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ITUC-Africa Statement on the occasion of the International Women's day 2021: A New Social Contract for a gender-equitable post-COVID-19 recovery and resilience

As the world celebrates today, International Women's Day, the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (www.ituc-africa.org) would like to congratulate the millions of women and activists that have continued to make vital efforts and sacrifices for a better world and humanity despite the critical situation forced on us by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the entire world and adversely affected lives and wellbeing. Particularly worrisome is the fact that the health, social, economic, cultural and even political effects of COVID-19 have been more drastic, harder and harrowing for women and girls. Similarly, as the COVID-19 pandemic intensifies, economic and social pressure, coupled with restrictions on movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence has increased exponentially.

Further, new evidence on the impact of COVID-19 shows that women's economic and productive lives will be differently affected disproportionately to men. Globally, women's incomes have fallen, they save less and job security for women reduced compared to men. One obvious but unacceptable reality and seemingly entrenched stereotype is that more women likely to be employed in the informal sector compared to men. Some of the net effects of these current realities negatively affecting women would be that their absorptive capacities are drastically reduced. This is partly responsible for greater poverty and inequality amongst women because they have been made more vulnerable and exposed on account of weakened shock absorptive capacities. ITUC-Africa calls for the reversal of these unacceptable realities through the design and deployment of genuine, conscious and pragmatic policies and programmes.

ITUC-Africa also noted that social protection provisions to women are dwindling and more budget cuts on social spending are being carried by governments because of falling resources and reallocation of public fund to servicing national debts. COVID-19 has been identified as one of the main reasons for the rise in national public debts. Sadly, women are more exposed to the immediate and future effects of such debts servicing. In essence, national debt administration processes and practices, without much qualms, are exposing women to avoidable hardship and misery. ITUC-Africa strongly rejects this current situation where women are considered and used as one of the acceptable trade-offs in national debt management processes.

The world is seized with the task of economic recovery post-COVID-19, we call on governments, relevant agencies and institutions to place women and girls' - inclusion, representation, rights, social and economic outcomes, equality and protection - at the centre of the recovery strategies and processes.

As for the Trade union Movement, seizing the opportunities to build back better requires that we reshape our strategies and capacities, including achieving gender equality at work and to develop the leadership of younger generations. We must work together to enable women to fully make their contribution to the economic development of the continent. We need to also promote women's education to ensure their empowerment through specific programmes meant to build the capacity based on new needs.

To commemorate this year's International Women's Day (IWD), we join the International Trade Union Confederation and the global labour movement to enhance our voices for a New Social Contract based on:

- Rights: advance women's rights and protections; guarantee fundamental workers' rights for all women; eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work;
- Jobs: support investment in the care sector of which women make up 70% of the workforce worldwide. Adequate investment in this sector would create much needed low or zero-carbon jobs, help to reduce inequalities and inequities in women's labour force participation and improve the availability and quality of services for all, including childcare and long-term care.
- Social protection: secure gender-responsive social protection accessible to all workers, including workers in the informal economy, and advocate for the establishment of a Global Social Protection Fund;
- Equality: promote the presence of women (with a transformative agenda) in leadership roles;
- Inclusion: dismantle intersecting systems of oppression in the world of work and society and promote equality and equity.

Importantly, this is also an opportunity to request all stakeholders to respect their commitments for ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention 190 (Violence and Harassment). This instrument has proven to be a very crucial, necessary and useful instrument in this period of crisis.

Long live women! Long live the African trade union movement! Long live the international trade union movement! Long live women workers!

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