

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Toronto Hotel Workers defer strike action to support World AIDS Conference.**

*(For immediate Release August 9/06)*

Toronto Hotel workers have chosen to put their futures on hold and take no strike action during the XVI International AIDS Conference which begins this Sunday in Toronto. The decision comes after 2,000 hotel workers at seven major hotels voted overwhelmingly last week to authorize strike action as part of collective bargaining with the hotels.

“We want to let the conference organizers, its 25,000 attendees and our city know that Toronto’s hotel workers share their dreams for a successful conference,” said Habtom Ogbamichael, a hotel worker at the Sheraton Centre. “We fully support the goals of the conference and will do everything we can to welcome participants to the city and ensure their hotel stay is as comfortable as possible.”

Ogbamichael said that, like conference participants, hotel workers have come to Toronto from all over the world to seek a better future. “We know the fight against HIV/AIDS is a fight against many issues including poverty. That is a struggle that we share, identify with and support.”

Since last fall, the Hotel Workers Rising campaign has drawn widespread attention as it seeks to raise standards for an entire sector. Many who work in back-of-the-house hotel positions must work two jobs, sacrifice their health and have their children grow up in poverty. In particular, housekeepers have experienced high injury rates as hotel chains have introduced luxury standards like bigger beds and heavier duvets requiring them to do extra, and heavier, work.

Hotel workers, represented by UNITE HERE Local 75, have been bargaining with Starwood, Hilton and Delta hotels since February, when contracts expired at 23 hotels across the city. Last week’s successful strike authorization votes took place at Le Meridien King Edward, Hilton Toronto and Hilton Airport, Sheraton Centre, Delta Chelsea, Delta East and Delta Toronto Airport hotels.

“These strike votes show that we are serious and willing to do whatever it takes to win an improved standard of living for all hotel workers,” said hotel housekeeper Karen Dublin. “We are fighting for higher wages, better family benefits and pensions as well as investment in training opportunities. Those are standards that will allow us to live and retire with dignity and security. None of these issues have been addressed by the three hotel companies we are bargaining with.”

Dublin added that new luxury hotels are planned for Toronto as hotel companies expand their operations. Hotel workers are pressing for the right of non-union hotel workers to be able to join a union without harassment and intimidation. “Thousands of new jobs will be created and we want to ensure that these jobs are good jobs and that workers have a voice in decisions that affect them.”

Community leaders Kristyn Wong-Tam of the Chinese Canadian National Council and Father Elias Morales of the Hispanic Ministerial Association spoke at the media conference. They are among a number of diverse community leaders who continue to lend their support to the Hotel Workers Rising Campaign.

“Hotel workers must share in the prosperity that their hard work generates—for the health our city, our communities and our families,” said Father Morales. Wong-Tam added that the fact that hotel workers have made the decision not to strike during the AIDS Conference “demonstrates their commitment to making Toronto a better place to live, work and visit.”

The hotel industry has forecast that 2006 will be its most profitable year since 2000, which was an industry high.

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