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The ITUC has expressed its deep concern about the unprecedented drought and famine in the Horn of Africa, in a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, calling on the UN to dramatically scale up action to deal with the on-going human tragedy.

More than 12.4 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are currently affected by the famine, which is the most severe food crisis of its type in the world for some two decades. According to the information received by the ITUC from a trade union mission to the region affected by the drought led by the ITUC affiliates in Kenya (COTU) and Somalia (FESTU), the situation is deteriorating. The famine has major implications for peace and development in the region in the short and long terms, in particular given the appalling campaign of violence being waged by the Al Shabaab fundamentalist group. Current efforts are substantial, but not sufficient, and a major increase in humanitarian aid is urgently required. New emergency camps need to be opened, as the capacity of the existing camps is no longer sufficient. The ITUC also emphasises the need for the UN to ensure a proper focus on and support of the national capacity of public services in the countries concerned, in order to deliver their vital functions, particularly health services. The recent trade union mission discovered that in Somalia, the epicenter of the famine, some hospital workers have not received their salaries for more than eight months, as is the case at the Baidoa hospital some 250 km from Mogadishu, where there are more than 10,000 sick people waiting for medical care. “The international community must face up to its responsibilities, under the leadership of the UN and working with the African Union. A major increase in support is urgently needed, along with measures to support health and other vital public services, and an effective strategy to tackle the global imbalances in food production and availability,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. For more details, see the ITUC letter to United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon

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