UNI Equal Opportunities proudly covered Liverpool in the purple, green and white of the suffragette movement to commemorate the centenary of women’s right to vote in the UK, as well as the 150th Anniversary of the British Trade Unions Congress and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. Around 500 women from all over the world, representing 66 countries and 160 unions participated at the 5th UNI World Women’s Conference, which took place on the 14th and 15th June 2018 at the ECHO Arena.

The two-day Conference, which preceded the UNI World Congress, marked the conclusion of four years of hard work in the implementation and achievement of goals set out in the spirit of “Including You” and “Breaking Through”, as well as the beginning of a new stage in which “Making it Happen” would show the world our aim to be on the frontline of those issues that affect and interest service trade unions worldwide.
Since the beginning of recorded history, women have been fighting for their rights: to own property, to get an education, to work and 100 years ago, some of them sacrificed their own lives to acquire the right to vote.

But our fight, women’s fight, is far from over when women are still 60% of the chronically hungry people in the world; 1 in 5 women and girls experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner and in 79 countries there are still laws that restrict the types of jobs that women can do.

In the workplace, the global female labour force participation rate continues at almost 50%, but women are still more likely to remain unemployed or work informally, they suffer from occupation and sectoral segregation, they endure unequal distribution of unpaid care and household work, and gain uneven pay for the same job as men.
Four years ago, in Cape Town, the UNI Equal Opportunities Department aimed its work at growing and strengthening affiliated unions by including more women and minority groups in their work; as well as by raising their visibility in unions, as a way to obtain more balanced and inclusive societies. In order to achieve these priorities, we undertook research, developed programs and engaged our affiliates in global campaigns and regional activities, in order to transform them into advocates of inclusion, transformation, and equality.

In Liverpool, and as part of our “Making it Happen” strategy, participants to the Conference, agreed that in order to construct more equal and fair societies, women need to be at the heart of union work. They voted unanimously on: raising women participation in all UNI structures to improve, achieve and sustain the 40% rule; to continue working towards the eradication of gender based violence through different tools, such as an ILO Convention to address violence at the workplace; to promote the expansion of the Mentoring Program in order to build more leaders and encourage more young women to engage in union work; to empower women and encourage them to partake in union work and emphasize on the need of gender mainstreaming in unions; to promote the expansion of women’s networks at global, regional, national and sectorial levels; and to advocate for the inclusion of a gender perspective to UNI’s work on the Future World of Work.
It was also an opportunity to give thanks and farewell to all the people that have helped build the base for a strong female presence at UNI, including our 10 year UNI World Women President, Denise McGuire, whose work and dedication helped UNI Women raise the visibility of women’s issues in unions and raise the working standards for women all over the world. It was also a time to say thank you and farewell to UNI General Secretary Philip Jennings who made “we should all be feminists” an inspirational guideline for trade unions around the world.

But it was also a time of welcoming new faces and vibrant energy to the work of UNI Women. Patricia Nyman, from SACCAWU South Africa, was elected as UNI World Women’s President. Her activism, dedication, strength and her own personal history will be strong additions to the work of UNI Women. And for the first time in its history, UNI will have an all-female leadership with Christy Hoffman at the helm, as General Secretary and Alke Boessiger as Deputy General Secretary.
A new era of Powerful Women begins, and although the next four new years will also have challenges and obstacles, they will await us with more solidarity, success and rewards.

Let’s make those powerful women before us proud! Let’s continue in their footsteps, let’s empower more women, let’s Make it Happen!
“...history tells us that big change never happens incrementally, there are always big bursts of forward motion, followed usually by some steps back.

I believe that we are in one of those big bursts right now- that the chasms have opened on sexual harassment, the opportunity is presenting itself for us to translate a renewed public shock and outrage into long lasting progress. That we must seize this opportunity before it is too late.

We must both change the rules on sexual harassment and change the culture”

Christy Hoffman, UNI Global Union General Secretary
“In UNI we represent 10 million women – 10 million! This means we also represent half of the members of UNI’s affiliated unions across the sectors and regions.

We fight against all forms of discrimination – in general and at the workplace and are dedicated to improve the lives and working conditions of workers everywhere.

It is no coincidence, that we are here today. Each of us has a story to tell and each of us has battled fights no man will ever know. We can, and we should be proud of all the things we have accomplished… A Finnish author, feminist, journalist and social activist from the 19th century, Minna Canth once said that questions of women should be part of everything, because: "Female question is not only a question of women, but of humankind."

Ann Selin, Former UNI Global Union President

Let there be no doubt:
• Women can do anything.
• Women can be anything.
• Women can change the world!
And together, we will! Together, let’s seize the future. Together, let’s make it happen!

Denise McGuire, Former UNI World Women’s President
Women everywhere must have the right to take their own decisions about what’s right for them – in their private life and in the world of work.

Without women in the workplace, everywhere in the world, all of our economies will not grow to the extent that they need and could.

*Alke Boessiger, UNI Deputy General Secretary*