

# asia workers organising

march 2015

## AAWL Activities Report for 2014

The year opened up with the killings of a number of garment workers in Cambodia by the police and military after a protracted campaign for a better minimum wage. This bloody repression did not stop workers and they continued to take action throughout the year. In neighbouring Thailand, the Thai military instigated another coup. The military neutralised many of the labour opponents and increased the use of repressive legislation like the Lèse Majesté law. Many hundreds of Thai activists have had to go into exile. Also in May, we witnessed another mass murder of workers, this time at the Soma coal mine in western Turkey where 301 workers were killed. Their families are still waiting for justice.

In July, Israel unleashed another brutal war on the people of Gaza, leading to the deaths of thousands of Palestinians, the great majority of whom were civilians. In the same region, we have seen unions in Iraq standing up to war and repression, while in the northern Syrian region of Rojava, left-leaning Kurdish groups have been fighting back against imperialist and reactionary onslaughts.

Workers everywhere have had to face the continuing crisis of the global economy with continuing pressures to work harder, longer and for less. Nevertheless, workers everywhere continue to fight for their rights. Organising and co-ordinating our actions at a regional and global level, is the way to make our strength count. We saw such instances of global organising in the NXP Electronics dispute in the Philippines and the Otis Elevators dispute in Australia.

Global organising is what AAWL works to achieve.



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## Highlights in 2014 for AAWL work

Hosting a solidarity visit by Indian trade unionists from Bigul Mazdoor Dasta

Sending a delegate to the Philippines for the KMU - ISA 30th anniversary event

Helping to host a three months internship of Ho-joon Song from the Korean Railways Union

Organising the inaugural Global Day of Action to Stop the Repression Against Trade Unionists

Participating in an international meeting in Kuala Lumpur on how to organise and respond to the coup in Thailand

Organising the commemoration for the 1st Anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster

Participating in the Melbourne solidarity rally for Korean Railway workers

## AAWL Trade Union affiliates

Without our union affiliates, the solidarity work of AAWL could not continue. We thank the following unions and labour councils for their support in 2014:

AEU (Vic)	HACSU (Vic)
AEU (NT)	MEAA (Vic)
AMIEU (Vic)	MUA (Vic)
AMWU (Vic)	NE Border TLC
AMNF (Vic)	NTEU (Vic)
ASU A&S (Vic /Tas)	QCU
ASU Vic Private	RTBU (Vic)
Ballarat TLC	RTBU (SA&NT)
CFMEU C&G Vic	SW TLC
CWU Vic T&S	TCFUA (Nat)
ETU (Vic)	UCIW
CWU P&T (Vic)	Unions NSW
Geelong TH	VTHC
Gippsland TLC	



## The team at AAWL

Our work would not be possible without the contributions of the Executive, project co-ordinators and convenors. We would also like to thank the people who spend much volunteer time developing our campaigns and materials, and distributing our news to a growing audience of labour activists globally.

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# Campaigns, projects and issues for 2014

## International organising

In our globalised capitalist economy, companies have continued to blur state, national and continental boundaries by integrating their processes. This integration happens in two major ways:

- By a company having production, distribution and retail sites located in many different countries, and/or
- Where the production and distribution of particular items/goods is carried out by different companies over many countries.

Due to AAWL's long involvement with the labour movement in the Asia region, and our efforts in developing international solidarity activities, AAWL is one of the organisations at the forefront developing new ways and thinking around workers organising globally.

This process is not an easy one and can only be achieved by AAWL working in partnership with relevant unions and worker organisations in our region. Nevertheless, workers are realising more that they are all facing common problems at their workplaces around issues of wages, security of employment, and OH&S. In addition, not only are the issues similar, but workers are connected across countries by being employed by the same company or being part of the same globalised industry.

## The Garments Industry Campaign

This campaign was started this year as a result of the solidarity activities that were undertaken by AAWL and other unions following the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 where over 1,200 garment workers were killed.

- Two trade union solidarity delegations to Bangladesh and one trip to Malaysia were undertaken in 2014 in order to understand the political and social environment in Bangladesh better, and to get to know the activists and labour organisations. Concrete solidarity projects were discussed by the various unionists and organisations involved. These projects are still being developed.

- A rally to commemorate the 1st anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster in April was also held while other solidarity actions were undertaken in line with labour mobilisations in Bangladesh.
- In conjunction with the situation in Bangladesh, throughout 2014 garment workers in Cambodia have organised and campaigned hard in calling for better wages and conditions under tremendous pressure. A number of labour activists were killed, many more injured, beaten and arrested during these waves of protests. AAWL organised the Melbourne rally for the International Day of Action in September in support of a new minimum wage. AAWL has made initial links with groups in Cambodia and will seek to strengthen these in the coming year.
- Contacts were also made with garment worker representatives in India, Indonesia and Pakistan with the view of expanding the reach of this campaign.



## The Airlines Campaign

Following on from the successes in 2013, this campaign has continued to consolidate its contacts and partners. For a number of reasons, there were no major projects undertaken in 2014, but discussions have continued with labour organisations with a view of developing new activities and projects.

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## The Car Campaign

Following on from the announcements in 2013 that both Ford and General Motors were going to cease production in Australia, Toyota also announced in 2014 that it was going to cease manufacturing cars in Australia.

This closure is part of an ongoing restructure of the global automotive industry where wages and conditions are being forced lower. Major disputes were seen in South Korea, the Philippines and India during this year as workers fought for job security and the right to organise.

The situation for the 132 jailed Maruti Suzuki workers in India, who have now been in detention for over two years without trial, remains grave with many of these workers suffering both physical and psychological issues due to the treatment in jail.

This campaign continued to consolidate its contacts and partners aiming to develop future co-ordinated actions.

## May Day



The 1st of May is a celebration of the international labour movement and is marked all around the world by demonstrations and activities. AAWL, in collaboration with regional worker organisations and trade unions, also marks May Day. In 2014, we once again organised a rally in Melbourne for the 1st of May to highlight the connectedness of workers' struggles worldwide.

## Free our comrades



The jailing of labour activists is one of the ways that employers and governments restrict our right to organise so that they can make more profit from our labour. The unfortunate reality is that workers all around the world also face the threat of fines, dismissals, beatings, rapes or even murder.

For a number of years AAWL has campaigned to free jailed labour activists. This year AAWL decided to broaden our campaign. In partnership with a number of other labour organisations in the Asia Pacific region, we declared the 16th of November as the Global Day of Action to stop the repression against unionists and labour activists.

Activities and rallies were held in a number of countries on this day.

AAWL also continued to campaign for the release of specific people, like Somyot Pruksakasemsuk and Reza Shahabi.

This year significant number of arrests of labour activists occurred in Cambodia and South Korea. International campaigns were initiated for these comrades and all were released during the year.

## Solidarity and visit from India

In India, workers' struggles in the big industrial belts around the major cities were prominent again this year. AAWL worked with labour activists in the Gurgaon region just outside of New Delhi to support some of these struggles, such as the victorious steel workers in Warzipur. This co-operation led to a visit to Melbourne and Sydney by an Indian comrade from the Bigul Mazdoor Dasta group.

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## Communication and media

Communication is a very important part of AAWL activities as it allows workers to connect and share information, ideas and tactics on their organising. AAWL hosts a variety of platforms that range from publishing written documents and leaflets, to organising public meetings on issues that affect the workers' movement in the region, to using electronic media.

AAWL continued to produce its long running weekly radio program, Asia Pacific Currents (APC), on the local radio station 3CR Radio. The program is streamed live internationally over the internet, and is available as a podcast on both the 3CR radio website as well as Rabble, a Canadian independent news website.

AAWL social media are also expanding and developing via:

- Mini News e-bulletin - a weekly electronic news service that is a summary of news, actions and assessments on the state of the workers' movement. This platform underwent a major upgrade in 2014 which will increase its effectiveness and reach. It has around 10,000 subscribers.
- Facebook - AAWL's page features our mini news items, our APC podcasts as well as other news that affects workers internationally.
- Twitter - is another platform for AAWL to distribute information and news.

## Documents produced



**Bangladesh**  
Report from the  
union solidarity visit  
to Bangladesh

Workers in Bangladesh are some of the most exploited in the world. Their lives are considered cheap by the big companies, but they produce great profits. Come to hear about current organising efforts in Bangladesh and what we can do to build solidarity.

aawl public meeting  
wednesday 3 December  
6pm evatt room trades hall  
lygon street carlton

AAWL routinely produces leaflets on working class issues that remain available on the AAWL website. During 2014, leaflets/statements were produced on the following topics:

- Korean railway strike: What is at stake?
- Invasion Day is nothing to celebrate
- Defend our right to protest
- International Women's Day
- Anniversary of Rana Plaza
- Workers' Memorial Day
- May Day
- Statement Against the Thai Military Coup
- Statement from Iraqi workers
- Happy 53rd birthday Somyot



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## General workers' issues

The outcome for workers from the continuing crisis of capitalism varies across the globe. In West Asia, we continue to see expanding armed conflicts and increasing government repression in countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Bahrain and Yemen. In many of these countries, the labour movement is either very weak or severely repressed.

Nearby, the workers' movement in Iran shows continued activity, though coming from an extremely low base and an almost complete absence of independent unions.

The fire and explosion at the Soma coal mine that killed 301 workers was caused by inadequate health and safety systems. Families and survivors are campaigning for justice and compensation amid continued harassment by the company and local authorities.

In Pakistan, the state is barely functioning and workers face intolerable working conditions as well as repression from both religious fundamentalist groups and the state. Nevertheless, organising in some of the major cities and industrial areas continues.

In our region, the military coup in Thailand was a setback for labour and human rights activists while in the Philippines, labour organisers are still being killed by paramilitary forces. Nevertheless, there have also been some good wins by Filipino workers.

Similarly, in Indonesia the working class movement is now in the third year of a wave of actions. In Hong Kong there were massive demonstrations for greater civil liberties, in China the number of strikes continues to increase, while in South Korea workers continue to fight hard battles at places such as Ssangyong and Hyundai.



**we need a  
global labour  
movement  
charter**



- The right of all workers to organise collectively without being subjected to violence, intimidation or legal harassment
- The right to organise unions and take collective action including industrial action and solidarity actions
- Secure employment
- Health & Safety at work, compensation, rehabilitation
- A living wage for all workers in all industries
- Decent work, with appropriate hours of work proposed by workers, paid leave and paid holidays
- Full rights for women workers
- Indigenous workers' rights & Land Rights
- Permanent residence with full employment rights for all refugees and all migrant workers in all countries
- No child labour
- Education, housing, health and childcare provisions
- Social security and adequate welfare benefits

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Thank you,

This is a lot of work for an organisation without any paid staff. It all happens thanks to you: the members and affiliates of AAWL, working together to build international organising and solidarity.

Thank you. Our struggle continues.

**Workers change the world.**

Piergiorgio Moro  
AAWL Co-ordinator.

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