



FIGHTING HIV/AIDS TOGETHER

A PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT



The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) jointly recognize the direct impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the world of work. This joint statement gives voice to that mutual recognition, hereby calling on IOE and ICFTU affiliates and their member enterprises and trade unions, wherever located, to give the issue the highest priority. Efforts need to continue to be mobilized to fight this disease and its consequences. There is no room for complacency. We also call on both to work together to generate and maintain the momentum necessary for successful interventions.

HIV/AIDS has already devastated many countries and communities and is spreading rapidly in others. Workers' and employers' organizations need to recognize the common interest that exists on this issue and co-operate at both the workplace and at the national and international level to promote effective action to address this unprecedented public health crisis. We cannot afford to do anything less.

In addition to the destruction of communities and families, HIV/AIDS is reversing development in many countries, threatening the survival of workers and enterprises. Efforts to address the pandemic must therefore continue to be intense and must strategically target countries and regions where it can have the most impact.

Our work in this area will be built around the *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work*. That code is comprehensive and covers areas of education, prevention, training, assistance, workers' rights, issues of discrimination, occupational health and safety, and many other areas. It was developed through tripartite consensus and the ICFTU and the IOE played an important role in its adoption. It forms a sound basis for workplace partnerships as well as for effective action on HIV/AIDS beyond the workplace.

There are many examples of successful co-operation between employers and trade unions in the fight against HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa. As recently as 7-9 April, 2003, in order to support such co-operation, the African Regional Organisation of the ICFTU organised a conference in Nairobi, with the full and active participation of the IOE, on the theme "Workers and Employers Together Against HIV/AIDS". The IOE and the ICFTU are convinced that employers and trade unions, working together and building on that experience and expanding co-operation in Africa as well as across the globe, can accomplish a great deal more, achieving greater results together than either can produce separately.

One strategy for implementing our efforts is to target population groups that are at high risk of contracting the virus. Such target groups include young people between the ages of 15 and 24, who represent one-sixth of the world's population, yet represent half of all HIV infections. The ICFTU and the IOE intend to continue to focus on youth and urge our respective national affiliates to do everything in their powers to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people as one of the keys to controlling the disease.

There are also important gender dimensions to this problem, particularly among young people. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, young women are five times more likely to contract HIV/AIDS than young men. Due to the devastating economic effects of the disease, people are forced to adopt survival strategies, which contribute to this vicious cycle. There are many other high-risk groups to focus on as well, especially migrant workers.

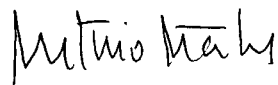
The ICFTU is working with its partners in the international trade union movement, the Global Union Federations, representing national trade unions grouped by sector and occupation. Several of them are already carrying out work in this area, often jointly with employers. This work must and will be expanded. It is also working with its national affiliates and its regional organizations, particularly in Africa.

The IOE is working closely with a number of its national affiliates and will intensify this work. Its recent publication with UNAIDS titled “Employers’ Handbook on HIV/AIDS: A Guide for Action” looks to assist employers by sharing good practice/best practices in support of the ILO code of practice. It is also expanding its outreach to other international and regional groupings of employers. Similarly, the African Regional Organization of the ICFTU has developed and is using “A Training Manual for Shop Stewards on HIV/AIDS in the Workplace.”

Given the nature of the virus and its direct impact on industry, the IOE and the ICFTU, both independently and in collaboration, acknowledge and stress the crucial added value of labour-management co-operation to combat its spread. In addition to promoting common efforts, including partnerships in support of sustainable development, we will work for effective tripartite action to help bring solutions to a whole series of problems that cannot be resolved by workplace action alone. Both approaches are vitally and urgently needed if victory over this terrible affliction is to be won.

The ICFTU and the IOE will encourage governments in developing and developed countries alike to take a comprehensive view of both the causes of current problems and the most effective ways to address them. Such a comprehensive approach should focus on healthcare delivery systems and infrastructure development, including education, international funding to help poor nations meet their healthcare needs, and effective and safe use of the best health care interventions, which include innovative medicines, in particular the quest for an AIDS vaccine, which offers the best hope ultimately to stop and reverse the spread of the pandemic.

As part of their joint commitment, both ICFTU and the IOE will explore opportunities to identify and develop joint action programmes. These will be done in partnership with their national members and will look to build on the efforts and initiatives taken to date at the workplace but which will, at the international level, seek to both increase the profile of the problem as well as looking to increase the resources available to fight this pandemic.



Antonio Peñalosa
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May 12, 2003, Geneva

The IOE and the ICFTU are the most representative employers and workers’ organisations in the world. The IOE represents 137 national employers’ organisations from 133 countries. The ICFTU has 231 affiliated national trade union centres in 150 countries representing 158 million members.

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