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### **ITUC-Africa Statement on the commemoration of International Migrants Day 2021: *addressing the plight of migrants in the time of COVID-19***

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa [www.ituc-africa.org](http://www.ituc-africa.org)) joins Africans, allies from Asia and the rest of the world to commemorate the 2021 International Migrants' Day (IMD).

ITUC-Africa salutes migrant workers all over the world that have continued to be part of the efforts to rein in the COVID-19 pandemic. Their contributions as street clearers, scientists, laboratory attendants, health workers, ambulance and bus drivers, domestic workers and caregivers, pilots and crew attendants, platform workers in the global supply chain, security guards, factory workers, shop attendants and many others remain tangible and critical for our people, communities and economies to combat and ultimately defeat this virus. We are grateful for the services of all these migrants and celebrate them.

Sadly, we have also witnessed and continue to hear of developments and actions that have undermined the human and labour rights of migrants and members of their families during this period of the pandemic. African migrants have suffered racism, discrimination, restriction, arrest, detention and forceful deportation in inhuman conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brutally exposed and exacerbated the fault lines between those who have access to social protection and those who do not, as hundreds of millions of workers have lost their jobs and livelihoods, and migrants have been disproportionately excluded from social support.

Under the pandemic, we have witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon of wage theft from migrant workers as most were forced and hurriedly repatriated to their country mostly in the early days of the pandemic. This phenomenon also continues to play out in the failure to pay overtime wages, especially to lived-in domestic workers who work long and excessive hours without rest and compensation.

Also, we are witnessing an era of an unprecedented spike in the numbers of persons, including migrant workers suffering from mental health illnesses on account of the stress and pressures from the socio-economic and cultural effects of the pandemic. The new working arrangements, including working from home, online working arrangements with limited support systems have contributed to worsening psychological health and wellbeing of people and workers. These arrangements have partly contributed to increased violence and harassment, especially at homes and workplaces. Women and migrant workers constituted a sizeable number of victim cases.

Statistics indicate that the world has witnessed an increase in migration in recent years. In 2019, according to the UN, some 270 million people, or around 3.5% of the world's population, were migrants. Unfortunately, lots of these migrants are disproportionately excluded from access to social protection,

and at the same time more likely to be concentrated in low-paid, precarious and informal work. They are, therefore, exposed to poverty, social exclusion and social insecurity. Women are more exposed to these unfortunate realities.

Though several African governments have initiated and deployed some actions and put in place agreements and policies as part of the efforts to implement the United Nations Global Compact on Safe, Fair and Orderly Migration (GCM). Unfortunately, many migrants and migrant workers, especially women have continued to suffer more from the harsh and hard effects of the COVID-19.

To deal with these gloomy and hard realities that migrants face and are exposed to and dealing with, especially in these times of COVID-19, the ITUC-Africa is calling on African governments to urgently consider the following actions:

- To ratify and implement the African Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), ILO Conventions 97 (Migration for Employment) , 143 (Migrant worker, supplementary), 189 (Decent Work for Migrant Workers) and 190 (Violence and Harassment) as well as ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors to ensure the extension of social protection security to all members of society, irrespective of contribution history.
- Commit to a new social contract urgently needed to avoid a fragile and unequal recovery fueled by austerity policies and marked by precarious work, high unemployment, and economic uncertainty.
- Ensuring universal social protection that is available to all workers without discrimination – including migrants – must be at the foundation of this new social contract, together with measures to create quality jobs, support access to fundamental rights, ensure equality, and support the inclusion of all people.
- Genuinely implement the African Union’s 2021 Declaration on the protection of the human and labour rights of migrant workers.
- Urgently initiate and achieve an African Labour Migration Governance Process architecture similar to the Colombo Process that will help to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and address exploitation and abuses that African migrants suffer in their work experiences.

As trade unions, we commit to continue to work with our counterparts in origin and destination countries to continue to strive for global coherence and governance of migration that will contribute to the essence of our humanity. We shall continue to deploy pragmatic solidarity and advocacy actions to give hope and for the attainment of shared prosperity, including for migrants and members of their families.

In solidarity!



**Kwasi Adu-Amankwah**  
**General Secretary**