



May Day, 2020 - Message by ITUC-Africa

For the first time in living memory we are celebrating May Day in a completely different way. No marches or demonstrations or big public meetings. Our public expressions on May Day are all mainly virtual through social and other media.

Most parts of the world are under lockdown or restrictions of some sort. This is part of the effort to deal with the health crisis the world is facing with the emergence of the new coronavirus, COVID-19.

The heroes and heroines leading the effort to fight and overcome this grave crisis of our time are our health and medical workers and care givers. They are ably supported by our scientists and essential services and goods workers. These are the food producers, water and electricity workers, sanitation workers, transport workers, traders and salespersons, finance, media and security personnel as well as all those who have had to go to work when other workers have had to stay home to prevent and control the spread of the coronavirus. On the occasion of labour day we salute all these workers in a special way.

COVID-19 has reminded us in a forceful way that health is a fundamental right and attribute that we must all enjoy to be able to have a meaningful life. This pandemic provides us the lesson that we must prioritize the universal right to health and place it at the heart of the workers' struggle. We recall the constitution of the World Health Organization that recognizes health for all as a fundamental condition for peace and security in the world. COVID-19 teaches clearly that we need the cooperation of all persons and states to achieve health security for the world and its people.

But COVID-19 has also exposed some major weaknesses for us in Africa. Our dependent states, weak social protection systems, high levels of informality, overcrowded and congested urban centers with their poor accommodation,

have all been exposed as Africa has struggled to cope with the health crisis. In addition, an already difficult unemployment situation has been further worsened and compounded by the economic impact of COVID-19. Jobs have been destroyed or severely threatened in the hotel and tourism sectors, in catering, airlines, transport, education, entertainment, repairs and other services. Millions of informal economy workers have also lost irreplaceable incomes and suffered further destitution by necessary measures of restriction that have been imposed in different countries to contain COVID-19.

May Day reminds us once again about the place of resilience and solidarity in the fortunes of workers. We need to fight back and reach out in solidarity to each other to overcome the crisis that faces us all. Trade unions must link up within our countries, across our regions in Africa and with all workers around the world to fight for health, employment and social protection for all.

As the world continues to battle with COVID-19 trade unions must remain consistent in fighting to protect jobs and wages during this period. Unions must also do all they can to secure workplaces and to ensure that those who have to work are safe, that workers get the message right in protecting themselves, their families and their colleagues from getting infected. Where people get infected we must work to ensure that they get treatment.

As we battle on in solidarity we call on African trade unions to join in raising issues of the informal economy and in securing recognition for the contribution of informal workers to the economies of our countries. Unions must work hard to extend their organisation to informal workers and to strengthen their voice and representation.

The crisis that faces us with COVID-19 is a wake-up call that also provides an opportunity to us. African trade unions must join other workers of the world in demanding greater responsibility from our governments and for a renewal of the social contract between governments and the citizens of our countries. We must push our governments to do better in regaining the trust of populations by delivering material gains to the people from good governance.

In Africa, our governments must provide better opportunities for inclusion and social dialogue in the way they administer affairs. As trade unions we must also renew our commitment to organizing workers and in pushing the rightful demands of the population for the needed attention to better health and social protection, employment and decent incomes.

As we fight the coronavirus and prepare for recovery of our economies we urge African governments to strengthen their cooperation and collaboration in the Regional Economic Communities and the African Union. On our part, African trade unions must stand ready and united to promote the rights and interests of workers and our people to stay alive and to rebuild our countries in new ways that will benefit all.

Together we shall win!



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