

### **What's a Global Agreement?**

An Agreement between a global (multinational) company and UNI Global Union on behalf of the unions which represent its employees anywhere in the world.

### **Why?**

When companies were local, unions had local agreements; when companies were national, unions had national agreements. Now in the global economy we need global agreements.

### **What's in it for the company? Lots!**

In this era of calls for greater social responsibility, lots of companies include mission statements or solemn commitments in their annual reports.

But today, with all the corporate scandals and scepticism, who believes just the words?

A global agreement is not just an employer's word.

It is a signed agreement with the people employed by the company

It gives the company's claims credibility because it allows for monitoring.

With investors and pension funds paying much greater attention to company image and ethical investment, this can be a big plus for any global corporation.

### **But what's in it? Whatever the global union and the company want in it.**

In practice, this means a commitment:

- To observe International standards for the recognition of the right to join a trade union, to bargain collectively and to non-discrimination in employment;
- To never use child labour or forced labour;
- To observe decent working conditions;
- To adhere to good environmental standards;

### **Do national unions have to give up decision making power?**

*No, UNI Global Union insists on the importance of creating trade union alliances, bringing together all unions in any company. They decide themselves what to demand, how to work together to get an agreement, how to work together to monitor and enforce the agreement.*

### **What's in it for the union?**

If a company agrees to leave open the door to union organisation, then it's up to the unions to build on this. Increasingly UNI trade union alliances have been able to obtain agreements to allow trade union access to employers with success e.g. one UNI affiliate in Brazil can claim to have more than doubled its membership in this way.

For the unions in the home country of the company, it means international questions become a legitimate subject of discussion and negotiation with the management. This can be crucial when, for example, a company wishes to outsource work to another country.

Some unions have negotiated their own globalisation agreement with companies;

- any off-shoring must be the subject of prior discussion with the union;
- there must be guarantees of no redundancies;
- and assurances that the ILO standards, including the right to organise, will be respected in those countries to which work is transferred.

### **Do you have to negotiate the standards with every company? No**

The International Labour Organisation, ILO, a part of the United Nations, has established standards – agreed by governments, employers and unions – covering almost all these issues.

All the employers and unions have to do in the global agreement is commit to respecting these standards

### ***You want to set wages and conditions world-wide? No***

We cannot substitute for direct negotiations between companies and workers at the national level. However, in the era of globalisation, companies shift production and services to almost any part of the globe.

The global agreement is a way for the company to say: wherever we go in the world, we will observe civilised internationally recognised standards; we will offer decent work and jobs. In short, "we will be decent global corporate citizens".

### ***Yes, but has any company signed up?***

UNI already has agreements with:

- Carrefour, France – Commerce
- Euradius, Netherlands – Graphical
- Falck, Denmark – Property Services
- France Telecom, France – Telecom
- H&M, Sweden – Commerce
- ISS, Denmark – Property Services
- Metro, Germany, Commerce
- NAG, Australia - Finance
- Nampak, South Africa - Graphical
- OTE, Greece – Telecom
- Portugal Telecom, Portugal, Telecom
- Quebecor, Canada, - Graphical
- Securitas, Sweden – Property Services
- Telefonica, Spain – Telecom
- UPU, UN Agency

and there will be more...

### ***We are not alone***

Other [Global Union Federations](#) have signed more than 60 agreements with companies such as:

- IFBWW - IKEA (furniture), Sweden and Faber-Castell (pencils), Germany
- IUF - Danone (food), France and Accor (hotels), France
- IMF - Volkswagen (cars), Germany and Daimler Chrysler, (cars) Germany
- ICEM, Statoil (energy), Norway and Endesa (electricity), Spain

And there are others

### ***How do we monitor them?***

Monitoring systems can range from simple agreements for the company and UNI to meet when and wherever necessary to fully-fledged internal audit systems operating at all levels in the company.

The most important monitors are our union members.

They can report to UNI on any developments, changes or actions which might not be in accord with the spirit of the agreement.

They can alert their national union and the global union to take up questions with the company.

It is even better if we have a procedure which allows UNI and the company to meet on a regular basis to exchange information and views about any matters which affect the company and its employees.

### ***Do the global agreements help solve conflicts/strikes/disputes?***

The agreements are not designed to resolve all conflicts that inevitably arise from time to time.

However, by facilitating the exchange of information, letting workers know what the long term plans of the company are, what the company and the workers see as problems – before they become problems – can help to prevent conflict arising.

Even where conflict occurs, the dialogue between unions and company, the mutual confidence built up, can mean that intervention by the global management with the global union can help resolve conflicts more quickly.

### ***What do we do if the employer does not respect the agreement?***

These are voluntary agreements. So the employer should always want to respect them.

In those cases where subsidiary or associated companies are found not to be respecting the global agreement, the case has to be taken up with the parent multinational. Hopefully most problems could be resolved in this way. However, if the parent company is reluctant, or slow in taking action, it must be aware that its reputation and its image are at stake.

Through UNI and our affiliates throughout the world we can make sure that everybody knows the company is not keeping its commitment.

### ***How do we get one? "if you don't ask, you don't get"***

But it's best for a lot of people to ask at the same time.

That's why at UNI we encourage first the formation of a trade union alliance to create links between unions in different countries with members in the same company.

We have created alliances in a number of companies.

They can meet or sometimes start by forming a virtual committee linking people over the Internet as we have done for DHL, Vodafone, Singtel, SBC and Telstra.

Together they decide what kind of agreement they want. Then as UNI, we go to the company and negotiations begin.

### ***And now it's your turn:***

#### ***Does your union have members in any global companies?***

What are you doing to get:

- a globalisation agreement;
- a global alliance of unions in the company
- a global agreement through UNI

**Put Global Agreements on your Union Agenda.**

Contact: Philip Bowyer, UNI Deputy General Secretary: [philip.bowyer@uniglobalunion.org](mailto:philip.bowyer@uniglobalunion.org)