



20<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## **ITUC-AFRICA STATEMENT ON THE COMMEMORATION OF WORLD REFUGEE DAY**

The African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation ([www.ituc-africa.org](http://www.ituc-africa.org)), joins the rest of the world to celebrate the strength and courage of millions of people who have been forced to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution.

We recall that the World Refugee Day commemorated annually on June 20 is an occasion to educate all stakeholders about significant issues of concern to refugees and to recognize their resilience in rebuilding their lives.

Further, we note that World Refugee Day was originally known as Africa Refugee Day, before the United Nations General Assembly officially designated it as an international day in December 2000 to express its solidarity with the African continent. That day also marked the 50th anniversary of the U.N.'s 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees. In essence, refugee and displacement were issues that plagued and dominated on the African continent.

We note with serious concern that dealing with the flood of refugees worldwide has become the world's main humanitarian crisis. According to the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2018, the world had a record number of 70.8 million uprooted people who fled from wars or persecution. This is the highest figure since the creation of the UNHCR 70 years ago.

Out of this figure, more than 25 million are refugees, while 41,3 million are internally displaced and 3,5 million are asylum seekers. Every day, almost 44,000 people on average flee their homes to seek protection in another part of their own country or abroad. And of the total number of refugees globally, over 50 percent are women and under the age of 18.

We are disturbed that violence, conflict, human rights abuses, persecution, disasters and climate and environmental change are some of the factors responsible for forced displacement and movement. These forced movements are creating considerable challenges for countries of first asylum, transit and destination, as well as countries of origin. These challenges include the actual and potential impact of these populations on labour markets of host countries. Access to work or livelihoods may be prohibited or restricted by law and refugees who do manage to find work do so mostly in the informal economy.

We are equally worried that the precarious situation of these populations renders them vulnerable to discriminatory practices which can lead to exploitation, the denial of fundamental principles and rights at work and situations of forced labour and child labour.

No doubt, refugees and other forcibly displaced persons make important contributions to the global economy and the development of host countries. They continue to fill labour shortage gaps in the care (domestic and health), agriculture and food, construction, tourism/hospitality and transportation sectors. Therefore, they should not be treated as liabilities.

The actual COVID-19 health crisis has exposed them to challenges that affect them in more profound ways than other categories of workers. A number of them are working without Personal Protection Equipment and in an unsafe environment and many have lost their jobs and could not secure an income. With the COVID-19 crisis, most of the humanitarian organisations that could help refugees had to review their priorities to focus on the responses to the crisis especially in health issues and any other matters including providing legal assistance to refugees was put on standby.

ITUC-Africa expresses its solidarity with millions of refugees and internally displaced persons and their families in Africa and the world. We commend the encouraging steps taken by some African governments by reviewing their legislations in order to enhance their national protection capacities with respect to refugees and displaced people.

We call on our governments to commit more to the ratification and implementation of national, regional and international instruments related to refugees and others vulnerable groups. We also call on them to review and improve their labour laws to facilitate access of refugees to the labour market and guarantee their right to freedom of association.

Our countries need to do more in setting up common refugee and displaced coordination system across the continent. And to strengthen the international cooperation in information sharing and identification of refugees and other vulnerable people.

As an organised labour movement, we will continue to advocate for and to mobilise the necessary political will and the development and deployment of policies and programmes in addressing the challenges of poverty, insecurity, democracy, human rights abuses, corruption and impunity, which are push factors responsible for displacement. We will do these in full partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders.



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