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“Human and Labour Rights: The Pathway to Dignity and Development”

World Human Rights Day is dedicated to reflections, actions and initiatives aimed at advancing the respect, enjoyment and preservation of the human rights of all people without distinction and discrimination. The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa: <https://www.ituc-africa.org/>) joins workers, civil society organisations and all advocates for justice across the continent and the world to reaffirm our commitment to the protection and promotion of human and labour rights in Africa. While this day serves as a reminder of the inherent rights of every individual, it is also an opportunity to reflect on the challenges millions of Africans face in accessing these fundamental rights.

The State of Human and Labour Rights in Africa

Despite international frameworks and commitments, human rights violations remain alarmingly prevalent across the continent. Africans continue to face severe challenges that threaten their dignity, freedoms, and livelihoods:

1. Respect for Human Rights: Widespread abuses persist, from extrajudicial killings and torture to systemic discrimination and harassment of marginalised groups.
2. Freedom of Association: Trade unionists and activists advocating for workers' rights are increasingly targeted, facing intimidation, arrests, and violence for organising to protect labour rights.
3. The Right to Food: Amid soaring hunger and food insecurity, millions are denied the fundamental right to adequate food. Climate change, conflicts, and economic instability exacerbate the crisis, particularly among the working poor and rural populations.
4. Democracy Under Attack: Across the continent, we witness an erosion of democratic norms. Coups, authoritarianism, and manipulated elections undermine the will of the people and threaten stability.
5. The Culture of Impunity: A growing disregard for accountability fosters corruption, injustice, and inequality. Governments and powerful entities often act without consequence, leaving victims without recourse.
6. Weak Criminal Justice Systems: Dysfunctional judicial systems deny citizens access to justice, further entrenching cycles of abuse and exclusion.
7. Shrinking Civic Space: Governments are increasingly curtailing civil liberties, stifling dissent, and silencing activists and journalists who dare to speak truth to power, including enacting legislatures that criminalise civil liberty activism.

Our Demands to African Governments

As we mark this important day, ITUC-Africa demands urgent and concrete actions from African governments and other critical stakeholders to uphold their responsibilities to their citizens:

1. Uphold Human Rights: Respect, protect, and fulfil the fundamental rights of all individuals as enshrined in national constitutions and international treaties.

2. Initiate collaborative efforts to expand decent job creation possibilities and opportunities, as employment is at the heart of human dignity and a right and pathway to people's availability to develop and achieve their human potential.
3. Ensure Freedom of Association: Guarantee the right of workers to organise (form and join trade unions), bargain collectively, and freely engage in trade union activities without fear of reprisal.
4. End Hunger: Prioritise policies and investments that address food insecurity, focusing on sustainable agriculture, fair trade, and equitable resource distribution.
5. Protect Democracy: Commit to democratic good and participatory governance, free and fair elections, and uphold the rule of law to safeguard the people's will.
6. End Impunity: Strengthen accountability mechanisms to bring all human and labour rights violators to justice.
7. Strengthen Criminal Justice Systems: Build robust, independent, and transparent judicial systems that serve justice to all, especially the most vulnerable.
8. Expand Civic Space: Protect civil liberties, including freedom of expression, assembly, and access to information, fostering an environment where democracy can thrive.
9. We must recommit to pursuing and advancing the African Ubuntu spirit of reaching our shared humanism through compassion, love, and solidarity. We must remind ourselves that no one is free until we are all free from any form of oppression, suppression, and deprivation.

As we move forward, ITUC-Africa calls on African governments to reaffirm their commitments to international human rights standards and to work collaboratively with trade unions, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to address these pressing issues. Together, we can create an Africa where human dignity, justice, and equality are the norm—not the exception.

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