



EATUC SOLIDARITY MESSAGE ON MAY DAY 2020

Our dear brothers and sister, for the 1st time we celebrate the worker's day virtually and from our homes. This is not the case for many of the frontline workers who are out there working because the world now literally hangs on their shoulders.

EATUC would like to take a moment of silent to celebrate the fallen soldiers in this fight against Covid-19, the workers who did not have the luxury to social distance nor did they have an option of staying but got infected in their line of duty and lost the fight with others that they everyday fought for.

We would like to give a standing ovation to those workers, who at this moment are working around the clock to support the society in one way or another. That under paid and overworked nurse who has gone on more than 16 hours shift without rest because of the shortage of nurses. The doctor who has to make that difficult decision on whom to save and whom not to save, this was not what he signed for but is overwhelmed by the number of patients and lack of equipment at the hospital. That policeman, who is paid slightly above minimum wage, but has to enforce curfew and man road blocks in all weather.

We will not forget those in the service industry whose hotels have been turned into quarantine centers and have to deal with working with no or limited protective gear as they provide their services without showing the fear in the eyes.

Who thought, the world would be dependent on that under paid supermarket or grocery employees without contracts, who keep the shelves stocked and those who ensure your orders are delivered in the comfort of your homes. We stand together with our drivers who are hauling goods from the ports in land and verse versa, they have been under a lot of stress of late in East Africa. They are now a group of interest having recorded the highest infections in East Africa. These drivers have always spoken on the challenges of occupational health and safety in the line of duty.

As we continue the fight let us all take a minute to reflect on those workers, who in the past, have been, underpaid, discriminated upon, harassed, marginalized, with no basic rights, lack social protection and are now at the center of fighting this pandemic in one way or the other. We hope, their plight, their struggle will not go in vain and they will enjoy Decent work in the future.

In East Africa the effects that Covid-19 has had on the informal economy, which is the highest employer in East Africa and a great contributor to the economy of this region has been the greatest. The challenge to mainstream and extend Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) at work places in the informal economy has been met with innovativeness of the workers in this sector taking on measures that work for them and we commend them for this.

But even with this crucial role that they play in building the economies, informal sector workers in East Africa remain vulnerable as they are exposed to health and security hazards while at work.

As we celebrate the worker's day this year, EATUC would like to take this opportunity to commend the Ministries in charge of labour, social services and social protection. They have been instrumental in reaching out to the vulnerable groups in our communities, the elderly, the people living with disability, the youth and those in the informal economy. This just shows the important role that this ministry plays yet it is one of the underfunded government ministry in our sub region. We hope to see more resources allocated to this ministry to ensure our populations are cushion in the future beyond Covid-19 through social protection initiatives.

EATUC also takes this opportunity to call on EAC partner states to ratify and implement the relevant ILO conventions that offer a framework in protecting workers who are vulnerable as the trade unions continue to play a key role in awareness building and campaigns for ratification.

We would like to conclude by emphasizing on constructive and persistent social dialogue between governments and social partners in developing effective responses at the enterprise, sectoral and macroeconomic level, as demonstrated by historic economic crises. Governments can neither tackle the causes and consequences of crisis nor ensure social stability and recovery through unilateral action.

We wish all the workers a happy May Day full of reflection. If there is one thing that Covid-19 has taught us in East Africa is, we have home grown solutions for our problems. Let us look inwards to offer sustainable development of our region, that puts Decent Work at the center of its development strategies.

Long Live Workers Solidarity!

Pamoja Tushikamane!