

DECEMBER 2018 UPDATE



WOMEN LEADERS OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The Guatemala City Cemetery, like the city in which it's built, is a sprawling and chaotic place. The women in charge of its maintenance not only face a considerable amount of work, they are also constantly exposed to accidents, given they work under virtually no health and safety protection. FESTRAS, a partner of the Steelworkers Humanity Fund in Guatemala, represents these workers in defending their rights. Last fall, they shared their story with a delegation of three Canadian Women of Steel and representatives from women's organizations from eight countries in Latin America.

This meeting was part of an annual exchange organized by the Steelworkers Humanity Fund, a unique opportunity for women from different horizons and work sectors to gain insights from each other's rich experience. This year, the delegation focused on promoting women's leadership, in order to better understand the myths, obstacles and challenges women face in becoming leaders.





All photos by Laura Ramirez

Even though their lived experience might be very different, many parallels can be drawn around the existence of negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and the lack of support for women to take on these roles given family responsibilities. They also explored different styles of leadership and the responsibilities that come with it, discussing ways in which unions, women's organizations and other allies could help promote women's rights and women's access to decision-making spaces. In addition to the cemetery workers, the delegation also met with FritoLay women workers and Indigenous women organizations to hear about their working conditions and the challenges they face as women in Guatemala.

By the end of the exchange, participants such as Karrie-Ann Giardino (USW Local 7916) felt inspired to continue this struggle at home: "while as Canadians we have come a long way in our fight for equality, labour rights and better working conditions, we must never become complacent with what we have. We must push for further improvements so that others may see what can be accomplished with solidarity." All the participants felt better prepared to break with barriers and inspire and empower other women to change social patterns in their own organizations and communities.

To learn more about the Steelworkers Humanity Fund

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