

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (by videoconference)

17 June 2020

Political Statement on COVID-19

“Unity and Struggle for a just and better future”

Current System Failed

Since the beginning of the novel coronavirus crisis, everything has changed, but in reality nothing has changed. The global crisis highlights the failures of the global economic system. We must intervene to change the narrative. The world is in a crisis, not for the first time. The labour movement has seen many crises. Nevertheless, this time it is different, and the implications for organised workers across the globe are profound.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting workers and communities differently. It is impacting disproportionately on groups that were already at a disadvantage before the pandemic emerged: poor women workers, precarious workers, workers in the informal economy, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, minority groups, among others. And this health and economic disaster is being denied by many populist and autocratic leaders rather than adequately addressed. The politics of unreason shows their impotence to deal properly with this challenge. At the same time, this is an opportunity to question their power and demand genuine social reforms. Here, as trade unions, we should take responsibility, as part of civil society, in a resolute manner.

In recovering from the health, economic, and social impact of this pandemic we should not return to business as usual. Instead, it is imperative that a new and fairer world emerge that is capable of addressing the unacceptable levels of inequality, lack of social protection, decent living and working conditions of the majority, and the looming climate catastrophe.

In the economic crisis initiated in 2008-2009, caused by the global banking and finance industries' criminal conduct, there was a rare moment in which questions were asked, and taken seriously, about the structures, institutions, and assumptions of the global economy. Unfortunately, that moment passed without any serious change. Now, as hundreds of thousands die, is not the time to let the market decide. We cannot allow that once again the workers will be left to pay the price of the crisis. The status quo simply cannot continue. The current model is unsustainable and must be transformed.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the global GDP of 2020 will fall -3% in average and -6.1% in the most advanced economies. By the middle of the year, 300 million will have lost their jobs in the formal economy, according to the ILO.

Estimates show that COVID-19 poses a real challenge to the UN Sustainable Development Goals of ending poverty by 2030 because global poverty could increase for the first time since

1990 and, depending on the poverty line, such increase could represent a reversal of approximately a decade in the world's progress in reducing poverty. Under the most extreme scenario of a 20 per cent income or consumption contraction, the number of people living in poverty could increase by 420–580 million, relative to the latest official recorded figures for 2018, according to Oxfam.

Pre-existing gender inequalities in the world of work, and in our societies, have been deepened and exacerbated, jeopardizing the fragile progresses achieved these last decades.

The COVID-19 crisis is exposing the many flaws in our economic structures and the failed model of globalization. The health and life threats and its social and economic consequences also exposed the increasing and immoral global inequality. Humanity is faced with an unprecedented global crisis affecting its social, economic and climate components along with serious threats to democracy and lack of global governance. We need a new social contract and human-centred model of development.

No more austerity; instead, sustainable industrial policies

Years of austerity policies and cuts in public spending have stripped essential social services, including our health services, to the bone. The world must invest in quality public services, particularly in health and education. It is now time to rebuild our economic, productive and social systems in a way that will make them more resilient. The reconstruction of public services requires investments in the order of billions.

Decades of de-industrialisation and reliance upon global networks of production and trade have depleted our capacity to produce or commandeer at short notice essential goods, from food to personal protective equipment—even basic pharmaceutical and medical supplies. A reconversion of industries as seen at many of our industries to supply goods to the frontline may also be helpful in shaping the sustainable industrial policies that must guide the Urgent Economic Stimulus and Workplace Measures we are demanding, or we risk further damage to society and the environment.

Historical role for trade union movement

The coronavirus crisis presents a possibility to question the vulture-capitalist economic system, with its insatiable hunger to privatize wealth while socializing costs, and thereby worsen its impacts on human and environmental health. As in previous crises, this one also is proving that workers can only rely on their own strength and their unions to defend their livelihoods. By strengthening the solidarity actions and strongly defending the health and safety, jobs and income of workers, Unions can resume their prominent role to drive the global agenda.

IndustriALL Global Union Must Continue to Struggle

In the present crisis, unions, progressive movements and political parties have the opportunity to build a new society. If IndustriALL Global Union is to be a part of this, we must ensure that our organization can organize campaigns and actions and deliver the solutions that working people desperately need.

We have to do so within the structures of our trade unions which comprise our existing reality, but this does not mean we are satisfied with them. Our actions must be guided by the principles of organizing, of bringing people with us, bringing unions together to create more

powerful organizations in sectors and industries rather than fragmented organizations to create workplace power capable of standing up to capital.

Our main principles need to be:

- To organize around the real needs of working people across the globe;
- To act to engender hope, and to give hope to those who may be slumping into despair;
- To work for a decent wage commensurate with workers' increasing skills;
- To oppose the continuing growth of precarious employment in all its forms including the fictional self-employment;
- To demand a better life for workers, their families and their communities;
- To fight for universal public services and public investments in a sustainable future;
- To defend and advance gender equality in the world of work and in our societies
- To give leadership to our communities, our nations and a voice to the voiceless.

Demands of IndustriALL Global Union

At this moment, a minimum immediate program of demands from IndustriALL Global Union must include:

Workers' Health and Safety:

- IndustriALL Global Union should continue to consider occupational health and safety as a matter of workers' rights and employers' responsibilities around the rights to know, stop unsafe work and participate.
- The protection of the health and safety of workers must be recognized as a fundamental right.
- COVID-19 must be recognized as an occupational disease.
- The ILO must adopt a new convention on protection against biological hazards.
- Employers must negotiate with unions for a safe restart of production.
- Safe working conditions are also essential for workers in the supply chain, since a new outbreak of COVID-19 in the supply chain endangers the entire production. Multinational corporations have to take responsibility for their supply chains as well.

Influencing Global Governance for employment and decent work:

- All intergovernmental institutions and countries must place employment and decent work at the centre of macro-economic policies alongside emergency debt relief to enable developing countries to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate a sustainable recovery from the crisis.
- Global financial institutions must immediately cancel or suspend debt payments by the least developed countries.

Fight for universal social protection and quality public services:

- A global and coordinated effort must be put in place to achieve universal social protection.
- The social and economic impact on workers and their families must be mitigated.
- Measures should include wage subsidies and extension of unemployment benefits and paid sick leave to all workers, including casual workers, the self-employed, platform workers and workers in the informal economy, including migrant workers.
- Governments and employers must mitigate the hardships with fast relief and legislative measures to protect and regulate the flow of migrant workers internally and globally;
- Likewise, access to good medical care and medications must be a right of every person.

- Cooperation at global level is needed to fund social protection for all and help the poorest nations to respond to the pandemic.
- National governments must expand social protection by providing a universal basic social care and medical insurance to protect all workers, including workers who are not in formal employment, and their families;
- Quality public services must be strengthened with investments to ensure universal access to healthcare, water, sanitation, food and shelter, and with guarantees that these systems are adequately staffed and workers' rights respected.
- Access to quality childcare public services should be ensured for all to relieve the burden on women shoulders

Struggle for Democracy and Fundamental Workers' Rights

- ILO Conventions and accompanying jurisprudence, including occupational health and safety, must be respected and implemented.
- In applying these policies, governments and employers must respect workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining and refrain from all forms of discrimination;
- Special attention must be given to protect women and the most vulnerable group, such children, migrants, refugees and people working in the informal sector.
- In light of the clear disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on women, children, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees and other marginalized groups, specific measures must be taken to protect their rights.

Regulating Unsustainable Global Supply Chains:

- The global model of trade and production must be addressed since the crisis has exposed the enormous risks to labour rights in unregulated global supply chains;
- Human and labour rights' compulsory due diligence must be regulated at international and national levels through binding legislation.
- Multinational companies must support their suppliers allowing them also to manage cycles in order to preserve jobs

Defending Sustainable Industrial Policies and Securing Manufacturing Jobs:

- Manufacturing must continue to be the engine of national economies. Global resources must be allocated for real economy. Investment in manufacturing must be encouraged and facilitated.
- Stimulus programs provided by intergovernmental agencies and government must be given with the condition of maintaining employment with a full tax transparency.
- Just Transition policies must be implemented to avoid the impacts of climate change, digitalization and other drivers of change. A "green recovery" is an opportunity that must be at the core of sustainable industrial policies.

Fight for gender equality

- Proper representation of women into decision making at all levels is needed. Incorporating women into the long term response effort to the current crisis, as well as collecting gender disaggregated data on the impact of the crisis, is an absolute necessity
- Gender gaps in the world of work, including the pay gap, and women's segregation into low paid sectors and precarious work should be addressed

- The ratification of ILO Convention 190 must be a priority on the political agenda in order to eradicate violence against women, who have been put in increased danger during lockdowns.

Securing and Protecting Workers' Rights around Future of Work

- Given the fact that the coronavirus crisis has spurred the growth of telework, workers' rights and interests must be protected in all new modalities of work.
- The rapid increase in teleworking and use of new technologies must be accompanied by proper regulation and protection including at the ILO level to avoid precarization of working conditions.

Therefore, IndustriALL Global Union, together with its affiliated organizations throughout the world, determined to ensure democratic principles and practices, to continue to govern decision-making, underlines the importance of unity and struggle in defending and advancing workers' rights and interests in the time of this pandemic. IndustriALL Global Union will continue:

- To provide assistance to its affiliates through exchange of information, general and special guides; this should include global communications, which may include emergency financial assistance to purchase communications equipment and air time in order to maintain communications with their members and with the global trade union movement; to this end, IndustriALL will prioritize resources to assist affiliated trade unions, particularly in the Global South;
- To work and coordinate actions and activities with ITUC and other global unions to organize a joint fight together for a new human-centred agenda, mainly vis-à-vis multilateral institutions, particularly the ILO; in this framework, the Secretariat will provide an overview to the Executive Committee about the impact of the pandemic on the resources, operations and structures of other global unions as well as potential opportunities for enhanced and more effective cooperation with them considering resource optimization;
- To take initiatives in its sectors to avoid impacts of COVID-19 and finding joint solutions;
- To interact with multinational companies to make them accountable to their policies and practices in their operations and supply chains throughout the world; in this context, the Secretariat will continue to provide updates to the Executive Committee and affiliates about the responses on policies and practices of GFA signatory companies around Covid-19 pandemic;
- To organize solidarity and support campaigns for its affiliates in difficulty.