NEHAWU

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

International Relations Bulletin

International Working Women's Day Commemorative Event

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Editorial
- Opening and Welcoming Remarks
- Address by the Premier of the Free State Province
- Introduction of Keynote Speaker
- Keynote Address
- Vote of Thanks

EDITORIAL

This issue of the International Relations Bulletin is published to record and share the proceedings of the NEHAWU International Working Women's Day commemorative event convened in Bloemfontein, Free State on the 9th of March 2026.

This commemoration was not convened for symbolic or ceremonial observance's sake. NEHAWU recognises International Working Women's Day as a day rooted in the history of the working class struggle. The commemoration emerged from the battles of working women in factories, workshops and communities who organised against class exploitation, poor working conditions and political exclusion. It was through these struggles that the day was established as an international commemoration of the role of working class women within the broader working class struggle. In a period where the meaning of many historic working class commemorations are stripped of their working class character, it remains important that trade unions like ours uphold and defend their origins and purpose. We therefore commemorate International Working Women's Day with a clear emphasis on its class character, and we continue to work to ensure that this history is not diluted or forgotten.

Our commemoration adopted the World Federation of Trade Union's 2026 International Working Women's Day theme: "From History to Today's Struggle: Working Women Against War and Repression", recognising the continued role of working class women across the world in the international working class struggle against imperialism.

This event, and the publication of this bulletin, are therefore undertaken in recognition and in honour of working class women across the world, both those who fought in the past and those who continue to fight to advance the international working class struggle against imperialist wars and repression. As NEHAWU, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the legacy of working class women's struggles remains alive within our union and within the wider organised labour movement. It is through the continued participation and leadership of working class women that the international working class struggle will advance in the years ahead.

OPENING AND WELCOMING REMARKS

Today we celebrate women's global achievements while demanding urgent and actionable equality. We must focus on rights, justice and action for all women and girls, tackling structural barriers, biasness and promoting equality over mere quality, it is a call to action for collective and unwavering efforts.

To our National Office Bearer - Cde Zola Saphetha, our Premier - Mme MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae, Head of Department: Social Development - Mme Ntombela COSATU Provincial Secretary - Cde Tiisetso Mahlatsi, SANCO in absentia, SACP PEC and PWC member - Cde Kenny Mahlatsi, ANC in absentia, our international guests joining us through hybrid, University of the Free State (UFS), Central University of Technology (CUT), Office of the State Attorney, Motheo TVET, Free State School of Nursing (FSSON), Free State Gambling, Liquor and Tourism Authority (FSGLTA), our Provincial Office Bearers (POBs) from nine (09) provinces, Regional Office Bearers (ROBs) Gender Coordinators, our Heads of Departments and everybody present here today good morning.

We gathered here today to celebrate International Working Women's Day. This is not just a date on the calendar, it is a global moment of reflection, recognition and action. It is a day to honour the extraordinary, courage, resilience and achievements of women across all fields, i.e. Scientists, Care Givers, leaders and community builders. This year's theme is "give to gain". Rights, justice and action to all women and girls, it reminds us that while we make progress the fight for equality is far from being over, true progress requires us to go beyond just celebrating, it requires us to take action.

We must challenge the stereotypes and biases, both conscious and unconscious, that still hold women back. We need to dismantle the systematic biases that prevent women from achieving their full potential, whether at the workplace, at home or in leadership roles.

Empowering a woman is not just a women's issue but a humanity issue, because when women are educated, safe and empowered, societies thrive, families become stronger and the economy grows.

Let us not be observers of change, let us be the drivers of change, let us create a world where every woman, girl is respected, valued and given the chance to thrive.

You are all welcome to our Free Stte province, Mangaung region in Bloemfontein, the city of roses, the home of Siwelele!

Happy International Working Women's Day!

ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

Programme Director, General Secretary of NEHAWU Cde Zola Saphetha, National Office Bearers, Leadership of COSATU, Provincial Leadership, ANC Leadership, SACP Leadership

It is an honour and privilege to be here to celebrate International Working Women's Day. We celebrate this historic day at a time when women in our country continue to bear the brunt of sexism and abuse. The women of our country are subjected to brutality at their places of work and worse, even at their homes, where they ought to find refuge.

Programme Director, the women of our country are denied career opportunities simply because they are women. Their career progression is halted because they refuse to give in to the sexual demands of senior male officials. They are isolated and mocked for taking a stance against abuse at the workplace.

The women of our country find themselves at the bottom of the food chain. This is done deliberately by testosterone filled, backward thinking, toxic laden patriarchal men. Men who, even in the year 2026, are still stuck in the dark ages and believe that a woman's place is at home, rearing children and taking care of the house. I am standing here today to say not anymore! We refuse to be silent when injustice is carried out against us. We won't be bullied by brutes who view women as sexual objects to be tossed around at will.

As women of the Free State, we want to send a stern warning to those who continue to violate the vulnerable in our society, particularly children and the elderly, that their days of abuse are nearing an end.

We cannot continue living like prisoners in our country. We managed to defeat the evil and brutal apartheid regime, so a small number of abusers masquerading as men can and will be defeated.

I am inundated with calls daily from women across our province who are being abused. They tell me harrowing stories about the challenges that they are faced with on a daily basis, particularly at their places of work.

I am therefore happy that present here today, is the membership and leadership of NEHWAWU. We appeal to you comrades, let us stop turning a

blind eye to the abuse that women are subjected to.

Let us stop the "brotherhood" where leaders go to great lengths to protect other men who commit unspeakable deeds against their female counterparts. We also want to appeal to you comrades to desist from cosying up to the employer at the detriment of the workers.

Local government, as we all know, is the coalface of service delivery. Our preoccupation must be the provision of quality services to our people. How are we going to provide services to the people of our province when women are constantly being attacked? We are appealing to you, as NEHAWU, to make the rights of the workers a priority.

Let us put an end to the culture of protecting individuals at the cost of the workers. There is a worrying trend where some shop stewards go out of their way to shield individuals from accountability, and we wish to once again warn such people that sooner, rather than later, your actions are going to catch up with you. People must make a choice whether they are on the side of the workers or beholden to corrupt individuals.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to wish the women of our province a blissful day. Our journey has been long and marked with pain, but we soldier on.

We have endured untold misery and repulsive discrimination. We continue to suffer the injustices of inequality, years after the attainment of our freedom. We will not fail nor falter. We will continue to fight because we too are children of this land.

We waged war against a brutal system to free South Africa and her people from the bondages of oppression and we bear the battle scars from that fight. Why then would we cower to a small minority of patriarchal maniacs?

We stand on the shoulders of giants such as Edna Molewa, Rejoyce Mabhudafasi, Albertina Sisulu and many heroines who were torch bearers in our struggle. The struggle, while exhausting, intensified our tenacity and built our courage.

As the women of South Africa, we too demand an equal share of what this country has to offer. It is an inherent right that we fought for and it is not too much to ask for.

I also want to thank the men who are walking this journey with us. They are our trusted allies in a battle that has raged for years, but which, with a little more effort from us all, will ultimately come to an end.

Re ea le leboha bo ntate ka tshehetso ya lona. Ntwa ena e batla tshebedisano mmoho, ke ka moo re reng, kopano ke matla. Re kopa le tswelle jwalo ka tshebedisano ya lona.

As we celebrate this day, we reflect on the journey traversed. We take stock of the gains made and importantly, we look forward to a future full of opportunity and prosperity for the daughters of this beautiful country of ours. Ke ea leboha!

INTRODUCTION OF THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Greetings, comrades. Let me take this opportunity to recognize the presence of the Provincial Office Bearers of NEHAWU led by the number one shop steward in a form of the Provincial Chairperson, the Provincial Secretary of COSATU, the SACP Provincial Executive Committee member, the ANC. SANCO in absentia, notwithstanding the fact that they were both invited. Comrades let us recognize the presence of the Premier and all our guests who are holding strategic positions in their respective sectors where we are organising, who are serving in top positions at their workplaces as women. All members of the union present here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, and distinguished guests, it is my honour to introduce a leader whose voice resonates across workplaces, communities, and international platforms. Today, we welcome a tireless advocate for workers' rights, gender equality, and social justice.

Comrades, I am here to introduce a member of the Central committee of SACP, a member of the Central Executive committee of COSATU. A worker leader who grew up within the congress movement, who grew up within the MDM structures.

Our keynote speaker serves as the General Secretary of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), where they have championed the cause of workers in essential sectors, those who nurture, heal, and educate our societies. His leadership has been marked by unwavering commitment to improving working conditions, defending collective

bargaining, and amplifying the voices of women in the labour movement.

Beyond national borders, he also hold the esteemed position of General Secretary of the Trade Union International Public Service and allied, uniting workers across continents in the struggle for dignity, fairness, and solidarity. His work embodies the spirit of internationalism, reminding us that the fight for justice knows no boundaries.

On this International Working Women's Day, as we celebrate the courage and contributions of women in every sphere of life, it is fitting that we hear from a leader who has dedicated his life to advancing equality and empowering workers everywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, please join me in giving a warm welcome to our keynote speaker, an inspiring champion of labour, justice, and women's rights. Cde Zola knowledge Saphetha.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Program Director, Provincial Office Bearers, PEC members, Alliance leadership SANCO, ANC, SACP, COSATU, Premier of Free State province, guests from the university and members of NEHAWU, our red and transformative national union, class oriented trade union affiliated to the Trade Union International for Public Service and Allied (TUI PS&A) and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU),

Kindly receive our profound and revolutionary greetings on this occasion of commemorating and celebrating Working Women worldwide - strong and hardworking components of society and flowers of the world - under the theme 'Working Women against War and Oppression'.

Comrades, Compatriots, Friends, Brothers and Sisters

March 8th, is a day in a calendar to commemorate struggles of the working class.

It is a day to highlight the plight of women, particularly working class women under capitalism and imperialism, and to honor generations of working class heroines who have fought against oppression and exploitation.

The origin of the international working women's day arose from the 28th of February 1909 when the Socialist Party of America in New York City (SPA) organised a significant support from many different groups,

such as trade unionists, progressive social reformers, farmers and immigrants.

In solidarity with them, communists, activists and politicians then proposed the celebrations of Working Women's Day at the 1910 International Socialist Women's Conference with not set date, which, as a result led into the first demonstrations and commemorations of International Women's Day across Europe.

In 1922, Vladimir Lenin declared 8th of March as International Women's Day to honour the women's role in the 1917 Russian Revolution - a period of political and social change in Russia that saw the abolishment of monarchy led to the adoption of a socialist form of government, following two successive revolutions and a civil war in the aftermath of

World War I.

In 1977, the United Nations (UN) promoted the day as a public holiday after observing its connection with a particular issue, campaign or theme in women's rights in several countries.

Hence, as per the UN theme for 2026, we celebrate this day under "Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls"; to focus on closing justice gaps, eliminating discriminatory laws and ensuring legal protection, with a strong emphasis on addressing structural inequalities and violence against women.

Some of a theme for this international day of working women elsewhere says: "Give to Gain" which underscores the principle that meaningful progress on gender equality requires deliberate contributions from government, institutions and individuals.

When we invest in women's safety, rights and leadership, we strengthen societies as a whole. This struggle continues to this day and it will continue for as long as capitalism exists.

We meet here not only to commemorate these struggles and acknowledge the plight of women under imperialist generated disasters and wars, but also to recommit ourselves to fight all forms of oppression and the social systems that breeds such oppression.

From its inception, International Women's Day has been tied to the struggle against oppression and exploitation.

In 1908, women textile workers in New York took to the streets, demanding an end to long oppressive working hours, and exploitative low wages.

These women were part of a broader movement against capitalism, which sustains itself through the exploitation of the working class.

Today, women, particularly working class women around the world face the same forms of oppressions, including new forms.

Imperialist wars ravage countries, putting women and children in more vulnerable positions through violent displacement.

These wars do not only pose the risk of physical harm and displacement, but also destroy livelihoods and increase the burden of women as care givers under adverse conditions. These hardships are felt most acutely by the working class in general, and working class women and children in particular.

But working class women are not just victims, they form a critical component in the struggle against greed and human exploitation.

The historical significance of 8th of March lies in the fact that it demonstrates that women's struggles have always been an integral aspect of the broader working class struggles.

Comrades, the 8th of March is a day that has been commemorated for over a century, born out of the struggles of working class women fighting for their rights.

However, over the years, attempts have been made by our class opponents to water it down.

Attempts to make it more about generic "women's empowerment" and less about the working class roots that gave rise to it.

These attempts find expression through shifting the focus of the commemoration from labour rights, and class struggle, - to more abstract, less confrontational themes.

The bourgeois class wants us to "celebrate women" in a vacuum, without acknowledging class conflict, and the challenges working class women face on a daily basis.

Forgetting about their marginal status and the daily struggles they are confronted with at workplaces and communities.

So, what is the impact of denuding the 8th of Mach from its working class roots? By denuding the day of its working class roots, they make it less about the working class women who need it the most.

The working class women are displaced by imperialism, living in refugee camps and exploited as immigrants - are in factory floors, with low-wage jobs facing exploitation.

They turn this significant milestone in working class women's struggles into a sanitized elitist version of abstract "women's empowerment" devoid of class content.

Reducing it to the promotion of women from the elite classes to higher positions in society.

While working class women continue to toil at the bottom, consoled by their acceptance into the ranks of the marginalized and exploited sections of the working class, earning meager wages.

Working class women of the world have a common enemy; the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses them, including the destructive imperialist agenda driven in the interest of monopolies and capital.

Our responsibility is to build an international working class movement that unites women and workers' struggles across borders through both ideological and practical work.

The working class as a whole, must unite to fight for its rights, and advance the struggle for a free egalitarian society.

The women's question is integral to confronting capitalism and fighting imperialist wars and oppression.

Class conflict and women oppression are driven by the same ideology of class exploitation.

We upon all revolutionaries and instruments of workers and the

working class in general on this day to intensify the fight for the social, economic, political and cultural emancipation of all women until it is won.

Let us join hands and recommit ourselves to defeat gender based violence &femicide as well as patriarchy and its manifestations throughout the world in building a truly non-sexist society.

So, we dare not fail to keep our focus on labour rights, equality, and the struggle of working class women.

Our common enemy as the working class is capitalism – and our common struggle are at all material times directed at that common enemy.

“The revolution is the best school for the proletariat”. Rosa Luxemburg.

2026 is a year to re-launch our national gender structure before May as per the Gender Policy of the union after the 2nd National Elective Gender Conference of COSATU taking place on the 26th and 27th of March. At this relaunch, the union will discuss, among others, the harassment and abuse of women at workplace and concretise a prompt and the kind of vigorous and impactful campaigns in defence of women even at collective bargaining terrain.

At the same time, the union through its training institute (Workers Knowledge Centre) is resuscitating its gender training program and women emancipation development training with the university of Western Cape and University of Kwazulu-Natal,

with a focus on ideological and political training in order to build cadreship in the union capable of carrying-out the socio-economic struggles and organisational campaigns aimed at empowering women in particular and gender in general.

The union continues to elevate and heighten its pledges for man of NEHAWU committing man not to allow any form of abuse women and child not in their name;

women of NEHAWU committing women stand up and not to accept any form of abuse against them and; NEHAWU pledge stands firmly against women and children abuse and commit itself to act decisively when such happens in the union irrespective of the face and position held by the perpetrators in the union. We are on the right side of history. We will continue to fight united against wars and imperialist aggression.

Wathint’ Abafazi, Wathint’ Imbokodo! Happy International Working Women’s Day!

Thank You

Long Live WFTU!

VOTE OF THANKS

Let me take this opportunity to give thanks to the program director, comrade Mantsopa Lekhoana

As Free State we are mourning the passing of the first democratic Premier of our province, a former leader of UDF and NEC member of ANC, Free State has been progressive when coming to the issue of transformation, as we had two female Premiers before the current one who is also a female.

Let us take the opportunity to thank the leader of Government Mme MaQueen Letsoha Mathae as a Premier to honour our invitation and presented his message as requested, we also extend our gratitude to the Social Development Head of Department Mme Ntombela who have been with us during the start of the program.

We further give thanks to the SACP to give us a commissar who gave a message of support on behalf of Communist party, we give thanks to COSATU Provincial Secretary Cde Tiisetso Mahlatsi who makes stime whenever we need him. He is forever available for NEHAWU.

The union is thankful to the facility staff who ensure that we receive breakfast and lunch in time without delay.

We are also thankful to the young artist who forever honours the invite from NEHAWU and his performance is always on point.

Our regions have worked hard to ensure that the venue is full, we thank the regional leadership to ensure that mobilization and attendance is on point.

To the national staff we need to give them a round of applause with the good work that they did by arranging this event, as the Free State Office bearers we are delighted to have been trusted with this magnitude of the event by the National Office Bearers to host one of the most important international activities.

To the keynote speaker Comrade Zola Saphetha, we really appreciate the time you have created to be with us in hosting this event. We know the kind of work and the responsibility you are having as the General Secretary of NEHAWU and the General Secretary of TUI-PS&A.

We should also extend our gratitude to the members as well as shop stewards who ensured that they attended in numbers, we couldn't proceed without them as they are the important guests of the national union.