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Myrtle Witbooi

South Africa – She persisted, We are united

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From slavery to fighting to end it for all! She changed the course of history. She is Myrtle Witbooi.
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Story

"If somebody would have said to me 45 years ago that I would have sat here today and really get to the end of slavery, I would not have believed them," Myrtle Witbooi said from the Palais des Nations' podium in Geneva in 2011 a few moments after the adoption of an international convention for domestic workers' rights. It has been life-long fight for Myrtle. And the odds were indeed against her when she started campaigning in the 60s for domestic workers' rights in South Africa.

"My story begins in a small room in the backyard of an employer's house. I was separated from my child when she was one month old – because a domestic worker cannot have her children with her." At that time, domestic work was regulated by the "Master and Servant Act". "It meant that anything the master said had the force of law and the worker had no say at all," Myrtle recalls.

After the first meeting she held, she got elected to represent her peers and became a trade union women leader. "I didn't even know what a chairperson was," she says. But she took up the challenge with one motto: "where women take the lead, things happen." And thing happened. She dedicated her life to being a spokesperson for those who are not heard. By pushing for the adoption of laws and international conventions, Myrtle activism changed the life and conditions of hundreds of thousands of domestic workers globally. Today, she is the President of the International Domestic Workers Federation. She is We.

Link: <http://idwfed.org/en>