

## How Spanish unions support unionisation in Turkey

by Emre Eren Korkmaz

### Introduction

International Framework Agreements (IFAs) have become an increasingly important tool for the international solidarity of workers. Global Union Federations (GUFs) may convince Transnational Corporations (TNCs) together with the home country unions of these TNCs to recognise their responsibilities over the labour rights in other countries within their supply chains. Inditex<sup>1</sup> IFA has taken a step further and Spanish textile corporation Inditex has agreed to recognise local unions as their official partners in their supply chain.

IFAs are non-binding agreements signed between monopolistic TNCs and GUFs. They present new opportunities for the global labour movement to intensify solidarity. Global Unions apply pressure over TNCs via organising, campaigning and negotiating to sign IFAs which would suggest a base for continuous negotiations with TNCs and an opportunity to overcome the shortcomings of voluntary one sided Code of Conducts (Hammer, 2005).

Inditex IFA is one of the first IFAs in the textile sector and was developed through protocols that could empower local unions to play a more active role in monitoring the application of the IFA. The training program to be explained in this article was the first example of such a project prescribing that an agreement signed in Spain could impact on workers in Turkish unions.

It is necessary to note that home country unions of TNCs have an effective role in signing these IFAs as affiliates of GUFs. These unions of developed countries have constant and direct relations with managements of TNCs and they can bargain with TNC over their supply chains. This is on one hand a form of solidarity and on the other hand, by introducing more responsibilities for TNCs over supply chains, they aim to hinder TNCs from investing in other countries with deteriorated labour conditions, which means more unemployment in home countries. In this case, Spanish trade union FITEQA-CC.OO<sup>2</sup>, which represents 80% of the total workforce within Inditex, could convince Inditex management to sign an IFA with the global union that provided more opportunity for the local unions in other countries to organise supply chain of Inditex. For instance, Turkish trade unions frequently call for support from home country unions of TNCs and GUFs when they face challenges and oppression on unionisation in supply chains of TNCs. Since 2004, FITEQA-CC.OO has been getting involved in labour disputes in supply chains of Inditex in a systematic way in Turkey, Morocco, Brazil and Bangladesh (Boix, 2013b).

### The Inditex IFA

"*International Framework Agreement between Inditex and International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation<sup>3</sup> (ITGLWF) on the implementation of International Labour Standards throughout the Inditex Supply Chain*" was signed on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2007.

Through this IFA Inditex accepted its responsibilities over its supply chain and agreed to collaborate with the Global Union on problems with regard to labour rights in its supply chains. Freedom of Association and the Right to Bargain Collectively has a central role in the agreement and parties agreed to formulate training programmes for employees and managements on introducing the IFA (IFA, 2007).

The main concern of the labour movement is the implementation of such agreements. Signing such agreements at the headquarters of these monopolistic TNCs may not mean anything for workers in supply chains if they are not informed or not applied effectively. Therefore Inditex and ITGLWF signed a protocol on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2011, entitled *Protocol to Specify the Role of Trade Unions in the Enforcement of the International Framework Agreement within Inditex's Supply Chain*. According to the Protocol, local unions would monitor, control and reinforce the IFA in supply chains and would work together with Country CSR managers of Inditex. Also, training projects would be carried out with managers and workers to inform these agreements and improve labour relations (Protocol, 2011). In May 2012 the parties agreed on another protocol to strengthen local unions' role in the application of the IFA and details of the training project were clarified (Boix, 2013).

### Training programme

The training programme in Turkey was the pilot project of the IFA. The main aim of the training for the global union and the Spanish trade union is to support Turkish trade unions to unite with workers of unorganised companies in Inditex supply chain and create favourable conditions for unions to get organised. It is estimated that participation of Inditex would encourage Turkish companies to recognise labour rights and not involve in anti-union activities by using Inditex's economic superiority based on the IFA.

In Turkey, the labour movement faces oppression on unionisation in which on one hand, unfair union dismissals and intimidation of active union members is widespread and on the other hand, collective bargaining processes have a long bureaucratic process that unions need to overcome two thresholds (1% national threshold and 50%+1 workplace threshold). Therefore this training programme done together with two trade unions from Turkey, namely DİSK Tekstil<sup>4</sup> and Deri-İş, could enable them to open doors of selected textile plants which are not covered by a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and union officers met with workers and explained their right to get organised and bargain collectively and invited them to unionise.

There were three stages of the training project. In the first stage the coordinator of the project, Isidor Boix from FITEQA CCOO and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) manager of Inditex visited selected companies to introduce and invite companies to participate in the training project. In the second stage an officer of a local union and CSR country manager of Inditex visited all plants, gathered with workers, explained the project to workers directly and asked them to elect two or three representatives to join the training. In the third stage representatives of workers from these plants and the officers from management of these companies participated in the training programme.

The first stage was done in September 2012 and four textile companies, one of which has three separate plants, were asked to join the training project. These were selected according to two criteria. For these suppliers, Inditex is the main customer and approximately 80% of their production was done for Inditex, so the demands of Inditex would have an effect on suppliers. Secondly, these companies were not covered by CBA, which means there is no unionisation in these workplaces. These companies were familiar with various training programmes of TNCs with regards to CSR activities. However, this was the first example of the participation of trade unions. Company managements had various training programmes introduced by major brands but did not include unions. Later, two companies refused to join the project, thereby putting their trade relation with Inditex at risk, and the training project was done by two companies in four plants.

The second stage was done in November 2012, when the author of this article, as a representative of Turkish trade unions and the country manager of Inditex visited four plants. We addressed the workers and then monitored the elections of workers' representatives.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013, the training programme was done with 17 elected workers, four officers from two Turkish trade unions and 20 people from managements of these four plants. Representatives of IndustriALL Global Union, FITEQA CCOO and Inditex CSR team were also at the training. The participants were divided into two groups as "managers" and "workers" in order to avoid elected workers feeling pressure from managers. The topics of the courses were the same for both groups and these were labour rights in Turkey, ILO Conventions, the IFA and productivity.

### Conclusion

IFAs may help global unions to intervene in policy making processes of TNCs, and do have the right to claim rights in the supply chain (Bourque and Hennebert, 2011). Not only dealing with monopolistic TNCs in their home countries, but organising supply chains of TNCs is a strategy of GUFs, because the unionisation rate is much lower in developing countries and TNCs outsource their production and create a complex supply chain that makes unionisation a severe problem in these countries. Therefore, IFAs draw up the responsibilities of TNCs over their supply chains (Hammer, 2005). Unions, which face oppression and discrimination from suppliers, may use IFAs as a stronger base to apply pressure over TNCs and easily convert the local struggle to a transnational campaign.

Under certain conditions, as in this training project or in course of a transnational solidarity campaign, IFAs may be used as an instrument to force a supplier to respect labour rights. Additionally, it is important to note the evolution of such promises from one-sided codes of conduct to bilateral framework agreements. Global unions' strategies to develop and evaluate these agreements to a more binding and stronger form will eventually extend strength of global labour movement over monopolistic TNCs (Stevis, 2010).

Inditex IFA and the training programme was the first experience of Turkish trade unions to be recognised as an official partner of Inditex and where they can collaborate on improving labour relations in suppliers of Inditex. Turkish trade unions may overcome oppression of their members and could convince employers to be recognised and begin negotiation from one side by using the IFA and from the other, Inditex could benefit from these attempts to maintain a stronger control of production over their suppliers.

- 1 Inditex is one of the biggest textile companies of the world. The corporation owns more than 6000 stores in 82 countries. Inditex has suppliers in 40 countries and almost 1 million workers work. Inditex has suppliers in China, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Morocco, which are important countries in producing for Inditex (Boix, 2013b).
- 2 Federacion Industrias Textil-Piel Quimicas y Afines Confederacion Sindical de Comisiones Obreras
- 3 ITGLWF merged with International Metal Workers Federation (IMF) and International Chemical Energy and Mining Workers Federation (ICEM) in June 2012 and founded IndustriALL Global Union. Inditex IFA then transferred to IndustriALL.
- 4 DİSK Tekstil is Textile Workers Union which is an affiliate of DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey). Deri İş is Leather Workers Union, which is an affiliate of Türk İş (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions)

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