



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

MOTTO: LABOUR CREATES WEALTH

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28th April 2020

YOUR SACRIFICE WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN!

Text of a Press Statement Issued by the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni at a Press Conference on the Commemoration of the 2020 International Workers Memorial Workers' Day.

Today, April 28, 2020 is commemorated all over the world as the International Workers' Memorial Day or the Workers' Mourning Day. This day is celebrated in the memory of workers who had paid the supreme sacrifice in the course of their duties as workers or as activists fighting for the rights and interests of the working class. It also a day to remember workers who had lost some limb, suffered injury and other forms of severe loss while at their work places.

The theme of this year's commemoration is **"Stop the Pandemic at Work"**. This is significant coming at the epoch of the global fight against the novel corona virus disease otherwise known as Covid-19. The contribution of frontline workers especially healthcare workers has become the only buffer between deaths in thousands and deaths in millions. Every day, our healthcare workers courageously dare the stare of death in selfless service to rescue the lives of others.

On a day like this, we salute the uncommon love, faith, courage, and sacrifice by frontline workers who have given more than what the call of duty demands to give hope to humanity. We will forever remain indebted to thousands of our healthcare workers, transport workers, utility employees, journalists and even workers in the informal sector who have continued to show up at their duty posts despite the threat of death, dearth of working tools and paucity of gratitude. We condole with the families of workers who have paid the supreme sacrifice in the fight against Covid-19. We assure you that their labours will not be in vain. Their unquantifiable sacrifice will never be forgotten.

We also wish to use this commemoration to ask government and employers in the private sector to throw in sufficient weight to make the load of our frontline workers easier. We demand sufficient personal protection equipment, hand sanitizers, functional wash rooms, suitable rest rooms and other facilities to make the work of our brave warriors on the health frontline less herculean than it already is. Our health workers and other frontline workers are not on a suicide mission. They simply want to save lives. The least government and employers can do is to help them keep their lives so that they can go on saving other lives.

We commend the Federal government for the insurance cover and enhanced incentives provided for frontline health workers. We urge states to follow suit. We also commend the Sokoto State government for leading the way in this regard. We wish to stress that this gesture of support incentives should be equally bestowed on all health workers as members of one team fighting one deadly biological enemy.

This year, Nigeria would be celebrating its 60th Independence Anniversary. It is important to point out that without workers our independence would have remained a pipe dream. Nigeria did not get her independence on a platter of gold. It would tantamount to a tortious twist of history to say so! Just as our frontline workers are doing today in the Covid-19 battle, Nigerian workers paid with their blood so that we can all be free. At the Bukuru mine fields, workers were killed. At the Iva Valley Coal mine, 22 workers were mowed down by British guns. Many more lost their limbs and livelihood. These workers laid down their lives so that we can pick up our lives. We will never forget!

Finally, on this occasion we make the point that labour is not a commodity to be taken, trampled, and tossed aside. Workers create the wealth and demand a decent fraction of the reward of their efforts. We urge workers everywhere to continue to draw inspiration from the fact that without our sweat, no sweet gain can be made. Without the twitching of our muscles, no socio-economic puzzle can be solved.

In reciprocation of the enormous sacrifice made by workers, we urge employers of labour to show solidarity with the sacrifice of our workers and people by ensuring wage protection, income support and social inclusion at these trying times. This is not the time to stop or deduct

from workers' salaries. Such an action would be both illogical and illegal as workers' salaries are core elements of employment contracts and collective bargaining agreements. We have asked our affiliates and state councils to resist any salary deduction on the account of Covid-19.

We reassure our workers that our priority in these trying times remains the cautious, gradual, evidence-led and smart restart of the economy so that our workers can go back to work. We are also completely committed to the recovery of lost jobs, protection of wages, support for income and livelihood and improvement of Nigeria's social safety net.

Finally, as we prepare to restart our economy, we call on the leadership of our industrial unions and state councils to continue working with the different cadres of workers' leadership in the states and unions to ensure that health and safety facilities and guidelines such as running water, soaps, hand sanitizers, use of protective masks and social distancing are made available and enforced at different workplaces.

As part of smart measures to restart the economy, government should intensify Covid-19 testing (build at least a test centre in each state), contact tracing, public fumigation, and robust public health education.

Given the current lockdown and in line with global realities, this year's May Day will be observed in low key. We have, however, earmarked a number of symbolic events including solidarity visits and gestures to our incredibly brave frontline workers. We will find innovative ways to ensure that all Nigerian workers receive our 2020 May Day Message.

We encourage Nigerian workers not to hesitate to contact the National Secretariat of the NLC in the event of any Covid-19 related work place infraction, injustice, negligence and gender-based violence.

While we look ahead with hope that this pandemic will soon pass, let us remain vigilant. For now, please stay home. Please stay safe.

Happy 2020 May Day in Advance!



Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni
President, Nigeria Labour Congress