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## **Celebrating Nelson Mandela as a Champion for Human Rights on the occasion of the 2013 International Human Rights' Day**

Today, 10th December 2013 is the International Human Right Day dedicated to celebrating fundamental rights of persons across the world. ITUC-Africa considers it a fitting day to remember and celebrate the legacies of Nelson Mandela- a political activist, human rights campaigner, trade unionist, leader.

It is no small feat to note that the entire world is celebrating the enduring legacies of Nelson Mandela. Some of his enduring legacies include the struggle for freedom, equality, peace and reconciliation, social justice and shared prosperity and progress. But just as we celebrate the life and times of this great African and world's citizen, we are sad that the rights he fought for all his life are daily under attack by businesses, international governmental organizations and governments.

Whilst we can celebrate that citizens of the world achieved remarkable success in the enthronement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the challenge is to continue to give effective demonstration in terms of the defense, protection and promotion of these rights. Under neo-liberal globalization, the threats to these rights have remained that of poverty, inequality and recurring sectarian and civil conflicts. These challenges are human-made.

In the words of Mandela "While poverty persists, there is no true freedom" and since poverty is driven by human action, human solutions should be undertaken to defeat it as a matter of right. To this Mandela noted "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

We must point out here that Nelson Mandela who is a global icon is a product of struggle and resistance in the quest to defeat Apartheid. In essence, he believed and championed the rights of organized workers to take actions to protect their interests, including strike action. Sadly, we are witnessing the attacks on the right of workers to organize, collectively bargain and to strike. The United Nations under Ban Ki Moon is not leading by example as it has withdrawn the right to negotiate from the UN

workers' union. Similarly, Employers' Group as the ILO is insisting that workers do not have the right to strike.

ITUC-Africa wishes to reiterate that state driven public social provisions represent an effective way to defeat poverty and rein in inequality. We therefore urge African governments to commit to the genuine implementation of the social protection floor as enshrined in the ILO recommendation 202 adopted in 2012.

Importantly, Fundamental human rights suffer unmitigated abuses because such actions have gone largely uninvestigated, prosecuted and offenders sanctioned. Civil liberties will thrive if and when African governments demonstrate genuine commitment to fight and defeat impunity. Trade unions must continue to organize, mobilize and build alliance with other members of the civil society to defend, protect and promote these rights.

ITUC-Africa extends solidarity to Korean workers who are struggling against the privatization of the railway transport by the Korean government. We call on the Korean governments to rescind its decision and plan to dismiss the workers, prosecute them and to replace them with unskilled workers.

As we celebrate Nelson Mandela as a Champion for Human Rights on the occasion of the 2013 International Human Rights' Day, we recognize that he respected the rights of workers and indeed identified with workers. This is clearly depicted in his address during his visit to the Detroit Workers Union "Sisters and brothers, friends and comrades, the man who is speaking is not a stranger here, the man who is speaking is a member of the UAW. I am your flesh and blood."

May we as workers honor his legacy.

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