

## GLOBAL UNIONS STATEMENT

### ON ATTEMPTS TO SLASH LABOR RIGHTS IN SRI LANKA

The Global Unions Federations (GUF) and its affiliated trade union organisations as well as the Trade Union Solidarity Support Organisations listed below join the Sri Lankan Trade Union movement in categorically rejecting the “Single Employment Bill”, designed to slash the wages, conditions and trade union rights of Sri Lankan workers. The bill includes multiple provisions that violate international law.

We also join the Sri Lankan union movement in demanding a halt to attempts to cut social security savings of Sri Lankan workers, proposals to privatize public services and the introduction of austerity measures designed to benefit the rich and foreign corporations at the expense of workers, under the guise of restructuring domestic debt.

The Employment Bill, dubbed the ‘Slave labor bill, by Sri Lankan unions, attempts to remove 13 existing labor laws, which have been developed through social dialogue over many years.

The draft has only been released in the Sinhala language, violating the language rights of the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka. It was rushed through a sham consultative process by the Labour Minister under the guise of promoting investments in Sri Lanka. It bypassed the nationally recognised tripartite process of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC). It is also deeply concerning that four unions were arbitrarily removed from the NLAC prior to the circulation of the bill.

The Bill includes the following violations of international labor standards:

- removal of the 8 hour work day,
- enabling of extended shifts, up to 16 hour days, without overtime
- removal of protection from unfair dismissal
- drastic reduction in annual leave entitlements
- dismantling provisions that protect the right to unionize and to effective collective bargaining

At the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the parliament approved a domestic debt restructuring plan, which if implemented, will deplete the superannuation funds of workers. The superannuation funds such as EPF and ETF represent a lifetime saving of workers and should not be used for anything other than themselves. The actual value of people's savings has already been diminished by inflation and the depreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee; therefore, if people were forced to bear the additional burden of a reduction in the interest rate paid on their pension funds, their savings would suffer significantly.

More than 1 million jobs have been lost in Sri Lanka as a result of the pandemic and gross economic mismanagement. Real wages have declined by more than 50%. The government and

the IMF have made this situation worse by increasing indirect taxes, removing subsidies for working people and promoting harmful privatization, without a political mandate. As a result, more than half of all Sri Lankans have reduced their food intake. Half a million families have stopped using electricity.

Global unions stand in solidarity with Sri Lankan trade unions and call upon the government to:

1. Immediately halt the current labor law reform process;
2. Ensure that all future labour law reforms respect International Labour Standards set by the ILO and advance the right to Decent Work;
3. Request technical assistance from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to conduct an audit of any proposed law reforms ensuring the reforms are consistent with Sri Lanka's obligation to the ILO labour conventions and that the laws promote progressive realization of economic social and cultural rights of all Sri Lankans;
4. Reinstate the four trade unions that were unlawfully removed from the National Labour Advisory Council in June 2023;
5. Reverse legislative and executive actions already taken that negatively affect the EPF/ETF (pension funds) provisions;
6. Cease efforts to privatize public services, infrastructure and entities;
7. Work with UNCTAD, unions and civil society to develop redistributive macroeconomic policies designed to advance economic rights, including through the restoration of a reasonable corporate tax rate, taxes on the digital economy, wealth taxes and the removal of harmful corporate subsidies;
8. Implement the recommendations of the UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt and Human Rights.

We call upon the IMF, other International Financial Institutions and all external creditors to :

1. Recognise the role and responsibility of creditors in the current financial crisis, suspend interest payments and cancel "odious" debts incurred by corrupt politicians consistent with the recommendations of [more than 150 prominent economists](#);
2. Implement the recommendations of the UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt and Human Rights following the country visit to Sri Lanka, published in 2019;
3. Implement the UNCTAD Principles on the Promotion of Sovereign Lending and Borrowing;
4. Cease pressuring the Sri Lankan government to adopt neoliberal policies that undermine the country's human rights obligations;



#### **Global Union Federations and its affiliated organisations**

1. ***Building and Wood Workers International (BWI) Asia Pacific***
2. ***Education International (EI) Asia Pacific***
3. ***IndustriALL South Asia***
4. ***International Transport Federation (ITF)***
5. ***Public Services International (PSI) Asia Pacific Regional Organization***
6. ***Union Network International (UNI) Asia Pacific Regional Organization***
7. ***National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)-BWI***
8. ***Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU)-IndustriALL***
9. ***Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union (FTZGSEU)-IndustriALL***
10. ***United Federation of Labour (UFL)- IndustriALL***

#### **Trade Union Solidarity Support Organisations**

1. ***Solidar Suisse***
2. ***Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA***
3. ***LO Norway***