

Iris Munguía – Silver Rose Award Winner

IRIS MUNGUÍA, HONDURAS, CENTRAL AMERICA, MARCH 16TH 2012

Edited translation of acceptance presentation

Childhood on banana plantations

I was born on 13 December. My father was a banana plantation worker and my mother was a housewife, just as the majority of women at that time in my country, Honduras. So I spent my childhood, my adolescence and my youth - a large part of my life - on the banana plantations.

Life

My full name is Iris Yolanda Munguía, I graduated as a bookkeeper and public accountant. Alongside studying and working, I looked after the family – a practice which implies a great amount of sacrifice in Honduras. Some women cope with this better than others.

I am a single mother with four children; two boys and two girls. I have been a banana worker myself on the Chiquita plantations for 33 years of which I was the union leader for the last 32 years.



Work as a Union Leader

Getting to this point in my life hasn't been easy. I experienced some very challenging situations before I became responsible for the Coordination of Women's Work for the Coordinating Body of Banana and Agroindustrial Workers Unions (COSIBAH) in Honduras, suffering the macho attitudes of my male colleagues who have always had access to power and who have little trust in women in leadership positions.

I went through various processes of formation and training, studying, reading, learning how to talk and to listen to others, to be analytical and critical and to look for means to understand men, women and myself.

For everyone, beginning to be empowered as a leader is difficult, especially in the case of a woman working with male leaders.

And today I still smile when I hear the words, “*Iris is going to speak to us now*” ...

... because the most satisfying thing about working with women is to realise that you can actually contribute to making women’s lives better.



Photo: COLSIBA women’s group

I coordinated our women’s programme for twelve years as a member of the Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana and Agroindustrial Workers Unions (COLSIBA), and worked for two years as the sub coordinator. I was elected as Coordinator in August 2011.

The Impact of my work

As a result of my work, I have learnt to value myself as a woman and have learnt how analytical, positive, creative and committed we women can be.

Women have always been involved in the battle to secure our rights, and yet we have gone unnoticed in history. Therefore, we women who work in the banana industry have lived through the experience of actually making and writing history.

“Lo que hemos vivido”



The long way up

As I was saying before, every beginning is difficult. I have gone from learning to write project proposals for working with women and obtaining the necessary funding, to inventing programme processes, taking into account women's specific needs. (COLSIBA Women's work agenda and the COLSIBA Women's Platform)

As a woman, I feel committed to the women's movement; with the claim of our history, our trade union work and in the defence of our rights, with our formation and education. That is what leads to the empowerment of women.

Defender of Democracy

As a citizen, it is also my duty to clearly define our political position in relation to the current situation in our country. This puts me in the position of being a 'Defender of Democracy' opposed to the coup d'état in Honduras (28th June 2009) - a situation which affects us all, but especially us women.



“The Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana Workers Union (COLSIBA) reported via their coordinator, Gilbert Bermúdez Umaña, that our colleague Iris Munguía, member of the leadership of the Coordinating Body of Banana and Agroindustrial Workers Unions in Honduras (COSIBAH), was arrested on Thursday 2nd July. She was arrested, along with other people who were taking part in a protest in the streets of San Pedro Sula, demanding the return of the constitutional president, Manuel Zelaya Rosales.”

In his report, Gilbert Bermúdez Umaña says, ‘the army assaulted and arrested hundreds of people’. He added that, since last Sunday, the banana trade unions, as well as many other popular organizations, have been protesting in the streets, demanding the return of Zelaya and denouncing the military coup d’état.”

Lifework

To date I feel satisfied with my work, because I feel that I haven't let down the men and women who have trusted me in the work that I have done.

I feel grateful for my life, for the work that I have done and for the opportunity to learn that a new society must be built by women and men alike.

We have to recognize that there are men who are aware and committed to social justice and to the defence of our rights. Only by working together, men and women together can carry out the necessary transformation to bring about a fairer and worthy world for everyone.

I feel so grateful for the opportunity of sharing my experience with you, of being a mother, a leader and a union leader.

I feel so grateful for the life that I have lived and am living; for the wonderful opportunity of receiving this SILVER ROSE PRIZE, in recognition of my work. To be honest, I never imagined that I would earn it one day. It makes me feel more than grateful and just leaves me to say:

Thank you so much, I will not let you down and I will continue with my work to the end!

Iris Munguía

