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## PRESS STATEMENT

### **ITUC-Africa Welcomes the Exclusion of Saudi Arabia and Russia from the UN Human Rights Council**

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa [www.ituc-africa.org](http://www.ituc-africa.org)) welcomes the decisive outcome of the election at the UN General Assembly for membership into the UN Human Rights Council, which resulted in the exclusion of Saudi Arabia along with Russia. This vote to exclude these countries is a significant victory for human rights, justice and accountability, following a concerted campaign led by civil society groups and human rights defenders worldwide.

Saudi Arabia's defeat in its bid to join the UN Human Rights Council is significant in light of its poor record on human and labour rights, especially regarding the ill-treatment of African migrant workers employed across various sectors. Thousands of African workers in Saudi Arabia have endured widespread abuse and exploitation under the oppressive kafala (sponsorship) system. These abuses include forced labour, confiscation of passports, delayed and non-payment of wages, denial of trade union rights, excessively long working hours without compensation, modern slavery practices, and sundry verbal, physical and emotional mistreatments. Many of these workers are denied access to justice and face arbitrary arrest, detention, and deportation, and several of them die in spurious and suspicious circumstances.

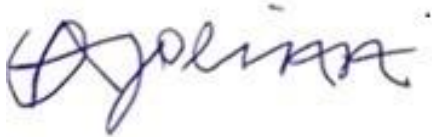
ITUC-Africa reiterates its longstanding position that Saudi Arabia's labour practices violate fundamental human and workers' rights, particularly those of African migrant workers. The exclusion of Saudi Arabia from the Human Rights Council sends a strong message that states which engage in such egregious violations cannot expect to occupy positions of influence within international human rights bodies.

Russia's exclusion from the Council further underscores the importance of holding all countries accountable for their human rights violations, including the suppression of civil society and media, involvement in conflicts that result in the loss of innocent lives and the targeting of trade unionists and human rights defenders.

This outcome is a powerful demonstration of the impact that coordinated and bold action by civil society, including the trade union movement, can have on the international stage. The exclusion of both Saudi Arabia and Russia is a clear victory for multilateralism, the rule of law and those who tirelessly defend human rights and labour rights globally. In the case of Saudi Arabia, we are determined to ensure that black lives indeed matter and that the treatment of black people who are part of the global human rights community is not with indignity. Therefore, we are irreversibly committed to ensuring that Saudi Arabia genuinely, inclusively and collaboratively reform its labour laws and practices to provide adequate protection, defence and promotion of the human and labour rights of all migrant workers, especially African migrant workers. We shall take our campaign to all spaces and processes at all levels to ensure voice and attention for our cause.

Conclusively, ITUC-Africa calls for continued vigilance and sustained action to ensure that states with poor human rights records, particularly about workers' rights, are held accountable in all international forums. We also highlight the growing reputational risk for those who remain silent in the face of these egregious abuses. We stand in solidarity with all human rights defenders and labour rights activists who continue to fight for justice and dignity for all workers, especially those in the most vulnerable situations.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Akhator Joel Odigie', written in a cursive style.

**Akhator Joel Odigie**  
**General Secretary, ITUC-Africa**

**Date: 14 October 2024**