

FROM THE WAREHOUSE FLOOR TO BUILDING UNION POWER WORLDWIDE

Mathias Bolton | Candidate for UNI General Secretary



With fellow workers on the warehouse floor, 1995.



Addressing the UNI Post & Logistics Global Conference, Bangkok, 2025.

Rooted In The Workplace

I signed my first union card in 1989, beginning thirteen years as a rank-and-file union member, including ten working in a retail distribution centre. As an elected Chief Steward for more than 500 workers, I represented workers, handled grievances, participated in collective bargaining and led one-day work stoppages and workplace campaigns.

That experience still shapes how I approach our work. I know what it means to be a union member and what worker power means on the shop floor.

In 2003, I joined RWDSU/UFCW's staff, working on organising, corporate campaigns, legislative initiatives and international engagement with IUF and UNI. That work taught me what affiliates need from their global union: practical support, solidarity and results.

Global Experience. Shared Purpose.

I joined UNI in 2012 and have led UNI's Commerce sector since 2016. For fourteen years, I have worked with affiliates across every region, ensuring their voices shape our global strategies.

I have tailored those strategies to different labour systems, cultures and political conditions while keeping us united around common goals. This understanding comes from years of listening, negotiating, campaigning and building trust. It is the experience a General Secretary needs to lead a truly global union.

A Record Of Building Worker And Union Power

I secured UNI's first global agreements with Metro Group, IKEA and Auchan and repeatedly strengthened our Carrefour and Inditex agreements. With these and many other companies, I have combined strong relationships, negotiation and union pressure to win commitments employers had resisted.

Together with affiliates, my team has implemented and enforced agreements in every region, in the Global North and South: helping establish commerce unions in Peru and Pakistan and build unions in Canada, Romania, Senegal, Kenya, Uganda and many other countries.

In Türkiye, we supported affiliates in organising and securing first collective agreements for thousands of retail workers across dozens of brands. The power and influence we had built enabled us to achieve results even with companies that had no global framework agreement with UNI.

As a member of the International Accord's steering and management committees, I work with its 300 brand signatories to turn binding commitments into safer factories for garment workers in Bangladesh and Pakistan. This work has deepened my experience of holding multinational companies accountable across their supply chains.

Why I Am Running

UNI is at a pivotal moment. Affiliates are not just choosing a new General Secretary; they are deciding what kind of global union federation they want. I want a UNI that turns its global reach into greater power for every affiliate. I have lived this work, from the shop floor to national union work to building union power worldwide, and I care deeply about what we have built together and what we can achieve.

I want to use our accumulated strength to negotiate across industries, shape corporate decisions and amplify our sectors' concerns with governments and international institutions.

I can offer the continuity of two full terms, subject to affiliates' continued support, to put these plans into practice and build lasting results.

I am asking affiliates to entrust me with this responsibility because I have spent my working life building the experience, relationships and trust this role demands. I will bring this experience, energy and passion to the work of our global union.

ONE TEAM

MATHIAS BOLTON

Candidate for UNI General Secretary

Strong Sectors At The Heart Of UNI

For most affiliates, UNI's sectors are a central reason they joined and a key way they engage with UNI at both global and regional levels. I will keep sectors at the core of our priorities and resource decisions, respecting the distinct needs and identity of each industry. Affiliates value both sector work tailored to their region's realities and a global platform to build shared strategies and collective power. I will support both, recognising the different forms this work takes and strengthening the connections between them. Every sector deserves the attention and support to deliver for its affiliates and the backing of UNI's wider strength to achieve more than it could alone.

Invest In Organising Results

I will respect UNI's limited resources and work with our sector heads and regional secretaries to evaluate organising initiatives on the results they deliver: stronger unions, membership growth, collective bargaining and greater power for UNI and its affiliates within companies and across industries. We will take an honest look at what has worked and what has not. We will expand successful approaches and have the courage to change direction and redirect resources when they are not delivering.

The Next Stage Of Global Union Power

I will build on the strength we have gained through global agreements and campaigns to expand our influence across whole industries. My team will pursue sector-wide agreements with multiple employers, bring companies together across sectors on challenges such as AI and digitalisation, and use international standards and institutions to strengthen and leverage our positions. We will use that power to influence corporate decisions, expand workers' rights and turn global commitments into concrete gains for workers.

Joining Forces Across Sectors

UNI's reach across industries is a source of strength. We will look to develop shared campaigns wherever our sectors' interests intersect - from Finance and ICTS on fintech to Commerce and Post & Logistics on the rise of e-commerce. These are just two of the opportunities to build power together. Mobilise the whole organisation behind major campaigns such as Amazon, drawing on every sector's expertise, relationships and organising capacity to expand our collective power and influence.

Women's Leadership. Equal Opportunities For All.

I will champion gender balance at the highest levels of UNI's leadership and across our teams, building on my experience developing the Commerce team, and ensure women have a strong voice in shaping our priorities and decisions. Working with UNI Equal Opportunities, Our Regions, Sectors, and Affiliates, I will translate our work on women's rights into concrete commitments, as I have done through Commerce global agreements and European Works Council agreements. Across this work, we will uphold equal rights and dignity for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Regional Diversity = Global Strength

UNI is a mosaic of labour systems, cultures and organising traditions, united by shared values. Our regions bring distinct strengths - from European Works Councils and influence on European policy, to defending democracy and social justice in the Americas, building union organisation across Africa, and advancing social dialogue and partnership in Asia and the Pacific. I will work closely with regional secretaries and regional leadership to support the priorities affiliates set through their regional bodies and ensure regional experience informs our global direction. Our Global Office, regions and sectors must work in partnership, drawing on each other's expertise and strength. I will also work to ensure that UNI's diversity is reflected in our staffing, leadership and elected bodies, so affiliates see their experiences represented and know they help shape our future.

Organising The Next Generation Of Workers

Young workers want to be part of our movement, but not necessarily part of our institutions.

UNI and our affiliates must make our unions places where young and new workers feel recognised, have a voice, and can influence decisions. Working with UNI Youth and the leaders of our national unions, we will explore how our institutions can become places where young workers feel comfortable, included and share a sense of ownership. At the same time, we will learn from our youth leaders about the best ways to attract, welcome and organise the next generation of workers into our movement.

New and young workers are key to our battle to stop the rise of the far right.

Secure UNI's Future

Within the first year of my term, I will work with our sector heads and regional secretaries to develop and begin implementing a plan to strengthen relationships with existing affiliates and bring new unions into UNI. A broader affiliation base strengthens our collective voice, extends our power and reach, and shares the cost of sustaining UNI more widely.

I will modernise how we work at our Global Office. UNI's hardworking staff are ambassadors for our work, and I will ensure they have the tools, support and efficient working methods they need to deliver our global, regional and sector programmes.

I will review our spending and how we resource our work, including the full costs and obligations associated with the increased external funding UNI receives from sources beyond our traditional solidarity support organisations (SSOs) and affiliates. We must understand both the money received and the demands these arrangements place on our staff, resources and priorities. This review will help ensure that funded programmes align with our objectives, build lasting union capacity and strengthen affiliate ownership.

Together, these steps will help strengthen UNI's financial and institutional stability and ensure this organisation we love has the strength to meet the challenges of the next decade.