

Reinstated at last, Pearl Continental Karachi Hotel workers get their first wages in 10 years

Friday 26 October 2012, by [Asian Food Worker](#) (Date first published: 12 October 2012).

Nearly 10 years after a fight over the rights of casual workers led to union-busting and the dismissal of 19 union officers and members at the five star Pearl Continental Hotel in Karachi, Pakistan, the unfairly terminated workers have been reinstated and are finally being paid wages.

When the Pearl Continental Hotel Workers Union opposed the mass termination of casual workers in November 2001, management launched a series of vicious attacks on the union, including false charges against union leaders that led to their arrest. These charges - later dismissed by the High Court as fabricated - were used to terminate the union's General Secretary, Ghulam Mehboob, Joint Secretary Basheer Hussain and 18 other union members and officers in January 2002.

The Pearl Continental Hotel Workers Union, a member of the IUF-affiliated Pakistan Hotel, Restaurant, Clubs, Tourism, Catering and Allied Workers (PHRCTCAWF), fought over the years with protest rallies, media conferences, protest letters, and a drawn-out legal battle, backed by continuous international solidarity actions. A new conflict over the dismissal of another four union officers and members in February 2010 led to a 26-day occupation of the hotel basement by 200 union members, ending with the reinstatement of the four workers.

Finally in February 2011 the Sindh Labour Court ordered the reinstatement of 19 union officers and members who unfairly dismissed in 2002. While the Pearl Continental Hotel management have appealed the court's decision and refused to allow them into the hotel, they still must pay the reinstated workers. These are the first wages in a decade.

During that decade the union also maintained its original demands over the rights of precarious workers. The casual workers management tried to terminate en masse back in 2001 were made permanent over the years and joined the union.

At the 12th IUF Asia/Pacific Regional Conference in October, the General Secretary of the Pearl Continental Hotel Workers Union, Ghulam Mehboob, thanked IUF members throughout the world for their support over the past 10 years. IUF Asia/Pacific Regional Secretary, Ma Wei Pin, commended the union on what is one of the bravest and most determined struggles experienced in the region.

Asian Food Worker

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