

**Shawna Bader-Blau, Executive Director
Solidarity Center
AFL-CIO Convention, October 25, 2017**

Brothers and Sisters! Thank you. I am Shawna Bader-Blau, and I am the executive director of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, and it is an honor to be here, especially on this day, when we are talking about winning—for all workers, everywhere.

Brothers and sisters, now more than ever we face enormous challenges that go to the heart of our right to work an honest day, for a fair wage, with dignity. This is as true around the United States as it is around the world, where the Solidarity Center fights every day for working women and men trying to earn a living with the deck stacked against them. And the stakes are high:

You know, in the world today:

- Seven out of 10 people live in a country that has seen a rise in inequality in the last 30 years
 - More than half of the world's workers are in the informal economy, with no benefits, regular hours or decent wages
 - 82 countries exclude workers from labor law, including the right to form unions, and more than half of all countries deny some or all workers collective bargaining
 - Worker-rights activists were murdered in 11 countries in recent years
 - In Guatemala alone, a country right here in our hemisphere and where we have a free trade agreement called CAFTA, trade unionists were murdered, over the last nine years, about every two months, with total impunity
- ➔ And globally, women earn 30 percent of what men earn for equal work. It will take 170 years for women to be paid the same as men at this rate. Women earn only 10 percent of income and own 1 percent of property.

The truth is: Labor rights are the most frequently violated set of human rights around the world.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

The deadliest structural failure in modern history was the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh in 2013. Several thousand workers were faced with losing a month's wages or going back into a building they knew to be unsafe because they had no union to protect them, no right to refuse unsafe work. Nearly eleven hundred workers returned to the factory floor and died that day.

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But a year later in Bangladesh, I met a young woman garment worker who had become a union organizer, with the support of the Solidarity Center. She told me that now she can sit across the table and negotiate wages and working conditions with the kind of boss who, before, callously threatened her with rape if she asked that her overtime be paid. Because he HAS to see her as his equal. Freedom of association in Bangladesh—embattled and under attack though it is—and her union, gave that woman dignity and power.

Because workers can win.

Black workers in Colombian ports fought historic disenfranchisement and built unions out of day labor jobs. Migrant domestic workers in Kenya organized and won a minimum wage for millions. Young workers in call centers in Morocco now have decent work because they fought anti-union discrimination and won. And just in the last few weeks, thousands of Honduran garment workers won collective bargaining in unions entirely led by women!

We are honored to be a part of all those struggles.

Sisters and brothers, workers everywhere win when we have a deliberate agenda of inclusion for our labor movement, and when we fight for our right to form unions. And the Solidarity Center—with you, and with the dozens of unions and millions of workers we can ALL call allies—will double down on that over the next 20 years to make sure it happens.

And now, it is my distinct honor and pleasure to introduce Jim Boland, my friend and a rare leader, champion of every worker everywhere, Jim Boland, President of the Bricklayers.