



DECENT WORK DAY MESSAGE FOR BRIEFING OF THE MEDIA

WEDNESDAY 7th OCTOBER 2020-(10.00 HOURS)

@ MASA SQUARE HOTEL

1. Early this year, on the 18th February 2020 to be specific The national labour centre, namely BFTU and BOFEPUSU on behalf of workers and Government (state party) and Business Botswana as the Employers Organization, together and each appended our signatures to a memorandum of Understanding thereby undertaking to cooperate in the implementation of the second generation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) sponsored Decent Work Country Programme. (DWCP) for 2020-2024. The first generation of DWCP rolled from 2011 to 2015 and was extended while the review for the development of the 2nd generation document was ongoing.
2. In terms of the general consensus it has been agreed that the bulk of propositions made in the first programme (DWCP 2011-2015) were not properly implemented.
3. 7th October each year is THE WORLD DAY FOR DECENT WORK. 2020 is the 13th year since the start of the annual decent work day commemorations. The 2020 theme from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) which as BFTU we fully support, calls for ***a new social contract for recovery and resilience***.
4. We call on all trade unions and Businesses to spread the decent work message.
5. As is now common knowledge in about the first week of March, almost three weeks later WHO declared covid-19 a global pandemic.
6. Three weeks subsequent to that, with effect from 2nd April after the first detected cases of coronavirus were reported in Botswana, government declared a nationwide state of public emergency (SOPE) and an immediate two weeks long countrywide lockdown and two other lockdowns later as well as continual inter-zonal lockdown, with a view to contain the virus by enforcing WHO assigned protocols.
7. On account of the pandemic's implications for movement of people, on their social life and economic situation generally and due to its pervasive characteristic covid-19 has indisputably become a workplace hazard.
8. One of the incidental effects of the mandatory measures or covid-19 restrictive protocols has been a virtual lockdown on the lives of women and girl children who have been rendered more vulnerable to abuse by their male counterparts.
9. Another universally declared concern has been the relative diversion of health services from even the most deserving of cases of people with underlying conditions, senior citizens and women and girls' sexual and reproductive health services (SRH) as a result of the new coronavirus and its contest for space and attention.

10. There have been escalations in the statistics of gender based violence and defilement and rape cases since the first lockdown. This notwithstanding the World Report placing Botswana at position two of rape countries.
11. Harassment in the workplace has become the in- thing. The issue is exacerbated further by the increasing unemployment rate since employees are afraid to report because they will lose their jobs.
12. The porosity of the country's social security and protection systems has been seriously exposed as is the case with the vulnerability of the unemployed and poorest of our countrymen. This begs the question; **should the worst revisit our relative comfort are we standing on a cliff?**
13. The outbreak of the pandemic has prompted a loud call by the ILO to governments, Workers' and Employers' organizations to adopt human-centred responses arguing that the pandemic has a human face. This simply means that our response processes must start with the people we are designing responses for and end with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs.
14. Moreover that it possesses an International standards system whose austerity offers the much needed compass that government, social partners and other stakeholders and institutions that value human life and cherish a dignified humanity can rely on for navigating any presenting crisis like the covid-19 pandemic.
15. This truism was further highlighted in recent documents and policy briefs by the ILO as well as its reference to last year's centenary conference's "...Declaration on the Future of Work" attended by 187 countries.
16. It was a call for renewed and unrelenting vigour in upholding its constitutional mandate which puts workers' rights and the needs, aspirations and rights of all people at the heart of economic, social and environmental policies.
17. Less than a year after that declaration, as if to test its validity, the pandemic has plunged the world into a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale.
18. The state of preparedness on the part of many a government much less the absence of a strong enough conviction as to the extent and magnitude of the risk posed by the virus, has shown serious cracks in many respects appertaining to governance. We are still to lay our hands on evidence fully exempting our own government in this respect.
19. In spite of ILO and WHO prescriptions and recommendations in respect of the ideal protections to their people and the environment for tackling covid-19 or any serious crisis for that matter, Government has not ratified at least 59 updated ILO conventions which include 3 priority/governance standards and all occupational safety and health services conventions save for safety in mines convention.
20. Botswana government is yet to give full effect to conventions which will make social dialogue mandatory and legally binding. Hence representatives of workers

remain observers in bodies that still relegate final decision elsewhere. ie LAB, Minimum Wage Board NEMIC and HLCCs.

21. Transparency regarding the effectiveness or existence of clear-cut long short term and long term interventions including the government managing of the Covid-19 relief fund exclusively without involving other stakeholders despite the peculiarity of its mandate feeds into unfortunate misperceptions and suspicions about motives of government especially based on past track record in relation to relief or stimulus funds.
22. BFTU is gravely concerned by reports which we also investigated and found to be true, that young people who were taken by government as interns though holding degree qualifications in the area of Occupational safety, health and environment have now been redeployed as SHE Officers to the Ministry of Basic Education. They are manning schools around the country focusing on covid-19 related functions. For this of being infected with covid-19 and of infecting pupils they are paid a paltry P1, 300.00., just because they are interns.
23. *To add salt to injury, government opted to employ what are known as Scorpions and SHE Assistants and are paid three to four times the interns despite the superior qualification and supervisory role played by interns.
24. * All efforts by BFTU to solicit clarification to these concerns from all the implicated Ministries have not yielded fruit, unfortunately.
25. *These young people's attempts to secure the audience of those who matter in relation to their circumstances have hit a blank as they were told to stay in their rightful place.
26. *In defining the roles, rights and responsibilities of Health workers, (including occupational safety, health and environmental O/SHE Officers,) WHO, stated that they are at the frontline of any outbreak response and as such are exposed to hazards that put them at risk of infection with an outbreak pathogen(in this case covid-19).
27. *Hazards include psychological distress, fatigue and occupational burnout as well as different forms of violence.
28. BFTU submits that the onset of the pandemic rather than diminish, it has rendered the imperatives set out in the June 2019 Declaration even more urgent as the international community engages in a collective endeavour to tackle the impact of the virus. These essentially drew from the ILO's DWA which informs the basis and the end of the DWCP 2020-2024.
29. In other words the protections needed by workers, minorities and native or indigenous populations by way of ILO conventions and recommendations as from other international governance systems remain more valid now in the time of the pandemic than before because of the increased and multi-angled risk they are now exposed to.

30. Against that background I would like on behalf of the BFTU to present as I hereby do, the “expert’s tried and tested” recipe, our own the ILO sponsored DWCP 2020-2024, for sustainable relief at national and cross sectoral levels, to “build back better”.
31. Parties have undertaken through the MOU to collaborate in the implementation of;
 - i) Sustainable Employment creation particularly for young women and men.
 - ii) Improved quality social protection and conditions of work for all;
 - iii) Effective Labour market governance institutions and Practices.
32. The thrust of this programme and in particular the basis of our entering into a memorandum of understanding with government despite concerns about the binding or non-binding effect of the current consultative machineries as alluded to earlier is to collectively tap on the technical support of the respective ILO and other UN Technical Support systems and units, to enhance our own capacities, knowledge and skills for engaging and asserting our rights and or ability to duly account even to our own memberships.
33. **The Idea was also to as much as practicable take advantage of the positive posture that the administration of President Mokgweetsi Masisi, displayed in dealing with labour movement and build back better together what was since disrupted and stalled many years by the past administration which was clearly anti criticism and opposed to a robust civil society movement.**
34. It has been motivated by the ILO thus, and we reiterate the position that, “...the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare”
35. Additionally, we believe the way governments tailor their stimulus and support packages determines in what shape their economies and societies will emerge from the crisis. For example; balancing support for enterprises on the one hand, with support for workers and their families, on the other, should enable government to address the human dimension of the crisis.
36. Part of our own commitment to the DWCP 2020-2024 stems more from our clear understanding of the implications of covid-19 on the lives of workers and their families as well as the recognition that it will stay with us for some time. We therefore own up to that responsibility to protect them by demanding and seeing to the implementation of laws that aim to restore their dignity and welfare.
37. ALUTA CONTINUA , VIVA WORKERS POWER