

# BOTSWANA FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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## MAY DAY 2020 MESSAGE

**DATE: 01 May 2020**

Fraternal greetings from the leadership of BFTU and its affiliates to all workers on this day that has been set apart to commemorate the challenges, triumphs and heroic achievements of workers all over the world.

May Day or Labour Day has a rich history dating back from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and for more than 100 years the day has been epitomized by workers chanting, demonstrations, protests or marching in large numbers on the streets. The 2020 May Day commemorations will go down in books as historic with events showing once more our resilience as Workers globally are challenged to STAY HOME to PROTECT LIVES. Nonetheless, we have found new ways of Uniting despite the physical spaces and Extreme social distancing measures that are in place as we continue our battle against the invisible enemy.

BFTU recognizes and **SALUTES** workers in the retail and food sectors, security guards, sanitation services, fire services, nurses, doctors, social workers, all health workers, armed forces and all other frontline as well as essential services workers including the media. We appreciate the work they continue to do while risking their lives and those of their loved ones and dedicate this year's May Day to their struggles. We will continue to advocate for a special COVID-19 allowance for all frontline workers.

We also appreciate the contributions of the Labour Sector Tripartite Forum chaired by the Minister of Employment, Labour Productivity and Skills Development for efforts made in ensuring that workers' rights, Jobs and livelihoods are protected during this difficult period.

We recognize and appreciate all employers who have promoted social dialogue and the spirit of give and take this far in the struggle against this pandemic, special recognition goes to Football teams and the Botswana Football Association (BFA). This we highlight because the arts, creativity and sporting sector has had little assistance this far.

We commemorate this year's May Day under the theme;

**'Trade Union Unity for Political, Socio-economic gains and Improved Conditions of employment'**

We draw inspirations from the theme of the ITUC Africa congress held in November 2019, calling for all African trade Unions to unite and make a difference. We strongly believe that Unity of trade unions is the only way that trade unions can make a difference and ensure that workers' rights are protected and socio-economic gains achieved for a post pandemic new normal that guarantees protection of workers at workplaces through improved conditions of employment.

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The new 2019 Corona Virus Disease has greatly affected our social norms, ethics and other social philosophies and by so doing influenced consumer behaviour and shaped new public buying trends. Trade Unions must therefore rise up to advocate for employment and wage protections. We must work together with employers and the Government to come up with better, more improved ways of ensuring that livelihoods are protected.

Botswana Government like most African governments implemented, since Mid-March, social distancing measures to prevent COVID-19 breaking out into a full-scale epidemic and a national health crisis given our limited resources.

We commend the Government of Botswana for having acted swiftly and timely to avert the spread of the Virus in Botswana. We also need to appreciate that the pandemic has also brought to light our challenges and shortfalls as a country and indeed exposed the enormity of these 'weaknesses'.

- The virus has shown that Botswana population is characterised by the working poor- people who work every day but do not earn enough to be able to save enough money for a crisis. This is largely caused by mediocre salaries that majority of the workers in Botswana are earning.
- We have also seen more evidence that job security in the private sector is of major concern.
- Occupational Safety and health standards are not put in place nor adhered to largely due to the absence of a national OSH policy to be put in place.
- Companies in Botswana do not have business continuity plans and the impact of the lockdowns has been direr as a result of not having these plans.
- The lack of updated data on population dynamics and labour force has made implementation of relief measures cumbersome particularly in dealing with the informal sector.
- Gender Based Violence needs to be given serious attention
- Our health system preparedness is lagging behind

We have been disappointed by the suspension of the right to industrial action in the regulations and the unilateral deferment of the employees 2020 salaries both in the public and private sectors.

However, the exposed gaps and weaknesses provide opportunities for Botswana to improve. The Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) and ILO Labour standards, especially recommendation 204 on formalizing the informal sector, offer a gateway for the recovery of our economy. These are instruments that can be used in coming up with the post COVID-19 economic strategy which must be focused on creation of decent and productive jobs, OSH and protection of Jobs to reduce the number of people who are dependent on state handouts. Nonetheless, there is need for all stakeholders to promote social dialogue, negotiate in good faith and improve consultations in workplaces so that companies in Botswana subsist the pandemic challenges and resume work as soon as possible.

Trade Unions in Botswana must unite and contribute to coming up with solutions that would help in the recovery of the country's economy. We must be adamant and resolute in insisting on

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strengthening of social dialogue structures at all levels as well as promotion of bargaining in good faith principles.

The duty to educate employees and our members lies with both social partners and we urge unions to also contribute in educating their members on COVID-19 preventive measures.

Safety and health measures must be enhanced in workplaces as workers prepare to return to work. This is critical to make sure that workers are safe at work and risks for contracting the virus in the course of work are minimal.

BFTU has been working with Botswana Informal Sector Association (BOISA) to add to their voice and assist the association in dealing with issues affecting the sector. We urge Government to extend social dialogue to the informal sector through BOISA and BFTU so that assistance can be promptly provided to the large number of affected informal sector workers.

In conclusion, we urge all workers to continue practicing good hygiene and social distancing measures and wish all comrades a **SAFE May Day**.

Let us stay Home, Protect our Families and communities.

Let us all keep well and prepare ourselves to contribute to the rise of Botswana post this pandemic.

Aluta continua.  
Long live BFTU  
Viva comrade  
Solidarity Forever.



Thusang Butale  
Secretary General