



ITUC-Africa Statement on Africa Day, May 25, 2020

Africa Day, May 25, commemorates the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Africa Day celebrates the aim to **bring together the African peoples, strengthen their faith in integration and popularize the ideal of union of the continent**. The celebration reinforces the conviction that regional integration is the key to the development of Africa and that it is the path to follow to ensure structural transformation and facilitate the beneficial integration of Africa into the global economy.

Renamed the African Union (AU) in July 2002, the objectives that led to the creation of the organization have not changed. These included to:

- (i) Promote the unity and solidarity of African States;
- (ii) coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa;
- (iii) defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence;
- (iv) eliminate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and
- (v) promote international cooperation, taking due account of the United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The vision of unity and integration of the African peoples has fueled several development projects and initiatives on the continent. Different institutions have been created in various regions of the continent to advance the integration project. In recent years two major agreements have come into being to boost the integration agenda. These are the Abuja Treaty, Agenda 2063: *The Africa we want* and the 2018 agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The road to a real integration in Africa, however, remains strewn with challenges such as poor leadership and abuse of democratic rights, institutionalized corruption, violent

conflicts, poor infrastructure, poor public services, dependent mentality and above all lack of confidence and ability to take our destiny into our own hands.

Today the COVID-19 health crisis in the world has exposed Africa in all its weaknesses. The growing number of infections on the continent and the devastating impact that the coronavirus has had on black people in Africa's diaspora around the world is a wake up call to African leaders at all levels. There is every indication that African leaders must do better for their people in all respects. At the level of the state, in business, in the trade unions and civil society, in academia, religious society and at all other levels, African leaders and actors must do better for our people.

As the world went into crisis with COVID-19 the hard reality dawned that every people must do well to rely primarily on their own effort and that solidarity support can only be a complement to local effort. Sadly, as many parts of the world dug into their reserves to respond to the crisis, most of us in Africa had to run around begging for reliefs and resources to weather the storm on hand.

COVID-19 has destroyed businesses and worsened unemployment, destroyed incomes and livelihoods and made many more persons destitute. It has exposed overcrowding and poor housing, poor health infrastructure, poor social services like water and sanitation and the overall poor social protection for African people.

The hard lesson is there for us to see, that we in Africa will also do well to ensure that we can provide our most basic needs for ourselves. We need to secure our food safety and our basic medical and pharmaceutical supplies and to rebuild our socio-economies to serve the interests of African people.

As we celebrate Africa Day, we must rededicate ourselves to African unity and integration at all levels. We must remind ourselves that Africa has a predominantly youthful and energetic population as well as vast reserves of natural resources. And that if we apply ourselves with the necessary commitment, we can move Africa onto a path of progress and prosperity.

As Africa struggles to cope with the current crisis let us strengthen the things we are trying to do together. The AU is encouraged to give all the necessary support to the African Centre for Disease Control to continue to coordinate Africa's responses to the COVID-19. Africa must also further its effort in coordinating the production of personal productive equipment, medical and other supplies needed to cope with the crisis. It is also time for our Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to look closely at the promotion of trade among African countries and for our states to tackle vigorously the negotiations about rules of origin and other essential elements that can help them bring the AfCFTA into fruition.

African trade unions are also ready to make their contribution to the integration and progress of Africa. We will work together to push for social dialogue at national and

regional level. We will work to ensure that the interests of workers are taken into account in the decisions and policies that are made. We will push for decent work and sustainable employment, decent incomes, social protection, equality, peace and security.

This is also time for each African to make their contribution to the progress and unity of Africa.

Forward to African Unity!



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