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ITUC-AFRICA STATEMENT ON MAY DAY, 2021

African workers join workers around the world to celebrate May Day 2021 under the exceptional conditions of COVID-19. The pandemic has impacted heavily on Africa and the rest of the world. Africa's poor health infrastructure and health care delivery have been exposed; millions of formal sector jobs have been lost on the continent; and many more workers in the informal economy have been pushed into poverty in the absence of adequate social protection. Violation of rights have occurred in some instances while gender-based violence has also been a byproduct of some of the measures, particularly restrictive ones, that were initially taken to prevent the spread of the disease.

In coping with the pandemic, health and safety have loomed largest for workers. Health workers have been the foremost frontline workers in fighting the pandemic. They have been the ones who have had to face the pandemic in offering treatment and care to persons affected by the disease. The inadequate personal protective equipment (PPEs) available to them has been a cause for concern all over Africa. ITUC-Africa pays special tribute to health workers on this occasion of May Day and demands improved conditions of work and adequate PPEs for them.

The persistence of the coronavirus and need for economic life to go on alongside it has raised health and safety at work to the fore and led to the call for COVID-19 to be classified a workplace disease and for health and safety to be considered a fundamental right at work.

Overall, the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on African economies and livelihoods, pushed many of our countries into further public debt and thrown up sharply the challenge of sustainable development.

The occasion for celebrating May Day also demands renewed effort in addressing the needs of workers and populations that have become more sharply exposed by the global health crisis. ITUC-Africa draws attention to the ITUC call for a New Social Contract for Recovery and Resilience and joins all African workers in calling on their governments, the African Union and multilateral agencies that contribute to shape the policies of our countries to pay heed to meeting the needs of workers and the peoples for employment, rights, social protection, equality and inclusion.

- **Employment** must be at the heart of public policy and we call for the appropriate investments in health infrastructure and the care economy, public works, adding

value to raw materials and agricultural processing, information technology as well as education and training of the workforce to meet the rapidly changing world of work. Attention must also be paid to greening jobs and workplaces to combat the devastation caused by climate change.

- **Rights**, particularly to organise and to collectively bargain must be promoted to strengthen workers voice in social dialogue and participation in decision making.
- Investment in **social protection** needs to be promoted as a means to meet the needs of the poor and to empower them as economic agents.
- **Equality** has to be promoted as a means of combatting gender and other forms of discrimination.
- Attention must also be paid to **inclusion** to ensure that no one is left behind in the effort at recovery and the achievements of United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) and that all persons have access to vaccines, tests and treatment as part of the effort to cope with the coronavirus.

As the world strives to overcome the coronavirus pandemic, unions must join fully in the effort to identify the opportunities that have been thrown up by adversity and to build on the innovativeness that has allowed us to cope thus far. Unions must continue to push for a new normal and mobilize to work with governments and employers in getting things done differently and in ways that benefit the people and ensure the sustainability of life.

Signed: Kwasi Adu-Amankwah
General Secretary