

# THE ITF FIGHTING FOR A FAIR FUTURE



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The world of work is changing. COVID-19, automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), monopolies, war, the massive accumulation of capital and anti-union laws make the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) representing over 18 million transport workers in 150 countries indispensable in the struggle to protect and advance workers' rights in the maritime industry.

We are proud to actively advocate for equal rights, representation and opportunities for women, LGBT+ and young workers. We're prioritising their visibility, activism, and leadership in an industry where these groups are under-represented.

Almost half a million ITF Dockers from around 290 affiliated unions are on the frontline organising and campaigning against the relentless drive for greater profits. Profits that all too often cost lives on the docks. Official records show that almost 800 workers were killed in ports over the last 20 years. The ITF view is clear: no worker should die at work. Every worker should join a union.

Consequently, one of our main priorities is planning around health and safety in ports. As a priority, we are engaging with the major Global Network Terminal Operators (GNTs) to stop the race to the bottom and raise standards globally.

The ITF Dockers' Section Occupational Safety and Health Strategy focuses on the key issues that matter for port workers around the globe, including:

- Researching and documenting fatalities and serious injuries.



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- Developing training programmes like the "Be more than a bystander" programme.
- Wellbeing including mental health: if you see a colleague in distress reach out.
- An innovative safety app for Maritime workers working closely with GNTs, industry working groups, employer associations and governments on raising safety standards across the industry via charters, consultative framework agreements and Memorandums of Understanding.

We always seek to increase our influence within the sector. Our critical work with the International Cargo Handling Coordination

Association (ICHCA) is a prime example: we have engaged with employers, UN Agencies, and regulatory authorities to make sure our voice is heard and our opinions considered.

We have worked with ICHCA on many workplace health and safety initiatives including the development of a new vessel inspection programme that could set a new global standard for port vessel inspections and lead to a more consistent approach in identifying hazards and risks onboard ships.

We have also produced an ITF Dockers Section Health and Safety Charter which sets out our principles for a modern and safe port, which include the



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fundamental employer health and safety responsibilities and the rights of a workplace health and safety representative. The charter has been made available in all languages for our affiliates.

We are also developing consultative framework agreements with employers and investors, particularly within the area of health and safety to raise awareness and standards in ports. The related issue of modern slavery is also on our agenda.

To facilitate this we have established a working group with dockers from every region to coordinate our occupational safety and health (OSH) strategy and identify priorities. The working group will provide recommendations to the dockers' section committee on OSH issues and formulate guidelines and toolkits for our affiliates' campaigns and training programmes.

The ITF believes in dialogue, therefore a collaborative and participatory approach to health and safety where workers' unions are involved in all aspects of health and safety policies and are included in the decision making process before decisions are made.

Ports are notoriously dangerous working environments, where a shocking number of work-related deaths of dockers and seafarers occur onboard vessels and on the quays of our ports at an unacceptable level. Hundreds of work-related deaths of dockers and seafarers in the last 20 years is completely unacceptable.

It is quite clear that protecting workers' safety and health requires a culture change in the port industry. To do this effectively it needs workers to have the knowledge and training to engage with management and other stakeholders.

In response to union demand, the ITF Dockers Section and the ITF Seafarers' Trust have worked together to develop an innovative online tool for port workers.

The new OSH Ports App was launched in the Arab World in

2021 and has now expanded to Latin America and the Caribbean. Workers can now access the app's powerful occupational safety and health knowledge in Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish and English.

The app was written by industry experts, with contributions from ITF-affiliated dockers' unions, and is supported by the International Labour Organization's International Training Centre (ILO-ITC).

It offers a course based on the best industry research and practice. It covers the fundamentals of occupational safety and health and is specific to the ports sector. It has been designed for users to understand occupational health and safety risks in their workplaces while considering the national, regional, and international context.

The OSH Ports App is split into five modules, which participants can complete at their own pace.

At the end of each module, participants must complete a short assessment, before they can move on to the next module. When they have completed all five modules, participants can take a final assessment within the app or website to receive a course completion certificate supported by the ILO-ITC.

The next stage is delivering face-to-face train the trainer courses throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Arab World. Key union representatives will go back into their workplaces and train hundreds more workers to complete the app.

This work started in January and so far this year we trained 13 delegates from nine different Caribbean countries who all successfully completed the course.

The goal is a reduction in serious injuries and fatalities, and that will only happen with more worker participation in all activities involving safety and health planning in ports.

Automation and AI are sold as powerful tools for efficiency and creativity, but this is simplistic and mostly erroneous. Much of the independent empirical research

shows how the new technologies and the rapid growth of AI and 5G have the potential to decimate dockers' jobs and communities whilst not increasing productivity one bit.

To coordinate and cohere our approach the ITF Dockers Section has created a global working group of union experts to combat the threat of automation and new technologies especially where these technologies are being used as a union-busting tool.

The Working Group has put together a Future of Work Campaign Toolkit to assist affiliates in their campaigns and discussions with employers.

The Toolkit covers the key issues:

- Community impact of automation.
- Just transition.
- Decreased tax revenues.
- Security risks.
- Impact on women.
- Productivity losses.
- Economical transparency.
- Examples of collective bargaining.
- Jurisdiction.

The ITF Dockers' position on automation is clear: workers must be part of the dialogue when employers are considering the introduction of new technologies. We have evidence of disastrous attempts to automate without union involvement and agreement. In 2016 Ports of Auckland launched an automation programme that it claimed would double the port's capacity, promising Aucklanders, customers, and shareholders safety, environmental, community and capacity benefits from the automation of their container terminal.

However, the automation project failed in every measure. Instead of improving throughput, and even after accounting for disruptions caused by COVID-19, the automation project led to severe congestion, delays and additional costs for the port and its users. Workers were put under



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pressure to make up the shortfall, jeopardising safety with lives lost and a tripling of injuries and lives lost. New analysis has found that Ports of Auckland’s automation programme has cost the port and the wider New Zealand economy over NZD\$1.2 billion (\$735 million) – equivalent to 17 years of port profits prior to the terminal’s automation.

The ITF is also highly active in a range of other critical activities: from workers’ capital initiatives to organising through global supply chains to Just Transition and climate change we are promoting a workers’ voice. Of course, we hold employers, governments, investors and multinationals accountable for ensuring decent work, fundamental labour rights and genuine social protections for dockers worldwide. We want meaningful dialogue and resolution through negotiation, but if necessary, we’ll use our industrial power.

With all the geopolitical turbulence and industry restructuring it’s difficult to predict with any precision where the sector is heading, but one thing is certain: the role of the ITF in defending workers’ jobs and rights has never been more important.

Or as many have said: ‘If there wasn’t an ITF, it would have to be invented!’

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

Enrico Tortolano has been active in the trade union movement for more than 25 years. He has run successful global campaigns, negotiated with government ministers and CEOs on pay, pensions and privatisation, organised workers across borders, and tutored trade union courses around the world including UN staff on labour history, economics and political education. He has also worked as the International Officer for a public sector union and headed the Policy and National Bargaining department of a UK civil and public sector union. He has also worked as a campaigning journalist in Latin America and was widely published whilst covering presidential campaigns and trade union rights issues.

Enrico is currently the Dockers Section Coordinator for the ITF managing a global team committed to protecting and advancing the interests of port workers.

Steve Biggs currently holds the position of ITF Docker’s Section Senior Assistant, a role he has occupied since November 2020. Before that, he served as Unite the Union Convenor in the Port of Southampton from January 2013 to November 2020. From 2018 to 2020,

he held the position of Chair of the ITF Docker’s Section Occupational Safety and Health Working Group.

In June 2021, he joined the ICHCA Technical Panel.

Steve began his career as a Docker for Southampton Container Terminals in 1994 and later became a Health and Safety Representative in 1998 and a Shop Steward in 2000. Throughout his tenure in the docks, he has fulfilled various roles including lasher, straddle carrier driver, and Ship-to-Shore crane driver.

Steve was a member of the Unite the Union team that worked as part of a tripartite group with PSS and the HSE to develop and publish the Safety in Docks Approved Code of Practice in 2013-14.

**ABOUT THE ORGANISATION:**

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) is a global, democratic, affiliate-led movement of 740 transport workers’ unions recognised as the world’s leading transport authority. We fight passionately to improve working lives; connecting trade unions and workers’ networks from 153 countries to secure rights, equality and justice for their members. We are the voice of the 20 million transport workers who move the world.