

# 2023

## Members' Report



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## Contributing our grain of sand to global solidarity

Following a year marked by transitions, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) has developed solid bases to continue to convey Steelworker union solidarity around the world and in our own backyard. Whether by developing opportunities for member engagement, advocating for the rights of workers, or supporting the activities of inspiring partner organizations, this annual report provides an overview of important initiatives made possible through USW member contributions in 2023.

This year's report provides a unique view into the multiple themes that the SHF touches on internationally, starting in Colombia, where our dedicated partners enable local communities to overcome key issues to their development. We will also explore how worker-to-worker networks and exchanges have held such an important space through our history, and why workers in the same sector or with the same employer gain significant advantages from building union connections and



USW staff and members from locals 5890, 5917, and 6717 presenting a donation cheque to the Regina Food Bank.



solidarity. We will also touch on new initiatives in Brazil and elsewhere to support women workers in predominantly male industries and occupations, and the inspiring women who made this work possible.

**Whether by developing opportunities for member engagement, advocating for the rights of workers, or supporting the activities of inspiring partner organizations, this annual report provides an overview of important initiatives made possible through USW member contributions in 2023.**

While international solidarity has been at the core of the SHF’s work, an important part of our support each year focuses on supporting organizations and initiatives in Canada, and 2023 has been no



Activists from Mulheres Que Reagem in Brazil participate in a workshop focused on organizing and combating violence and racism in impoverished neighborhoods.



Workshop with community leaders in Buenaventura.

exception. While issues of food security tend to receive the most attention given our annual donations to local food banks and emergency relief, this report will also highlight our work on key social justice issues such as the situation of temporary foreign workers. Last but not least, you will also read how the SHF’s emergency relief has shifted in response to reflect growing instances of climate change-related emergencies.

Finally, throughout the year, we received sombre reminders of the real risks regularly faced by trade union activists. In some of the countries in which our partners are active, defending workers’ rights can result in harassment, intimidation, sometimes risks for one’s job, and in some extreme cases such as what we have seen in Honduras, Madagascar and Bangladesh, threats to one’s life and freedom. The SHF continues to seek its inspiration from the dedication and sacrifice of trade unionists, as we help contribute the Steelworkers’ grain of sand to a better world.

Remembering slain trade union activists in 2023.



**XIOMARA COCAS**



**DELMER GARCIA**



**SHAHIDUL ISLAM**



**JOSÉ RUFINO ORTIZ**



**LESTER ALMENDAREZ**

# Sustainable development and the rights of local communities: focus on Colombia

The SHF supports projects worldwide that strive to promote and defend the rights of local communities. In Colombia, a country characterized by high levels of inequality, our partners have been active on a range of issues, including the civic inclusion of marginalized populations.

One of those key partnerships has been focussed on Buenaventura, a city of half a million inhabitants, of which a large majority is Afro-Colombian. Buenaventura is the largest port in Colombia, generating important revenues for the state, but 80% of its population lives in poverty, and 41% in extreme poverty. Many do not have access to basic services including water, sewage, housing, health and quality education, or decent employment.

But in 2017, following decades of marginalization and racism, the people of Buenaventura took to the streets. Over 20 days, what became known as the "Civic Strike to live with dignity and peace in the territory" mobilized local civil society. An agreement

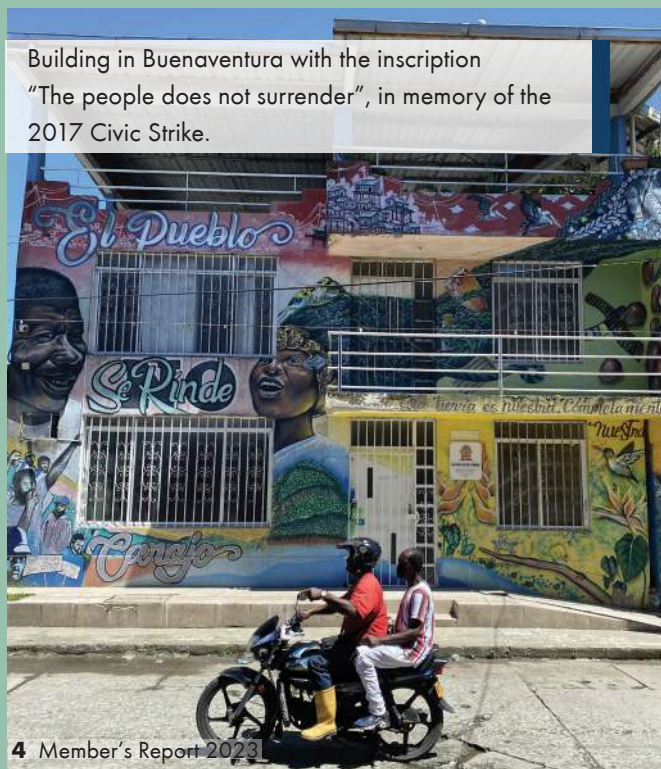


Part of the Fundación Aribí team.

was eventually reached between the protesters and the Colombian government to implement the changes that the residents of Buenaventura were demanding. For many, this process also represented an awakening with regards to their right to live in dignity.

However, nothing guaranteed the effective implementation of the agreements reached during the strike. This is why over the past two years, with support from the SHF, local organization Fundación Aribí has coordinated a project to strengthen the Civic Strike movement among its bases and envision new ways for the population, especially youth, to participate and live within the Buenaventura they desire. In 2023, organizers conducted workshops with representatives of local cultural, union and community activist groups, who replicated the training with members of their own organizations. Students in local high schools also participated in workshops, and then conducted awareness raising activities with their peers. To further the goal of advancing gender equity, the organizers ensured an overall parity was reached between women and men participants.

In 2024, Fundación Aribí plans a further expansion of outreach activities and ongoing networking between participating community organizations, so that the people of Buenaventura can continue holding the authorities accountable to their responsibilities.





# Building worker to worker solidarity through supply chains

USW members increasingly work for multinational employers with the capacity to shift production to regions where lower labour standards prevail or offset lost revenue due to a strike in Canada from other sites around the world. In this context, a strong union in a single workplace may not be enough to challenge a powerful employer.

Amid difficult strikes and lockouts, or opportunities to organize new workplaces or make gains in bargaining, the USW has formed strategic alliances with unions around the world. These relationships have helped connect workers in some of the world's largest multinationals. These networks share information and write joint letters of solidarity, and in some cases, act as "world councils" of unions to pressure employers to raise working conditions and wages to a higher common standard. The logic is simple: even on opposite sides of the world, workers are stronger together.

The SHF has often had a key role in bringing networks together. Worker-to-worker exchanges have allowed those employed in the same sector or with the same employer to compare their workplaces and national contexts. This experience can be eye opening for both Canadian USW members and participants from countries in the Global South. Not just a form of

charity, these initiatives build relationships between equals. The creative and courageous tactics applied by our allies, often under conditions not only of deep poverty but also of government repression and employer impunity, have inspired USW members and helped revitalize our own union practices.

In late 2023, the SHF supported the launch of a network of unions at Newmont, which through its acquisition of mining companies employing hundreds of members in Districts 3 and 6, became the world's largest gold miner. The USW has since joined unions in Mexico, Peru and Argentina to share information and support each other in their interactions with the employer. Through these initial dialogues, it has emerged that union-management relations and the treatment of workers and communities vary widely. The USW hopes to raise conditions up to a higher common standard. The SHF will continue to help build the necessary networks of solidarity to make this a reality.

*If your local is interested in exploring ways to build international solidarity within your sector, please contact SHF Project Officer Paul Bocking: [pbocking@usw.ca](mailto:pbocking@usw.ca).*

Union leaders including District 6 Director Myles Sullivan in Lima, Peru, at the Newmont unions network launch.





Sharen Brownson, president of Local 9422 (District 6) during the women's delegation to Mexico.

## Women/Femmes/Mujeres working to accelerate change

In every corner of the world, women are faced with a gender inequality gap that, according to global indicators, will take 132 years to eliminate. This means that at least five generations of women will continue to face disadvantages and barriers compared to their male counterparts.

It is challenging not to feel disheartened at the slow pace of change and to continue making a case for women's issues to be at the forefront of our social justice and advocacy efforts. Despite evidence that the road to achieving better outcomes for women in the global workforce and leadership positions is far from over, the SHF wants to hail the women who are examples of determination and strength whom we were fortunate to work with, as well as many other as part of our projects and activities in 2023.

In Brazil, Alba Almeida is the president of "Mulheres que Reagem" (women who react), an organization led by Afro-Brazilian women living in low-income neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro. In 2023, the SHF provided them with funding for education and training courses to women in welding and quality inspection. The objective was to open new employment opportunities in typically male-dominated occupations. As one participant in the training stated, "make way because I'm here to claim my spot! This project gave

me a unique opportunity to take a premium quality course and even mentor us in the job search. These jobs are not just for men."



Alba Almeida

2023 has been a difficult year of layoffs for garment workers in Honduras who make clothes sold in Canada. In this context, the SHF got to meet resilient women like Rosa Quiroz, a worker and union leader at the Delta Honduras Garment Factory. Rosa credits the work of the Independent Monitor Team (EMIH), the SHF's main partner in the country, as fundamental in her union education journey and feminist activism. Rosa spoke about attending the diploma program on ergonomics facilitated by EMIH: "When I spoke about workers' health issues, I felt that I was not only sharing concepts or suggestions, but also offering my own real-life experiences at the factory." As a result of her



participation with EMIH, she joined the health and safety committee in her workplace, then later her union's collective bargaining committee. She now contributes to improving of the working conditions of all her colleagues.



Rosa Quiroz

Workers' exchanges or delegations are learning opportunities for USW union members to travel to a new setting, learn about the local labour context, and meet other workers fighting for their rights. In September 2023, Johanne Gosselin from District 5 joined our nine-woman delegation to Mexico City. She shared with workers in Mexico her work at the union and years of experience in collective bargaining as a member of the executive of USW Local 1976 and unit president in the telecommunications sector.



Johanne Gosselin, Local 1976

The Mexico delegation also included women like Ninfa Cayo, a fearless labour leader in her native Bolivia who is one of only three women leaders at the National Federation of Mining Unions of Bolivia. Ninfa, an Aymara-speaking woman, is a proud miner who aspires to elevate the lives of all working women. She is also training to become a lawyer and speaks passionately for workers' rights.



Ninfa Cayo

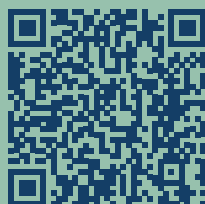
At the October USW International Women's Conference in Pittsburgh, the SHF's impact was on full display when Sharen Brownson from District 6, president of Local 9422 shared the stage with Imelda Jimenez, Political Affairs Secretariat from the Los Mineros union in Mexico. Sharen and Imelda told to the hundreds of USW sisters present their experiences at the recent international workers' exchange and made a case for the importance of global solidarity within our union.



Sharen Brownson and Imelda Jimenez

These and many other inspiring women with whom the SHF collaborates are not waiting for changes to take place, and for barriers to be dismantled on their own; everyday they enact the change they want to see in favor of gender equity.

Check out our video from the 2023 women's delegation to Mexico!



## Canadian Program

Every year, an important part of the SHF's resources is dedicated to providing grants or support to organizations in Canada, seeking to address issues that very often should not be those of a "developed" country, but unfortunately are.

Food insecurity continues to affect a growing number of Canadians who, due to rising living costs, rely on food banks to make ends meet. In 2023, the SHF supported 124 food banks across Canada, in an effort to alleviate the economic hardships of individuals and families in communities where Steelworkers live and work. And when climate change-fuelled disaster struck across the three districts, the SHF responded by contributing a total of \$125,000 in emergency relief for victims of wildfires.

Reflecting on the growing reliance on the Temporary Foreign Worker program (TFW) by Canadian employers, the SHF has partnered with organizations that support the rights of these workers. For example, in Northumberland County, Ontario, Horizons of Friendship has provided much-needed assistance to workers who have been coming to work in the region's fields for many years. With deep roots in the community, this organization helps connect migrant workers with legal services and mental health support.

In Montreal, the SHF provided support to RATTMAQ, the Support Network to Agricultural Migrant Workers in Quebec. This organization has been growing at a steady pace to face the demand caused by the exponential growth of agricultural workers arriving in Canada with temporary work permits tied to only one employer. After years working and learning from



Whitehorse USW Member Shane Hurst presenting a donation cheque to a local food bank.

migrant workers' experiences, in December 2023, RATTMAQ organized an international forum that brought together over a hundred participants from Canada, Mexico and Guatemala to strengthen their practices and advocacy in the defence of the rights of workers. Around the same time, the District 5 Annual Assembly was echoing some of the fundamental demands of RATTMAQ and its allies for the creation of pathways to permanent residence as the best way to prevent further abuse of workers, now present in all sectors of the economy.

The SHF will continue to support Canadian partner organizations on this and other important local issues such housing as they gain importance across our country.

**In 2023, the SHF supported 124 food banks across Canada**



Participants at the RATTMAQ international forum, December 2023





Photo credits from left to right: Islamic Relief (Morocco earthquake), Canadian Red Cross (Nova Scotia fires), Islamic Relief (Libya floods)

# Emergency relief

In the face of natural and human-made disasters, The SHF has been providing essential assistance such as food, shelter, and healthcare to those in need, both in Canada and across the globe.

From earthquakes to hurricanes to wars, USW members from across the country, through their important contributions to the SHF, have demonstrated unconditional solidarity for now close to forty years.

As we collectively confront more crises and the escalating challenges posed by global warming, let us remember the profound impact of our collective solidarity, compassion, and support in facing global challenges and building stronger, more resilient communities.

In 2023, the SHF responded to the following national and international emergencies:



Credit: OXFAM Canada (Gaza, Palestine)

## Turkey and Syria February 2023

The SHF donated **\$15,000** to Islamic Relief in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the southeastern region of Turkey and the northern area of Syria.

## Canada Summer 2023

Throughout the summer of 2023, the SHF contributed a total of **\$115,000** towards disaster relief and recovery efforts in response to the wildfires that ravaged various regions across the three provinces.

## Morocco September 2023

SHF contributed **\$7,500** to the Canadian Red Cross to support its relief efforts in response to the 6.8-magnitude earthquake that hit southern Morocco.

## Libya September 2023

The SHF donated **\$12,500** to Islamic Relief to assist in providing emergency shelter, food, water, blankets, and other essential items to those affected by the floods in Libya.

## Gaza (Palestine) November 2023

The SHF provided a **\$10,000** donation to Oxfam Canada to support civilians in Gaza who have been facing starvation and lacking medical assistance. This aid aimed to alleviate the humanitarian crisis amid the ongoing conflict.

# YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS AT WORK AROUND THE WORLD IN 2023

## CANADA



- CNCA – Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability / RCRCE – Réseau canadien pour la reddition de compte des entreprises
- Common Frontiers
- Réseau d'aide aux travailleuses et travailleurs migrants agricoles du Québec (RATTMAQ)
- Community Food Centres / Centres communautaires d'alimentation du Canada
- Qajukturvik Community Food Centre
- Horizons of Friendship / Horizons d'amitié
- Jeunes musiciens du monde
- Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)
- Projet accompagnement solidarité Colombie (PASC)
- Breaking the Silence (BTS)

## CENTRAL AMERICA / AMÉRIQUE CENTRALE



**MEXICO**  
**MEXIQUE**

**HONDURAS**

**GUATEMALA**

- CCDA – Comité campesino del Altiplano, Guatemala
- EMIH - Equipo de Monitoreo Independiente de Honduras
- Comité fronterizo de obreras, Mexico / Mexique
- DESMI – Social and Economic Development for Indigenous Mexicans, Chiapas / Développement économique et social des autochtones mexicains, Chiapas
- FAT - Authentic Workers Front, Mexico / Front authentique des travailleurs, Mexique
- Los Mineros, Mexico / Mexique
- Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas (RMS), Mexico / Mexique

## SOUTH AMERICA / AMÉRIQUE DU SUD



**COLOMBIA**  
**COLOMBIE**

**PERU**  
**PÉROU**

**BOLIVIA**  
**BOLIVIE**

- Corporación para la Educación Popular y el Trabajo (CEPEP), Colombia / Colombie
- Fundación Aribí, Colombia / Colombie
- Vida Viva Colombia Network / Réseau de la Vie, Colombie
- THANI, Peru / Pérou
- Red de Mujeres y Minería, Bolivia / Bolivie
- Flora Tristan, Bolivia / Bolivie
- Mulheres que Reagem, Brazil / Brésil

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS / AUTRES CONTRIBUTIONS

- Clean Clothes Campaign
- 50th anniversary of the military coup in Chile commemorations / Commémorations du 50e anniversaire du coup d'État au Chili
- Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)



# VOS CONTRIBUTIONS AU TRAVAIL DANS LE MONDE EN 2023



## ASIA / ASIE



- BCWS – Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity / Centre de solidarité ouvrière du Bangladesh
- Maharashtra Building, Construction, Forest and Wood Workers Union, India / Syndicat des travailleurs du bâtiment, de la construction, de la foresterie et du bois du Maharashtra, Inde
- Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), Nepal / Institut des affaires culturelles (IAC), Népal

## AMÉRIQUE DU SUD



- Popular – Instituto
- Colombia / Colombie
- Colombia
- seau Viva Vida
- / Bolivie
- rsil

## AFRICA / AFRIQUE



- Bench Marks Foundation, South Africa / Fondation Bench Marks, Afrique du Sud
- Camp for Peace, Liberia / Camp pour la paix, Libéria
- ILRIG - International Labour Research and Information Group, South Africa / Groupe international de recherche et d'information sur le travail, Afrique du Sud
- Sendika Kristianina Malagasy (SEKRIMA), Madagascar
- Syndicalisme et Vie des Sociétés (SVS), Madagascar

## AMÉRIQUE CENTRALE

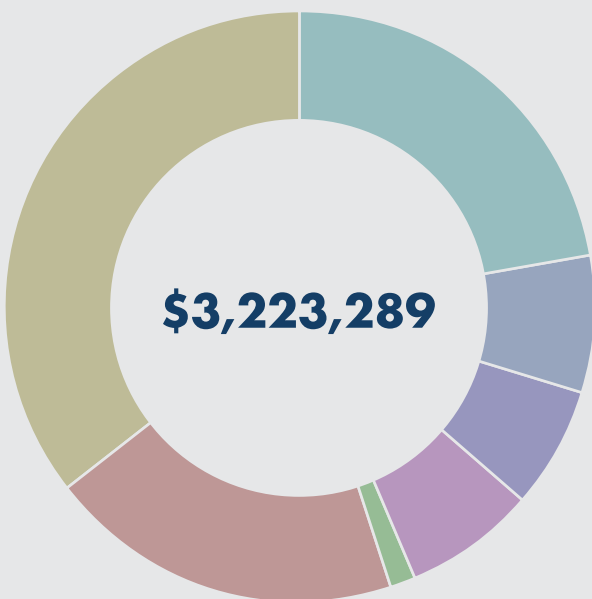
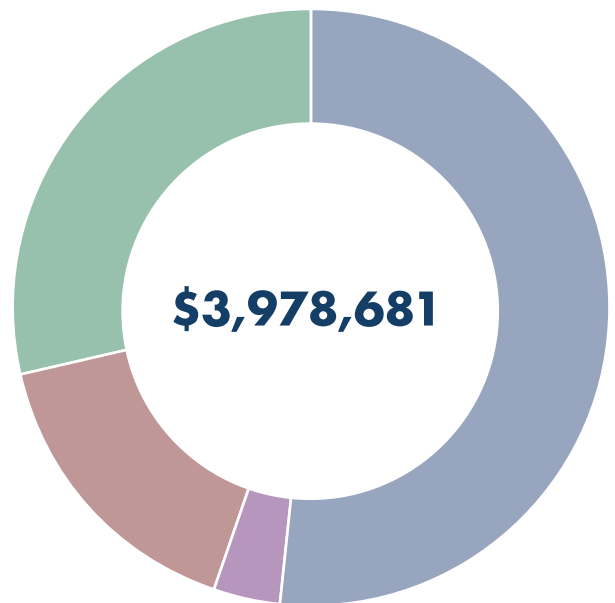
- Logistical support to the Military Diary case trial, Guatemala / Appui logistique au procès du cas du journal militaire, Guatemala
- Honduras Solidarity Network (Rights Action)
- FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto
- Mining Watch Canada (Justice for Mariano Abarca Campaign) / Mines Alerte Canada (Campagne Justice pour Mariano Abarca)
- Refugee sponsorships / Appui à la réinstallation de réfugiés
- New Traditions Music (Wheel It Studios)
- Etc.



Canadian Women of Steel activists with workers from Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico during the 2023 SHF women delegation to Mexico.

## Where our money comes from

- Steelworkers members contributions
- Local union contributions (not through CBA)
- Corporate accountability program
- ESDC grant for Mexico Labour Solidarity Project



## Where our money goes

- Canadian and international projects
- Food banks and other charitable organizations
- Climate change and other emergency relief
- Project support and development
- Administration
- Corporate accountability program
- Mexico Labour Solidarity Project





Scan the QR code to watch the SHF 2023 Highlights video!



**2023**  
**HIGHLIGHTS**





STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE  
JULY 2023

# FEELING THE HEAT OF GLOBAL WARMING: RESPONDING TO A GROWING EMERGENCY



Rescuing wildfire evacuees in Alberta's hot lands.

2023 has been a difficult year for many countries as we wrestle with the devastating impacts of global warming and increasing global temperatures. Heat and extreme weather patterns have distressing consequences for humans, nature, communities, and workers exposed to dangerous conditions. July 2023 has reported some of the hottest days recorded across many places in Asia, Europe and North America.

These recent heatwaves were also felt close to home and across Canada from West to East, as wildfires raged in Alberta, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, both for and near inhabited areas. In those provinces, massive forest fires led to the displacement of thousands of people and the hardship felt by communities where USW members work and live.

The Steelworkers Humanity Fund has a mandate to provide emergency aid at home and abroad

when urgent humanitarian needs emerge. This is why we responded promptly to support immediate relief and recovery operations for affected communities and emergency preparedness as well as risk reduction for future disasters. Thanks to the support of our members, we donated a total of \$105,000-dollars to the Canadian Red Cross, sometimes doubling our impact through matching donations provided by provincial governments.

Recent years have seen an increasingly clear pattern of national and global disasters directly linked to the impact of climate change, like wildfires and floods, but also increased food insecurity. Those events have daily and ongoing effects on the lives of people, workers and communities. The scientific community is unanimous: we will see a lot more of this if no immediate actions are taken to limit fossil fuel emissions. Global warming is here, and we must decide how to confront it.



STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE  
SEPTEMBER 2023

# BUILDING SOLIDARITY BETWEEN THE MEXICAN AND CANADIAN LABOUR MOVEMENTS AND BEYOND



Mexican workers meet local USW members at ABB Barrer.

For many decades in Mexico, it was virtually impossible to form a genuine union due to collusion between employers, the government and company-controlled unions. Workers petitioning to unionize confronted huge legal obstacles and the threat of violence. Since 2019, labour reforms under Mexico's progressive national government have created new protections, as have provisions in the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement, enabling workers to file complaints against companies in Mexico that export to the USA or Canada.

This context has created an opening for organizing. Through house visits, workshops, public forums, radio broadcasts and podcasts, labour activists in Mexico have been working hard to raise awareness of the new reform and how to use it. For two years now, USW allies including the Border Workers' Committee (CFO), the Authentic Labour Front (FAT), the Mine, Metal and Steel Workers Union (Ios Mineros) and the Network of Union Women (RMS) have been supported in their efforts by

the Steelworkers Humanity Fund and the Canadian Labour Congress, PSAC, Social Justice Fund, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Centre International de Solidarité Ouvrière (CISO) - with funding from Employment and Social Development Canada.

As part of its objectives, the Mexico Labour Solidarity Project aims to build solidarity between unions in Canada and Mexico. In this context, in March 2023, a delegation of Canadian unionists including USW National Director Mary Warren traveled to the industrial city of Torreón and to the Mexican capital. Shortly after, in April and May 2023, Mexican unionists attended the USW National Policy Conference, before meeting unionists in Ottawa and around Montreal, where they were hosted by local 9700 on a tour of the ABB Balzacour aluminum plant. Across the many meetings during these delegations, bonds of solidarity were strengthened, and new plans were made for cross-border projects.



STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE  
DECEMBER 2023

# UNION LEADERS AT RISK



Garment workers in a factory in Bangladesh. Credit: Steelworkers Humanity Fund.

Organizing a union and fighting for workers' rights is never easy, but in many countries in the Global South, becoming a leader in the labour movement can put one's life at risk. Over the past few months, two cases served as stark reminders of this harsh reality, in countries where the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) supports local partner organizations.

**Honduras**  
Honduras has a proud history of labour activism. In 1954, a general strike challenged the power of the corporations that controlled the profitable banana industry, resulting in the consolidation of unions and labour rights. Unions in Honduras continue to play an important role in fighting for workers against transnationals that build fortunes by keeping wages low, and jobs precarious.

Since then, the garment industry grew to become one of the country's largest employers. In 2023, SHF staff was on a monitoring trip in Honduras at the time of a massacre that saw 13 people targeted and killed by armed assailants. Among the victims were two union presidents and several

members of the union (SITRAGSAM) representing workers employed by a multinational garment manufacturer based in Montreal. The company had announced the closure of their factory a few days prior, leaving 2700 workers out of work. The motives of the killers remain unclear.

**Bangladesh**  
In one of the world's 10 worst countries for working people, trade union activists in the garment industry of Bangladesh face a battle on many fronts. These include movements for safer workplaces and living wages to afford workers and their families a decent life, fighting against high rates of gender-based violence impacting a predominantly female workforce, as well as resisting attacks on workers' freedom of association and collective bargaining. These struggles are compounded by the fact that many of the country's high-level politicians have business interests in the garment industry. SHF partners have demonstrated that it is not uncommon for union leaders to face intimidation, harassment, and targeted terminations at the factory level.



STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE  
MARCH 2024

# NO WORKER IS DISPOSABLE SHF SUPPORTING WOMEN WASTE WORKERS IN NEPAL



Project partners attending leadership management and governance training session. Credit: ICA

Decent wages and health and safety at work are universal aspirations for all workers. For women, these rights can be more challenging to obtain when you confront a culture of patriarchy and gender inequality that has created systemic barriers for female workers.

However, women in our unions have demonstrated that not only do we have the power to lead the fight for better working conditions, raise the bar on women's health, and demand the implementation of Pay Equity laws, we can also take action in solidarity with women workers in other countries facing more challenging contexts.

Last summer, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund invited organizations from around the world to submit proposals for projects supporting women working in predominantly male environments. A small volunteer panel of USW female members from each district reviewed, scored, and made the final selections for awarding funding.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) is a Nepalese non-profit organization that wants to safeguard the rights and well-being of workers,

primarily women, employed in waste management services. It presented a compelling project to enhance the rights and safety of workers involved in waste management.

In this mountainous country of South Asia, women workers perform an essential role in waste management in the capital, Kathmandu. Their work sorting waste before it reaches landfills often goes unnoticed, unappreciated and at a significant cost to their health. Workers like 32-year-old Nisha earn \$90 a month at transfer stations for unloading, handling, separating, and loading again all discarded items, including organic waste repurposed for pig farming. Nisha's work, like that of other female waste workers, is physically demanding and dangerous. Using personal protective gear is sometimes not available or uncomfortable to wear. Training is not provided while workers are at constant risk of interacting with hazardous materials.

Despite their significant services to the environment, women waste workers in Nepal do not receive legal protections or benefits from the

Find the latest Steelworkers Humanity Fund updates at

[www.usw.ca/shf](http://www.usw.ca/shf)

Or scan this QR code







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