Welcome to all, joining us today,

I am Sabine Slegers, president of the PERC Women’s Committee and National Secretary of the CGSLB, Belgium. The CGSLB is proud to be co-financing this important Women’s School, together with the Belgium Ministry of Labour.

It is with a heavy heart, due to family illness, that I cannot join you today in this very important Women’s School but I would like to give you a solidarity message through this video.

We all, and especially as women workers, have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. From the very beginning the PERC Women’s committee have seen the devastating impact and adopted a resolution on “WOMEN AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19”, which will form the basis of our discussion during our Womens’ School this morning. Here I would like to thank very warmly my sister from the Committee, who have worked very hard the past months on this.

The Covid-19 crisis is exposing inequalities and especially gender related inequalities: between men and women and between women of different classes and regions. *In many countries the struggle to achieve guarantees of decent work with jobs, income and social protection has just deepened. Social dialogue between unions, governments and employers is critical.*

COVID 19 crisis has revealed the vital role that both paid and unpaid care work play in maintaining the health and well-being of societies. Women are at the centre of the response to the crisis, and with the closure of schools, childcare and other care facilities, many of them have experienced a sharp increase in the amount of time they spend daily on unpaid care work.

The COVID crisis showed that protecting workers is more challenging than usual, particularly with regard to workers in non-standard forms of employment and in the informal economy. Many such workers, a large majority of whom are women, lack adequate labour and social protection, because of their contractual status.

During, the second part of our Women’s School we will be looking at the importance of ratifying the ILO C190 in the light of the COVID-19.

We also sadly saw an increase in domestic abuse. The ratification of ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 must be a priority on the political agenda. More than ever these difficult times and rising numbers of domestic violence show that a global answer is needed and the relevance of these two instruments could not be stronger. To help us in our fight for ratification, the ITUC have a number of tools which will be discussed during the afternoon.

Today I hope that we can learn from the experts, but also from each other’s experiences in our various countries to help fight the pandemic together and in solidarity.

I wish you a fruitful Women’s School and all the best in your trade union work,