support of other people's struggles. This led to Cosatu hosting an International Solidarity workshop in Johannesburg, which brought together organisations to engage on these issues. The outcome included the idea of a network of organisations involved in international work, in the form of a South Africa International Solidarity Forum, with Cosatu as convener.

This in turn led to the Annual Solidarity Planning held every February to synchronise the activities of organisations involved in international solidarity work. These sessions discuss which struggles to prioritise without compromising the independence or individual identities of the structures. This has been implemented since then, not without challenges, obstacles and set-backs.

Linked to these activities was the idea of an International Solidarity School to deepen the important

values of internationalism and a Conference. It has not been possible to launch the School yet but it was decided that holding an International Conference was important in order to take recommendations to Cosatu's Congress.

The hosting of the Conference was a key part of a process to shape the federation's internationalist work. This has become particularly important in the context of changing conditions with capitalism in crisis and global struggles for democracy, anti-sexism, anti-racism and popular control over natural resources, having gained momentum. As a force for revolution and socialism, Cosatu cannot be uncertain in such moments.

The Conference brought together an array of social forces, activists and internationalists with workers from all Cosatu's affiliates. It reflected on the ebb and flow of the class struggle, as well as what dangers and opportunities we face.

We reflected on a number of themes, amongst them climate change and its impact on workers, trade union strategy on multinational corporations, transformation of multilateral institutions and democratisation of global power relations, renewal of the international union movement, the African political economy and finally, trade and the struggle for global economic justice.

It also engaged with the issue of Global Union Federations (GUFs) and how best to make them more responsive to the interests of workers, particularly those in the south where the world's poorest are found. We also reflected on the struggles of the people of Swaziland against an oppressive monarchy, Zimbabwe against a ruthless regime, Palestine against Israeli brutality, Burma against a harsh military junta, Western Sahara against the terror of colonising Morocco, and Cuba against US imperialism.

We reaffirmed our support for the struggles in these countries. We also reflected on the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC) where multinational companies are making profits out of the blood of local people, as warring factions are funded by competing corporate interests in the country.

The Conference was a powerful space for creative, frank and factual engagement. It benefited from the participation of activists and internationalists from all over the world including our Alliance partners, international trade unionists, revolutionaries from across the continent, social movement activists, progressive academics and researchers, and many other internationalists of note.

The Conference spared nobody, including GUFs and Cosatu employees in international bodies, as well as powerful northern interests that tend to dominate structures, and often dilute the content of radical struggles for their own interests. This results from their being more privileged in the global capitalist economy.

A frank assessment of our international systems and infrastructure was also made, with the benefit of the *Naledi Review Report* which dealt with these. This allowed us to develop an ambitious programme to take our work forward in a systematic manner.

Cosatu International Solidarity Conference Declaration

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is mostly the responsibility of developed countries, though developing countries are adopting the same predatory economic patterns that brought this disastrous situation. We affirm the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Owing to the destructive legacy of apartheid capitalism, South Africa is one of the biggest producers of carbon emissions. It has one of the highest levels of CO₂ emissions in the world beating China and India with bigger economies and populations.

Climate change is a worker issue and provides an opportunity to change our productive model. The transition to a 'green' and low carbon economy must address worker concerns and the impact of climate change on employment.

The possibilities for green jobs must take into account 'just transition' measures. Research into mitigation measures such as clean coal technologies, carbon capture and storage measures is necessary for a low carbon economy.

'Just transition' recognises the right of society to decide on environmental issues. Without 'just transition', workers and communities will pay most of the

cost of mitigation and adaptation.

'Just transition' is more flexible than traditional labour market adjustment programmes. It includes support for communities, industries and income protection for workers. It moves workers from existing jobs to emerging ones, and prepares them for the next phase. It protects union rights to create institutional stability in the transition period.

Governments and business agree climate change is real and have an interest in taking action, but they adopt market-driven solutions which do not challenge the capitalist paradigm

GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

The financial crisis of 2007-2009 has been far-reaching. Market-based and regulatory solutions have been implemented while conditions continue to worsen for the poor across the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

With the crisis in the US and other advanced economies, the developing world is feeling the impact, particularly Africa.

In many regions, including in the Middle East, we see encouraging progress towards stronger anti-imperialist organisations.

The most important is Venezuela

which provides hope for the struggle against neo-liberalism. For many years, working-class and progressive movements have been on the defensive. Venezuela provides an opportunity to link up with a revolution and to win a new generation of militants inspired by its example.

AFRICA'S ROLE IN GLOBAL ECONOMY

It is the raw materials, cheap labour and unfair market access to our economies that is indispensable for Western Europe and North America.

The lending terms by the IMF and World Bank to African and other developing countries created serious debt problems and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes arrested development.

Global economics have wrecked Africa in the post-colonial period. Only global elites and their counterparts in Africa benefit who plunder resources and destroy the environment.

Many African countries are exploring oil, which creates a pull towards Africa away from the Middle East. This is compounded by China which is the second largest consumer of oil after the US, hence its expansion in Africa.

Linked to this is the threat of an increased US military presence in

Africa to secure oil supplies.

The following is noted on Africa's position in the global economy:

The continent was partitioned by Europeans in 1873. Today it is part of the global capitalist economy, although it is still an extraction zone for raw materials that are benefited in advanced countries where they provide jobs and economic expansion.

China has joined the West as the new economic imperialist power. In Africa, through the dumping of goods and exploitation of oil deposits while Russia competes for the same space.

Revenue from the sale of commodities is not shared in African countries, like oil in Sudan, Nigeria and Angola, minerals in South Africa and DRC.

Agricultural produce from Africa has to compete with heavily subsidised US and European products in the world market, while multilateral institutions like the World Bank insist that Africa deregulates its economies.

Multinationals sell energy resources to governments, extracted from African soil, in dollars or at Import Parity Pricing rates, making them expensive in order to make massive profits, such as coal for electricity sold by BHP Billiton to Eskom in South Africa.

Trade relations are influenced by colonial designs, which in turn have a bearing on the political and economic development of Africa, and unions on the continent are no exception.

African states have low of infrastructure which impedes the movement of goods, services and people.

Some African countries prefer to trade with former colonial masters or countries from Europe. Bilateral trade agreements take away rights and sovereignty.

Tariffs, customs and excise duties are still maintained by countries as a source of revenue and some countries rely on donor aid from European and US governments.

Countries face the problem of poor education, illiteracy and skills shortages that do not match what they require, so that there will be perpetual, huge unemployment.

Big business can set the socio-

economic and political agenda and unions do not engage or are indifferent, due to weak and undemocratic structures or the absence of resources.

There is jobless economic growth in some countries, particularly in Angola and Mozambique. People from these countries migrate to other countries such as South Africa.

African unions tend to mimic Europe in structures and politics. We have to set the pace and agenda on issues and unions in Africa should be the anchor of a progressive movement throughout the continent in development and practical solidarity.

There is a growing movement for democracy and economic justice in Africa, but more needs to be done in building a continental force against oppression, dictatorships, wars, hunger and underdevelopment. It is workers and the poor, particularly women and youth, who suffer disproportionately. There are three critical areas of focus for Africa:

- Transformation and democratisation of the state.
- Alternative paths to neo-liberal economic development.
- Creating institutional capacity for participation of people in public life.

BUILDING A SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

We note the importance of participating in the World Social Forum (WSF) as an alternative space for reflection and inspiration. We must harness the Africa into an effective force for global change. However, we are worried about the trend to replace popular forces and mass-based movements with bureaucratic, largely northern based NGOs which, through massive resources wield influence in the Forum, without a mandate from the poor, mostly from the south. WSF, particularly the African and Southern African Social Forums.

Cosatu's efforts to unite solidarity activities should be encouraged through the building of a coordinating structure that brings together organisations and activities to maximise cohesion. This will ensure the sharing of resources and capacity, experiences and lessons, as well as support for smaller solidarity initiatives. It must ensure that Cosatu is

not over-stretched in its solidarity work.

The following are critical to building a solidarity movement in South Africa:

It must be rooted and led by South Africans, acting in solidarity with those in need of support. It shall be guided by countries of struggle and respect those in whose name solidarity is waged.

There is a need to develop a common understanding with social movements when dealing with local, regional and global issues, in the tradition of social movement unionism.

There must be one broad solidarity movement which calls solidarity networks to unify. This will focus Cosatu's role and promote solidarity action from people of different countries, instead of each group for itself. This does not mean an end to existing solidarity organisations, but coordination.

Cosatu should support the needs of each solidarity network without compromising its ability to raise concerns. However, it should not be the centre of coordination, but act as the forum convenor of solidarity work.

Often solidarity work is not results-oriented, but activity-driven e.g. marches, blockades, pickets, demonstrations. However, more could be done such as capacity building in countries, exchange programmes, documentation, food and material support, shelter for refugees, research and policy development, studying laws and conferences. This would increase the numbers involved in supporting struggles and broaden understanding.

Solidarity requires goals that build common themes and a momentum between those involved in solidarity and those in struggle in a country.

It is important that South Africans are mobilised to demonstrate solidarity with struggling peoples. It is key to conduct political education in order for them to understand the importance of international solidarity.

The solidarity movement should be politically non-partisan, broadly involving all social forces and people interested in supporting a cause, without allowing local politics to interfere.

The international movement must be

nation-wide and organised in all provinces.

Solidarity must be unconditional, not for personal gain and glory.

The solidarity movement must be progressive, democratic, accountable and involve all people interested in participating.

MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

An effective multilateral framework is necessary to maintain cohesion and stability in the global system. This requires institutions and rule systems founded on equity, democracy, inclusiveness, justice and fairness:

- The current system reflects power relations that favour developed countries at the expense of weak, poor countries.
- The benefits of the global economic system accrue to rich countries of the North, whilst poor countries of the South are losers.
- The system is not inclusive as it is based on nation states, with civil society excluded.
- Poor and rich, weak and strong are governed by the same rules and provisions.

An analysis of the United Nations reveals some positives:

- Some democracy prevails in the UN, especially at the General Assembly. As a result the big players like the US are contained.
- Most UN agencies provide for participation by civil society organisations.

However, the Security Council needs to change. The composition and consensus-based operations are out of touch with sound governance. The Council must become inclusive and democratic.

Reflections on finance and economic institutions: International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and World Bank.

Most injustices in the global system are found here. Their rules and programmes bring inequalities, unsustainable development and imbalances in the global system. In developing countries they have engendered impoverishment, de-industrialisation, commodification of social services and a reduced state role.

A review of these institutions is urgent, based on:

- Their dissolution and replacement by a single integrated institution, such as a Global Economic Council
- The new entity should be based on the membership of nation states and regional economic blocs. Where regional blocs do not enjoy the confidence of the people, they should be reconstituted.
- New multilateral structures should have agencies similar to the UN's.
- New structures should be inclusive and provide for the participation of mass civil society like unions, gender bodies, environmental and rural formations.
- It should embrace democratic practices, with no veto rights.
- It should have a tribunal and other dispute resolution mechanisms.
- It should promote development and equitable sharing of the benefits of the world economy.

As prelude to the shift to the new system the following should apply:

- Rules and programmes which affect developing countries negatively should be revoked. This must be a global campaign.
- Resources and other support must be provided for countries that suffered negative effects of programmes of existing institutions.
- The UN must constitute an inclusive interim multilateral structure for finance and economic issues until a proper one is instituted.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The most organised social force for the oppressed is the union movement, yet its effectiveness in shifting the global balance of power in favour of poor and working people is nowhere near its strength.

There is a lack of ideological clarity, narrow focus and lack of political will by leading elements of the international union movement. It fails to confront the global ruling class by marshalling its massive energies and utilising its networks towards global economic justice.

Often the union movement is guilty of

collaboration with capital or the state in the subjugation of the working class. The struggles of workers are uneven and so is their impact, owing to the uneven strengths of worker organisations and the class orientation of leading layers, who are not driven by a revolutionary outlook but by degrees of reformism, opportunism, autocratic leadership, careerism and bureaucratic centralism.

The union movement arose from the womb of capitalism as an attempt by workers to contest and secure a space within the system. But through experience in bitter struggles, workers learnt that the problem is the capitalist system itself.

The following are important in renewing the international union movement:

There is a need to ensure that international linkages are not blind to the situation of workers in the South, and that the 'Northern perspective' which often dominates union relations is challenged and 'democratised'.

We must lead by example, and provide support and practical solidarity in South Africa, the region and continent.

We must ensure that information and the good work of GUFs are available to members, and that its relevance is explained and engagement with it encouraged.

We should use the experience and knowledge of union comrades in the leadership of the international union movement to strengthen strategies to rebuild the movement.

We should ensure that international linkages are not restricted to leadership, bureaucratic matters or union trips, but play a role in strengthening worker-to-worker contact and solidarity.

We must build alliances with progressive social and political movements around achieving key demands, and acknowledge that the crisis of capitalism requires a greater commitment to building unity in action amongst the poor, oppressed and organised working class.

We pledge to support measures to strengthen union organisation across the continent and embrace the creative approaches of the new leadership of the

ITUC which is emphasising organising at grass roots levels.

We must encourage transparency, accountability and commitment to practical action in internationals.

As Cosatu, we must make common cause with like minded movements elsewhere (such as the positive experience of working within Sigtur), perhaps on a platform of worker control (accountability, transparency, democracy), committed to fighting divisive elements like racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia, and ensure union independence.

Finally we are for a socialist alternative to neo liberalism, and for measures that empower workers by building a vibrant, mass movement.

Calls for solidarity with all struggling against oppression:

We will support struggling and poor people globally, in their desire for freedom, dignity and economic justice. We note:

Palestine: we continue to call for the intensification of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Campaign against Israel, which occupies Palestinian lands and expands settlements in wars of conquest as in Gaza. We call for the isolation of Histadrut, Israel's racist trade union, which supports the occupation of Palestine and the inhumane treatment of Arab workers in Israel. We must launch a Cultural Boycott Campaign against Israel in South Africa, which should be part of the global movement.

Zimbabwe: we note the composition of the GNU (government of national unity) and the evolving constitution-making process. However we support the call by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and civil society, for a people-driven constitution making process that leads to democratic elections and a legitimate government.

We remain ready to work with our counterparts in pressuring the regime to accede to people's demands.

We note the continued persecution of activists in a supposedly changed environment.

We support civil society initiatives led

by Cosatu, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa and the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum for a conference in Botswana to assess the GNU, conditions under the Terrorism Law in Swaziland, transformation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and building a regional solidarity movement.

Swaziland: we note the need for a more radical strategy to force the regime to release People's United Democratic Movement (Pudemo) president Mario Masuku and urban political parties for the speedy move towards democracy.

We note the need to build global solidarity with Swaziland, led by the people and their organisations, particularly the democratic movement. We must mobilise resources and capacity for sanctions against the regime.

Western Sahara: we note the plunder of natural resources of Western Sahara by the Morocco and foreign interests. This is in breach of international principles on using the natural resources of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the UN Charter.

The Western Sahara is rich in natural resources such as phosphates and a coastline containing some of the world's richest and most productive fisheries.

We call for the building of a solidarity movement in South Africa to raise the plight of Western Sahara and for the involvement of all Alliance partners of the mass democratic movement.

Burma is rich in natural resources and was once one of the wealthiest countries in Southeast Asia. After 37 years of military rule it is one of the poorest and has one of the worst human rights records in the world. We must intensify work with the Burmese people and their organisations for the release of the democratically elected leader of the progressive forces, Aung Suu Kyi and for the isolation of the junta.

Cuba: we continue to draw inspiration from the achievements of the Cuban revolution and are determined to learn more from their advances in health,

education, development, ecological justice and the popular participation in public life and decision-making in their country.

We call for the unconditional release of the Cuban five in US jails and the ending of the embargo by the US supported by the EU. We need to intensify our participation in the campaign to support Cuba, including waging ideological engagements in defence of Cuba.

XENOPHOBIA

It is a year since xenophobic attacks resulted in 62 working-class people being killed in South Africa. Queues to obtain refugee status remain long and attacks on immigrants continue and sometimes involve the police. The police also increase refugees' insecurity through raids on immigrant families.

There have been no convictions for xenophobic acts of violence, and a small number of convictions for theft and damage to property. There have been unhelpful statements by politicians and public figures about Zimbabweans returning to their country now that 'stability' has been restored. This does not take into account the poverty, unemployment and repression in Zimbabwe. Home Affairs continues to act in an inhumane manner, and there is evidence of corruption and illegal detentions in Lindela, a privatised deportation facility.

WAY FORWARD

We must hold a workshop of all unions as soon as possible to:

- examine what unions have done to tackle xenophobia and make this information known;
- explore how to deepen a workers internationalist perspective on the migration of labour, immigration, safety and security;
- share ideas for a progressive anti-xenophobia campaign that can be taken into workplaces, communities and unions;
- prepare an input into affiliate and Cosatu congresses. LB

This is an edited version of the Declaration.