

A USW Call to Action for Women's Equality

Our union has a proud history of taking action to advance women's economic, political and social rights. And we know that much more needs to be done before women achieve full equality in Canada and the United States, and around the world.



To continue the march toward full equality, we, the women Steelworkers gathered at the 2018 International/National Women's Conference, commit ourselves to act, individually and together within our union, on these important issues:

A. Ending violence and sexual harassment against women and girls

Because gender-based violence can take place in the workplace or follow women into the workplace, threatening our livelihoods and our safety, we commit to:

- Go back to our Local Unions and our Women's Committees and discuss ways to bring this issue forward and develop a plan to end harassment
- *Move a motion to include leave of absence for workers experiencing domestic violence in our local's proposals for the next round of bargaining*
- *Bargain strong collective-agreement language to protect workers from workplace sexual harassment, including by customers and clients*
- *Make stickers for sisters' hard hats that say, "I am someone's daughter/sister/mother"*
- *Provide a safe space for women who have experienced gender-based violence*
- *Ask our district to provide the "Men as Allies" workshop to our brothers*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- Making it a union priority to develop and bargain stronger collective agreement language to address violence and harassment, including access to leave of absence for members experiencing domestic violence, supports to increase safety and ensure job security, referrals to support services in the community, and employer-paid, Steelworker-delivered anti-harassment training
- Offering training and services in our local unions so local executives and members can better support Steelworkers and work to eliminate violence and harassment, including between members
- *Directing anti-harassment education at men*
- *Using “survivor” rather than “victim” when talking about gender-based violence*
- *Ensuring real consequences for the perpetrators of gender-based violence*
- *Having a designated woman on staff to talk to if someone is experiencing domestic violence, workplace sexual harassment, or another form of gender-based violence.*
- *Have designated union counsellors, similar to ERT representatives, in the workplace that workers experiencing gender-based violence can reach out to*

B. Women’s health and safety at work

Because good physical and mental health and safety are essential for women workers to support our families and be active in our union and our communities, we commit to:

- Encourage union sisters to become health and safety activists
- Bring women-specific issues forward to our Local Union Health & Safety Committees and developing a plan to identify problems that our sisters may be having
- *Join my local’s health and safety committee, and raise awareness that menopause and mental health are health and safety issues in the workplace*
- *Bargain collective-agreement language and take other measures to ensure clean facilities at work for breast-feeding mothers, longer maternity leaves, and properly fitting work clothes and protective equipment*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- Offering training and support in our local unions to eliminate workplace hazards that particularly affect women, including lack of accessible washrooms and other hygiene facilities, lack of appropriate personal protective equipment and tools, no job modifications during pregnancy, and inadequate protection from abusive clients and customers

C. Women's inclusion when planning and running events, programs, and policies

Because taking women into account encourages us to participate more in our union, but because all women aren't the same, we commit to:

- Support those union sisters who take the initiative to step up
- Reach out to union sisters we don't know well and encourage them to come to union meetings and get involved
- Propose language to our Local Union Executive for submission as resolutions to the USW Convention with recommendations for USW Constitution and bylaw changes
- *Talk to my co-workers and learn about them*
- *Educate new members about the value of a union*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- Taking our membership's gender, racial, language, and other diversities into account at all levels of our union, events, programs, and policies.
- Collecting demographic information about union members
- *Ensuring that district Women of Steel coordinators can work exclusively on promoting and supporting our Women of Steel program, including engaging in legislative action regarding women's rights*
- *Offering child care at district and international events*
- *Holding equity caucuses at all conferences that are each led by members of that group*

- *Keeping statistics on hiring within USW to monitor the percentage of staff who are female, workers of colour, and from other equity-seeking groups and create a plan for structural change to get more women into decision-making positions*
- *Amending the USW constitution so that the women's conference and women's committees can send resolutions to the international convention*
- *Creating a stand-alone Women of Steel web site*
- *Providing an opportunity at women's conferences for survivors of gender-based violence to connect and heal*
- *Holding conferences from Monday through Thursday or Monday through Friday, rather than over a weekend, and providing daily open-mic time for delegates to speak*
- *Collecting data to track the demographics of our union's membership*
- *Building solidarity, through the USW Women of Steel program, by promoting and supporting other constituency group programs within our union including SOAR, Next Gen, and Steel Pride.*

D. Women in union leadership and activism

Because having more women in union leadership empowers women and strengthens our union, we commit to:

- Build our Local Union Women's Committees and reach out to sisters to join in
- Sponsor women's educational programs through our Local Union Women's Committees
- Develop bargaining proposals that advance women's rights
- Move motions during Local Union meetings to fund activities of our Women's Committees
- Support USW education programs, and move motions and amendments that promote demographic equity of those attending from our Local Unions
- *Encourage my local to create a women's committee and have it build connections with other locals*

- *Change local bylaws to have at least one woman appointed to all committees, including the joint union-management committee and joint health, safety, and environment committee*
- *Volunteer to be a mentor*
- *Be creative in setting up training opportunities for women, if access is blocked by brothers, such as book clubs, on-line courses, and Facebook groups*
- *Organize a social event in my local for women workers and members' spouses as a way to get more women involved in our women's committee*
- *Stop bullying and sniping at other sisters, and instead support one another more and build one another up*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- Offering more training for women as organizers and running more organizing campaigns targeted at female-dominated workplaces and sectors
- Recognizing and supporting women's greater role in balancing work and family, including reimbursement for child-care and elder-care expenses while attending union events
- Offering increased opportunities for women, especially women from equity groups, to take on leadership roles at all levels of our union, such as through a specific mentorship program for women
- Supporting Local Union Women's Committees to develop bargaining proposals advancing women's rights and to lobby for good legislation for all women
- *Asking our union to provide more information about all candidates for office and their record in supporting working women and all working people*
- *Increasing the representation of women and workers of colour on the USW International Executive Board, including through the establishment of quotas*
- *Creating a formal USW mentorship program*
- *Posting all openings for staff representative*
- *Ensuring that local unions or units whose membership is at least 50% female are entitled to be serviced by a female staff representative*
- *Requiring local unions to send women to union events and conferences*

- *Amending the USW constitution and bylaws to require a minimum of two women on any executive*
- *In order to get more women involved in politics (supporting candidates or running), providing clear information on how they can get involved*
- *Limiting all International Executive Board members to three consecutive terms*

E. Changing the channel on hatred

Because colonialism, racism, and hatred against people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities threatens many women's health, safety, economic security, and political voice, we commit to:

- *Actively promote inclusion of all members in our Local Unions and of women in our Women's Committees, regardless of identity*
- *Speaking out when we see another member harmed*
- *Bargain collective-agreement language to prevent racism at work*
- *Educate members in our local about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and pressure the government to take action after the national inquiry issues its report*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- *Supporting USW- and community-sponsored political action and campaigns to end racism, including racism against people who are Indigenous/Native American or Black/African-American*
- *Creating strong collective agreement language and other union programs to provide fair treatment and equality of outcomes for workers, regardless of their gender identity and gender expression*
- *Including the Puerto Rican flag and anthem at all USW international events*
- *Increasing education and action on LGBTQ+ rights at all USW conferences*

F. Closing the gender wage gap

Because the gender wage gap unfairly keeps money out of women's paycheques, threatening their ability to support a family and have a dignified retirement, we commit to:

- Review our current collective agreements to better understand how language affects women's paycheques
- Offer bargaining proposals to negotiators that are specific to women's equality
- *Pressure the entertainment industry to ensure that there are roles for women and people of colour*
- *Review our collective agreement to see if our language closes the gender-wage gap, provides fair access to leaves of absence, provides fair access to training, and removes other barriers to women's economic equality. Propose better language if there are problems*
- *Create coalitions with other groups negatively affected by the gender wage gap, including grandparents raising grandchildren, single fathers, and men whose work is also under-valued*
- *Lobby and liaise with governments to gain their support for legislation that closes the gender wage gap*

We call upon our Union to support us by:

- Providing strong collective agreement language and other bargaining support to help local unions ensure gender equality in pay, benefits, maternity and other leaves, and other provisions
- Supporting local unions to develop and maintain gender-neutral pay systems without relying on the employer for analysis and data
- Continuing political action to press law-makers for good legislation to close the gender wage gap
- *Providing training for members of bargaining committees on measures to close the gender wage gap*

G. Standing with sisters around the world

Because women all do better when we all do better, we:

- Salute our sisters in unions around the world and thank them for their solidarity!
- Want ongoing connections between women in our union and in other global, international, and national unions, especially to work on campaigns to advance women's equality
- *Want to follow the example of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, which wants to create a worker-owned factory with childcare and housing and do this in Canada and the U.S., too.*
- *Want to organize a rally on the same day in all districts in support of Bangladesh garment workers*
- *Want to, globally, support women's organizations working to improve women's living conditions*
- *Want to bargain collective-agreement language to contribute to the Steelworkers Humanity Fund and its equivalent in the U.S.*

...and call upon our Union to support us in these efforts.