

ILO Workers' Group Message of Solidarity on the occasion of the 1st of May 2020

Social justice, social dialogue and workers' rights at the heart of the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected more than 200 countries and territories around the world, including cruise ships. The most recent figures mention more than 3 million people infected and more than 200,000 deaths, with numbers still growing.

Our thoughts and solidarity today go first of all to the millions of workers who are on the front-line in the response to the pandemic: health and social care workers, workers in emergency and public services, and others working in transport, cleaning, security, agriculture, food and retail sectors, many of them women. Their work is essential to save lives and provide vital products and services to confined populations. Yet, their health and safety are not sufficiently safeguarded, and their wages and working conditions often poor. Years of ill-guided austerity measures and cuts in public spending on healthcare with privatization of public services have undermined countries' capacity to respond to the crisis.

In the wider world of work, millions of workers are strongly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and their perspectives are looking grim. The proliferation of precarious and informal work including in global supply chains, fuelled by the current model of globalization, has made millions of workers – already suffering from indecent wages and working conditions – extremely vulnerable to the pandemic as they are losing their jobs and livelihoods and lack any income support and access to health care and social protection, leaving them in poverty and not being able to feed their families.

At a moment when the world is still dealing with the dramatic health consequences of the pandemic, and while economists forecast the worst economic and employment crisis since the 1929 depression, this is the moment to give effect to the call for a new social contract by the ILO Centenary Declaration, adopted in June 2019, with social justice and the rights of workers at its centre, and to implement its statement that '*safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work*'.

On 1 May 2020, the ILO Workers' Group stands in solidarity with all workers around the world impacted by the Covid-19 crisis.

The Workers' Group is calling upon Governments and Employers to address without delay the following:

- 1. The protection of the health and safety of workers to be recognized as a fundamental right.**
- 2. The recognition of Covid-19 as an occupational disease.**
- 3. The need for the ILO to adopt a new convention on protection against biological hazards.**
- 4. The protection of frontline and other workers against all Covid-19 risks to be addressed as a matter of urgency.** All frontline workers must have access to the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE). Front-line workers must be assured of

proper care in the event they themselves become sick. Should they pass away as a consequence of the infection, their families should be fairly compensated.

5. **A global and coordinated effort to achieve universal social protection.** The social and economic impact on workers and their families faced with lock-down measures, due to loss of jobs and income, 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. Cooperation at global level is needed to fund social protection for all and help the poorest nations to respond to the pandemic.
6. **Strengthening of quality public services and the public sector, with massive 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. Wages and working conditions in health care and the wider care economy must be improved, addressing persistent gender and other inequalities.
7. **Social dialogue, with effective respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining,** to be adopted and developed at all levels as a key means to meet the health, social and economic challenges posed by the pandemic, both during the crisis and in the period of recovery.
8. **The vulnerability of the global model of trade and production to be recognized and addressed.** The crisis has exposed the enormous risks to labour rights in unregulated global supply chains. The ILO must urgently tackle the challenges to decent work in global supply chains by taking normative action.
9. **The need for all countries to place employment and decent work at the center 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.
10. **The rapid increase in teleworking and use of new technologies, accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis,** must be accompanied by proper regulation and protection including at ILO level to avoid precarisation of working conditions.

When the peak of the pandemic is behind us, there will be no time for complacency, nor for going back to business-as-usual. A fundamental change of direction is needed to ensure a safe recovery with decent jobs for all in a more sustainable economy. The ILO must play a key role in the multilateral system to ensure that social justice, social dialogue, decent jobs and universal and lasting peace are at the heart of the responses to the crisis and to the recovery from it.
