

# SOLIDARITY CENTER

PROMOTING WORKER RIGHTS  
WORLDWIDE



**2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT**

**The Solidarity Center is the largest U.S.-based international worker rights organization helping workers attain safe and healthy workplaces, family-supporting wages, dignity on the job and greater equity at work and in their community. Allied with the AFL-CIO, the Solidarity Center assists workers across the globe as, together, they fight discrimination, exploitation and the systems that entrench poverty—to achieve shared prosperity in the global economy.**

**The Solidarity Center acts on the fundamental principle that working people can, by exercising their right to freedom of association and forming trade unions and democratic worker rights organizations, collectively improve their jobs and workplaces, call on their governments to uphold laws and protect human rights, and be a force for democracy, social justice and inclusive economic development.**

**Our Mission:**

**Empowering workers to raise their voices for dignity on the job, justice in their communities and greater equality in the global economy.**

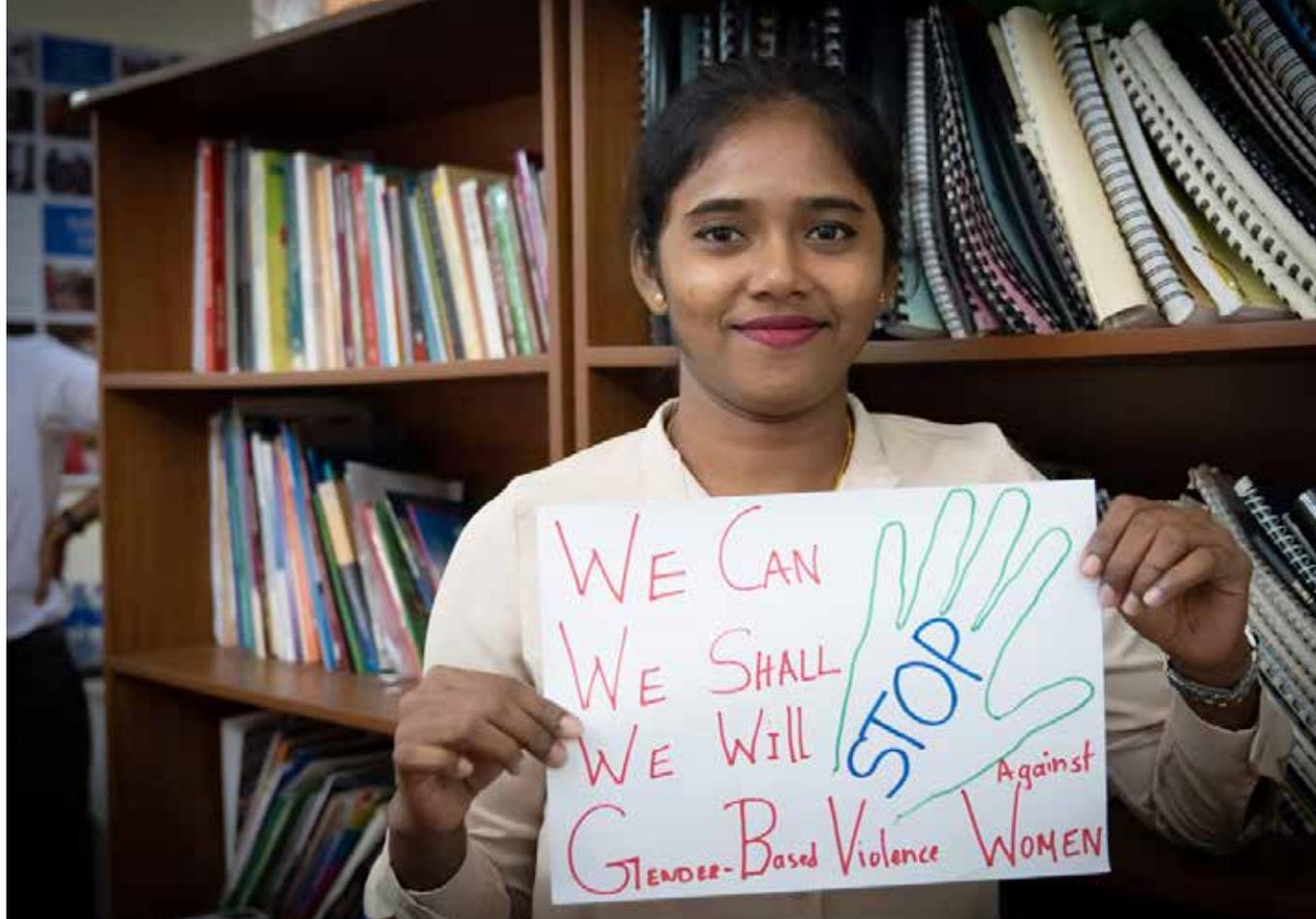
The Solidarity Center Education Fund is a registered charitable organization tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent of applicable laws. A summary of activities from July 2018 to December 2019 and financial highlights for the year ending November 30, 2019, are described in this report.

Editors: Carolyn Butler, Tula Connell, Kate Conradt  
Design: Deepika Mehta

Copyright by the Solidarity Center 2019  
All rights reserved.

**ON THE COVER:**

In her 60s, Etaf Awadi Hamdi Eqdeeh works on farms near Gaza, Palestine, to help support her family. She must visit local farms daily to find temporary jobs. The majority of the world's workers are informally employed, denying them regular wages, legal protections, sick leave and pensions. Photo: Abed Zaqout



**IN THESE TURBULENT TIMES FOR DEMOCRACIES**, workers continue to organize for a better world. This year, we and the global labor movement are celebrating several landmark firsts.

Gender-based violence and harassment—on the manufacturing floor, in the lunchroom, on transportation to the factory or field, at an employer’s home or during bathroom breaks and other job-related scenarios—suppress women’s voice at work and, like racism and discrimination in all its forms, disenfranchise them from their rights.

The Solidarity Center is proud to have supported trade union women leaders from **Brazil, Cambodia, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palestine, South Africa, Swaziland, Tunisia** and **Zimbabwe**, as they participated in negotiations at the United Nations’ International Labor Organization (ILO) in June 2019

to codify a binding rule to end violence and harassment in the world of work. They helped ensure the realities of women workers remained central to the discussions, and emphasized the need for gender-specific, structural responses to address the impact of workplace violence and harassment. Facing down the opposition, they helped create the first global standard of the #MeToo era: ILO Convention 190 (C190) to recognize the right of all workers to be free of violence and harassment at work, in formal and informal settings. Most importantly, the convention defines gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) broadly and includes the range of abuses experienced by women and other vulnerable workers, including but not limited to sexual harassment.

Then August 2019 saw another important benchmark. Lesotho-based unions and women’s rights groups, major fashion brands and international worker rights organizations, including

the Solidarity Center, and the garment factory owner signed enforceable and binding agreements to create a first-of-its-kind program to eradicate GBVH in the factories. Importantly, the definition of GBVH in the agreements reflects Convention 190 language (*See Page 5*).

Despite rising authoritarianism and rollbacks of human rights, these two victories show how cross-border, cross-movement solidarity can effect change when led by the voices and experiences of women workers. And though miles remain on the road to achieving gender equality, these successes are powerful steps toward preventing and addressing GBVH in our workplaces and overcoming one of the primary barriers to achieving economic justice for all.

In Solidarity,

Shawna Bader-Blau, Executive Director

Prithvi Sharujha and others from the Sri Lanka Eksath Jathika Workers Union shared strategies on how unions can end gender-based violence at work during a Solidarity Center training. Photo: Sean Stephen



**THE TREND TOWARD INCREASING AUTHORITARIANISM AND BARELY CHECKED CORPORATE POWER**, and their confluence, restrict the exercise of democratic rights and exacerbate the gap between the haves and have nots. Income inequality has widened around the world while public wealth has transferred to private hands, limiting even a willing government’s ability to provide services and social safety nets to minimize marginalization of its people.

At the crux of these trends are workers and their ability to earn a fair wage, ensure a safe workplace and weigh in on policies that affect their lives. With partners, the Solidarity Center works to secure freedom of association, collective bargaining and enforceable worker rights for all workers, everywhere. This includes efforts to reach workers traditionally excluded from labor law, such as domestic and migrant workers, and those in the informal economy, of

whom a disproportionate number are women.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the first-of-its-kind Migrant Workers Union formed and held its inaugural congress in 2019. More than 2,000 workers, who travel for jobs in Russia and elsewhere, joined the union to protect their rights abroad. The Solidarity Center and partner Insan-Leilek have provided pre-departure training and rights education to migrant workers for the last five years.

In another first, thousands of Kenyan informal-sector workers—vendors, cleaners, auto-body workers and mechanics—won union protection in 2019 following organizing efforts by the Central Organization of Trade Unions—**Kenya**, a Solidarity Center partner, and COTU-K affiliates. As union members, some 5,600 workers now will be covered by the country’s labor laws, which have excluded informal workers.

In **Ukraine**, domestic workers formed the country’s first organization for domestic employees and childcare workers in June 2019, to provide information and legal support, improve wages and working conditions, and advocate for Ukraine to implement the provisions of the Domestic Workers ILO Convention 189. Because domestic workers do not yet have formal standing under current labor law, the Domestic Employees’ Union will operate as a nongovernmental organization.

And domestic workers in **Mexico**, who in 2015 formed SINACTRAHO, their first union and a Solidarity Center partner, won landmark labor legislation in May 2019 that mandates written contracts, paid vacation and annual bonuses for domestic workers. The law also addresses child labor, banning children under 15 from undertaking domestic work, and limiting work hours for children over 15 years of age.

Domestic workers in Mexico celebrate Senate passage of a law ensuring the labor rights of the country’s 2 million domestic workers. Photo: Canal del Congreso



**THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS NOT WORKING FOR WOMEN AND MARGINALIZED WORKERS.** Entrenched cultural norms and political, social and economic power structures around the world disadvantage one group of people to the benefit of another. This manifests in many ways and often targets people by gender identity and norms, class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability or other group identities.

In partnership with worker, women and human rights advocates around the world, the Solidarity Center is working to right the scales and mitigate structural oppression, building solidarity and supporting worker efforts to change attitudes, working conditions and laws, with particular emphasis on eradicating gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work.

Precedent-setting agreements in **Lesotho**, signed in August 2019, will comprehensively address the rampant gender-based violence and harassment

denying thousands of women garment workers there a safe and dignified workplace. The agreements are binding and worker centered, cover five factories and were negotiated and signed by Lesothoan unions and women's groups, Kontoor Brands, Levi Strauss & Co., The Children's Place, international worker rights organizations (the Solidarity Center among them) and Nien Hsing Textiles. These pacts include language from ILO Convention 190—only adopted in June 2019, marking another first. They cover 10,000 Lesotho garment workers who produce jeans and knitwear for the global market, establishing a program of mandatory education and awareness trainings for all employees and managers, an independent reporting and monitoring system, and remedies for abusive behavior.

Players for women's professional soccer in **Colombia** have had to contend with longstanding gender discrimination, harassment, short-term contracts and virtual penury—and the cancelling of their

2018 season when they took grievances public. However, in 2019, the Solidarity Center helped their union, ACOLFUTPRO, engage the national Ombudsman's Office, which filed a constitutional complaint for gender discrimination against individual soccer clubs and the soccer federation. In August 2019, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the women players, ordering both the employers and ACOLFUTPRO to present plans for gender equality.

Members of the National Union of Seafarers **Sri Lanka** in Colombo successfully lobbied for a safer workplace by convincing their company to improve its code of conduct to help prevent gender-based violations on the job. The effort was inspired by a Solidarity Center awareness-raising training in December 2018 on gender-based violence at work in which four workers from the South Asia Gateway Terminal (SAGT) took part. Based on the workers' proposal, SAGT introduced a whistleblower policy and released a separate policy against sexual harassment.

In Bangladesh, the Solidarity Center partners with the Bangladesh Obivashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), WARBE Development Foundation and other organizations to protect migrant worker rights. Photo: Istiak Ahmed Inam



**AROUND THE WORLD LAST YEAR,** workers and unions pushed back against onerous price hikes, wage theft, corruption, anti-democratic legislation, discrimination and unemployment. They launched campaigns to educate working people on their rights. They took to the airwaves or marched in the streets to take on abusive supply chains and indifferent or exploitative governments.

Assaults on worker rights are core to attacks on democracy worldwide. Rampant rights abuses in global supply chains, uncertainty about future jobs in a low-wage world, the erosion of human rights and widening inequality are global challenges. The Solidarity Center supports allies, workers and activists trying to create respect and have a say at their workplace, both on the ground and through grassroots internationalism—connecting workers and unions across borders and movements.

In August 2019, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) commemorated the 400th

anniversary of when enslaved Africans first touched the shores of America. During this historic event in **Ghana**, the NAACP ad-hoc Labor Committee along with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), Solidarity Center and the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) conducted a labor summit to examine how past labor practices have current global impacts, including on migration and supply chains, and to promote cross-regional networks within the diaspora to support labor's ability to address the challenges of the future. The American Federation of Teachers, United Auto Workers, United Food and Commercial Workers International Union and SEIU provided support for the meetings.

Some 45 women leaders of unions from across **Africa**—many of whom campaigned for ILO Convention 190—pushed for their priorities to be adopted by the International Trade Union Confederation-Africa (ITUC-Africa) at its congress in November 2019. The quadrennial meeting sets labor's priorities on behalf of Africa's working

people. The congress agreed to their recommendations that women leaders participate in employer negotiations; agreements with employers include language that explicitly addresses gender-based violence and harassment at work; and that ITUC-Africa would support affiliates lobbying their governments to adopt the convention.

In October 2018, the **Kyrgyzstan** Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), including unions representing mining and construction workers, found that laws against child labor in the country were inadequate and implementation uneven, resulting in more than 250,000 children being subjected to hazardous work. The federation called on the government to monitor child labor, increase legal penalties for violations of child labor laws and educate citizens about the harmful effects of child labor. The Solidarity Center provided training for KFTU affiliates on international labor standards, during which participants developed an action plan for submitting workers' commentary on child labor to the ILO.

Sri Lankan tea pluckers—the majority women—who carry tea leaf loads to distant weighing points in the hot sun are fighting for a living wage. Photo: Sean Stephen



**ACROSS ALL REGIONS** and at an increasingly alarming pace, worker rights are being denied to greater numbers of people. More than half of the world's countries limited workers' ability to register unions last year, while 85 percent of countries violated the right to strike. Workers in more than 50 countries faced violent repression, and union activists were murdered in 10 countries.

Unequal power relationships, murky global supply chains and low-wage-and-no-benefits jobs disguised as entrepreneurialism, and governments turning deaf ears to social and economic issues facing their communities all contribute to the decline in rights.

The Solidarity Center supports partners' efforts to create laws that respect worker rights, rectify inequality, correct broad disenfranchisement and hold corporations and governments accountable.

Some 750 subcontracted palm workers at **Colombia's** largest plantation signed

a breakthrough agreement with their employer, Indupalma, in March 2019 culminating a dangerous, years-long effort to achieve decent wages and safe working conditions. The workers formed a union and fought to force the company to sign an accord recognizing them as permanent workers, negotiate a collective bargaining agreement and provide health coverage. Workers no longer have to pay for their own tools or transport—expenses that often left them in debt to their employer.

In August 2018, the Constitutional Court of **South Africa** determined in a historic ruling that workers placed by labor recruiters must be made permanent after three months at the company where they worked on temporary status, entitling them to the same pay, benefits and job security afforded to full-time employees. South Africa's workers have long argued that employers use so-called "temporary" workers to avoid the higher cost of employing permanent workers.

At the iconic Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap, **Cambodia**, trash collectors employed by the contractor V-Green received a boost in pay in January 2019 after 200 workers waged weeks-long lunchtime protests for better wages, safer working conditions and improved social protections like health care. Throughout the workers' efforts to achieve justice on the job, the Solidarity Center provided the union, an affiliate of the Cambodian Tourism and Service Worker Federation (CTSWF), with legal and bargaining support.

The Solidarity Center launched the only global network of union and worker rights lawyers and advocates, International Lawyers Assisting Workers (ILAW), in December 2018. By uniting legal practitioners and scholars, ILAW is increasing effective representation of workers' interests across jurisdictions and economic sectors; promoting the exchange of ideas; and providing a venue to diffuse legal strategies to benefit interests of workers.

75-year-old agricultural worker Jesús Zavala has spent more than 10 years cutting sugarcane in El Salvador to help sustain his family. Photo: Jonatan Funes



**INCLUSIVE, CIVIL-SOCIETY PARTICIPATION** in all aspects of public life is the antidote to rising authoritarianism, corporate impunity and the denial of human rights that erode democracy globally. For workers to be able to guard their rights and have a say in their how their government enacts economic and social policy, the Solidarity Center works to support unions at the national level and bridge large social movements to address common struggles, from the grassroots to the international stage.

In **Central America** and the **Caribbean**, where employer groups from Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama have combined forces to oppose ILO Convention 190, union activists are doubling down on campaigns for ratification of C190 by their governments. For example, the FEASIES federation of **El Salvador**, representing maquila and domestic

workers, has joined forces with women's rights and LGBTQI organizations to condemn employers' opposition to ending violence and harassment at work. Four major unions in **Guatemala**—FESTRAS, CUSG, CGTG and UNSITRAGUA—have joined with the Network in Defense of Labor Rights in Guatemala to end gender-based violence at work. The network also is building alliances with LGBTQI and women's rights organizations to further strengthen the campaign for C190's passage. The Anti-Union Violence Network of **Honduras** has presented petitions signed by union leaders and members to the Honduran government and Ministry of Labor advocating for ratification, and in coalition with unions, is campaigning for its passage. Also, the domestic workers' union federation FETRADOMOV in **Nicaragua** is lobbying the government and holding member trainings around the convention along with its affiliate, SITRADOTRANS, a union of transgender domestic workers

that has helped elevate the specific vulnerabilities to gender-based violence and harassment faced by transgender and gender non-conforming workers in the informal economy.

In **Zimbabwe**—where most people earn less than \$1 a day—union leaders were beaten, arrested or forced into hiding, sent anonymous death threats and some eventually charged with treason for planning marches to protest price hikes and a financial transaction tax in October 2018 and launching a national cost-of-living strike in January 2019. An attempted fact-finding visit by a delegation of the ITUC in February 2019 resulted in denial of visas for most of the delegation and the arrest of ITUC-Africa secretary general by state security. In solidarity, the global labor movement—including the Solidarity Center—raised awareness of the human rights abuses, staged protests at Zimbabwe embassies around the world and raised money to bail union leaders out of prison.

Wage theft and other economic injustices are major factors holding Zimbabwe back from a democratic society in which working people are empowered to advocate for their rights. Photo: Jemal Countess

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### Chair

Richard L. Trumka, President, AFL-CIO

### Secretary Treasurer

Elizabeth Shuler, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO

### Members

Tefere Gebre, Executive Vice-President, AFL-CIO

Leo W. Gerard, President, United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial & Service Workers International Union

Robert Martinez, Jr., President, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)

Terrence L. Melvin, Secretary-Treasurer, New York State AFL-CIO, and President, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists

Doug Moore, Executive Director, United Domestic Workers (UDW/AFSCME Local 3930)

Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO

Joslyn N. Williams  
Former President, Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO

## SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Shawna Bader-Blau, Executive Director

Hind Cherrouk, Middle East and North Africa Regional Programs Director

Kate Conradt, Communications Director

Al Davidoff, Organizational Development Director

Tom Egan, Senior Adviser, Trade Union Strengthening

Erika Fagan, Program Quality, Learning and Compliance Deputy Director

Michael Lawrence, Controller

Molly McCoy, Policy Director

Sarah McKenzie, Program Coordination and Trade Union Strengthening Director

Mary Markowicz, Program Quality, Learning and Compliance Director

Hanad Mohamud, Africa Regional Program Director

Joell Molina, Americas Regional Program Director

Quoc-Huy Nguyen, Finance Director

Rudy Porter, Europe and Central Asia Regional Program Director

Robin Runge, Gender Quality and Inclusion Acting Director

Tim Ryan, Asia Regional Program Director

Stoniek Staniszewski, Senior Adviser, Information Technology

Jeff Vogt, Legal Director

Darcy Wertz, Operations Director

---

### **The Benefits of Collective Bargaining for Women: A Case Study of Morocco**

[Co-published with the International Center for Research on Women and the Confédération Démocratique du Travail, Morocco]

### **Faulty Fixes: A Review of Recent Amnesties in the Gulf and Recommendations for Improvement**

[Co-published with Migrant-Rights.Org]

### **Freedoms on the Move: The Civic Space of Migrant Workers and Refugees**

[Co-published with CIVICUS]

### **The High Cost of Low Wages in Haiti**

### **In Our Own Words: Women Workers Address Gender-Based Violence in Garment Factories in Cambodia**

### **In Our Own Words: Women Workers Address Gender-Based Violence in Garment Factories in Indonesia**

### **The ILO Global Standard to End Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, Including Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: The First Comprehensive Legal Standard**

### **There Is No Work We Haven't Done: Forced Labor of Public-Sector Employees in Uzbekistan**

[Co-published with the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights]

### **Working for Peace in North-East Nigeria: A Challenge for Nigerian Trade Unions**

## Solidarity Center

YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2018, AND 2017

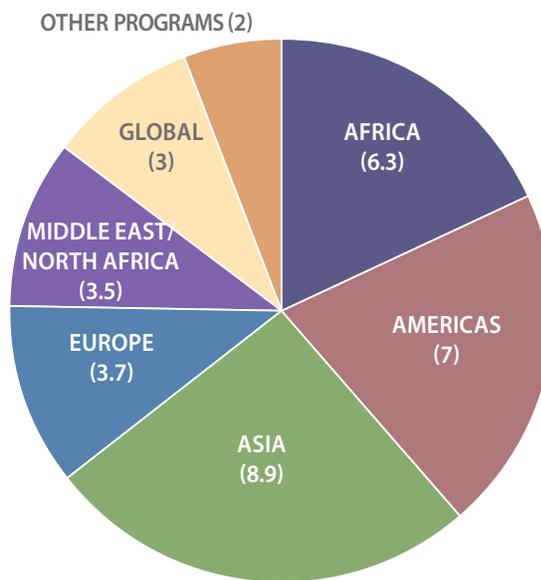
SUPPORT AND REVENUE	2018	2017
Federal awards	\$31,870,749	\$31,215,180
In-kind contributions for federal awards	1,191,037	958,390
Other contributions (unions, foundations, institutional donors, individuals)	1,387,153	1,186,213
Other revenues*	(22,582)	484,017
<b>Total support and revenue</b>	<b>\$34,426,357</b>	<b>\$33,843,800</b>

\* Reflects net appreciation (depreciation) in fair value of investments.

**Special thanks to major donors Amalgamated Bank, International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, Office and Professional Employees International Union and United Steelworkers, and to Solidarity Center staff for their generous donations over the last year.**

### FY 2018 REGIONAL SPENDING

(\$ in millions)



## IN MEMORIAM

The Solidarity Center lost two respected colleagues, sisters and activists in 2018–19.

**Lisa McGowan** succumbed to cancer November 24, 2018. A deeply passionate advocate for the marginalized, Lisa channeled boundless energy and true heart into her lifelong campaign for worker rights and the advancement of women. An economist and gender expert with more than 25 years of experience, Lisa worked to give people the tools to shape the development, labor and economic policies that affect them. And she had a profound impact on everyone around her. At the Solidarity Center, she developed and implemented transformational education programs related to women workers' empowerment and action in the global economy. During 2018, she collaborated across the global labor movement and in conjunction with women's rights groups to push for ILO Convention 190. Sadly, she did not live to see its adoption.

**Lyuba Frenkel**, senior program officer for Europe and Central Asia, lost her battle with brain cancer on July 30, 2019. Over Lyuba's 26-year career with the Solidarity Center, she was instrumental in designing, supporting and monitoring projects that bolstered freedom of association throughout Eastern Europe, and for several years also in Southeast Asia. She built close cooperation with local partners, with a focus on collective bargaining, grievance representation, labor laws, trade union organizing, dispute resolution, migration and worker rights. Throughout her successful career, Lyuba never missed an opportunity to convince workers their lives can be better when they join in a union to fight for their interests together.

They are both deeply missed.



1130 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20036

**Stay Connected**

[www.solidaritycenter.org](http://www.solidaritycenter.org)

 [solidaritycenter](#)

 [SolidarityCntr](#)

 [Solidarity Center](#)

 [solidarity\\_center](#)