

**INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM**

1634 I St NW, Suite 1001, Washington, DC 20006

**Open Letter from ILRF's Newly Appointed Executive Director****Board of Directors**

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January 19, 2011

Dear ILRF Colleagues,

Democracy, Social Justice, Human Development. These core principles that move progressive politics are all direct outcomes of labor rights: living wages, non-discrimination, safe workplaces, and, most importantly, the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. No justice without fair pay, no development without rising incomes, and no democracy without participation in corporate decision-making.

Some argue that respect for labor rights is a consequence of development or democratic institutions. I am convinced that it is the other way around: labor rights are the corner stones of progress. Labor rights come first. ILRF through its staff, board, and network of partners all over the world has a proud history of reminding governments and corporations of the priority of labor rights. I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to continue this mission as the incoming director of ILRF.

I have dedicated my career to promoting labor rights. My experiences, starting with grassroots organizing in Mexico, later working with development agencies, and most recently promoting social dialogue between workers and employers, have taught me again and again that respect for rights, and, even more so, respect for those who defend the rights of workers are the crucial building blocks for a better world. I have often come in touch with ILRF's work, and always admired their dedication, their integrity, and their impact on policies.

I am excited to build on this legacy and further strengthen and grow ILRF's programs. I am looking forward to continuing campaigns to end child labor and discrimination – two issues close to my heart from having worked with the women's and children's rights movements in Latin America. I particularly welcome the opportunity to campaign against the growing trend in forced and bonded labor and the even more egregious cases of human trafficking we see proliferating around the world. I also look forward to continuing to support trade union initiatives in worker training and the promotion of industry change.

Over the years, I have worked extensively on strategies to enable more constructive and effective dialogue among employers' and workers' organizations. I will bring this knowledge and experience with me as I work to grow ILRF's role as a forum for the exchange of research and policy proposals and for the building of coalitions – both locally-based and globally-connected – to defend and promote workers' rights.

I look forward to cooperating with all of you in the coming year and – for those of you not too far away – I hope to meet many of you at ILRF’s bi-annual gathering on April 6<sup>th</sup> in Washington, D.C. Please [follow this link to find out how you can attend the reception and awards ceremony](#) and help support ILRF’s broad network of grassroots partners around the world.

With very best wishes for your work,



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Judy".

Judy Gearhart

To reach Judy Gearhart, email [judy@ilrf.org](mailto:judy@ilrf.org).

ILRF also has a media release available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) for those interested in circulating.

