

BWI and Pfeiderer AG Sign International Minimum Standards Agreement

The Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) and BWI member IG Metall, the European Works Council (EWC) of Pfeiderer AG, and the management of the wood-based materials producer have concluded an International Framework Agreement (IFA). In the agreement, signed in Frankfurt on 30 November, the company undertakes to comply with minimum standards for the working conditions of all the workers in its domestic and especially foreign entities. Wolfgang Rhode, an executive member of IG Metall's board, sees the agreement as a way to agree minimum social standards and labour rights within internationally operating companies, in the absence of enforceable government regulations.

Wolfgang Rhode, Pfeiderer AG CEO Hans Overdieck, and EWC president Frank Bergmann signed the agreement.

"The worldwide enforcement of minimum standards should prevent international competition and cut-throat rivalry from being pursued as a race to the lowest standards in wages and environmental regulations and even with child labour," said Rhode. The aim was not only to implement formal rights and to enshrine a spirit of participation in a written document, but to apply those values in the practice and culture of all Pfeiderer AG's plants and offices. The agreement contains provisions that expand on existing standards and reassert them. So, "as a matter of principle, the company's sustainable development takes precedence over short-term profit targets," said Rhode.

Through the conclusion of international framework agreements, trade unions have for some years been pursuing the goals of guaranteeing workers' rights through transnational regulations and of protecting the employees of multinational companies and of their suppliers against exploitation and wage dumping. That is to be achieved through compliance with minimum standards for working conditions, based on the core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Those include the recognition of human rights, the prohibition of discrimination and of child and forced labour, the right of workers to join unions and have workers' representatives, and the right to adequate pay, healthy working conditions and socially acceptable working hours.

Ambet Yuson, BWI General Secretary: "We are delighted by this agreement with Pfeiderer. After all, the sense and purpose of International Framework Agreements is to give our member organisations a tool that helps them gain recognition as bargaining partners and initiate social dialogue with company managements. That process should, in turn, lead to the negotiation of collective agreements, which will then improve the workers' working conditions and wages." Ambet added: "The success of global company agreements depends crucially on the strength of trade unions at the national level and on whether it is possible to conduct collective bargaining at national and company levels."

Within the BWI's jurisdiction, there are now 16 framework agreements with multinational companies, with, for Germany-based companies alone, five agreements with wood industry companies, Schwan-Stabilo, Faber Castell, Staedtler, Wilkhahn, and Pfeiderer AG, and a construction industry agreement with Hochtief.

The Pfeiderer Group, with its head office in Neumarkt, employs about 5,600 employees worldwide at 22 locations in the United States, Canada, Russia, Sweden and Poland, of which some 2,500 at eight locations in Germany.