

November 8, 2024

ITUC-Africa Advocates for Labour Provision in AfCFTA protocols and pushes for other Labour Concerns in Namibia



Front row: Comrade Akhator Joel Odigie , General Secretary, ITUC-Africa (third from right), Aune Mudjanima, Acting Executive Director, Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation of Namibia (third from left), Vicki Erenstein ya Toivo, Special Advisor to the Minister (first from left), Comrade Karvihuha Monhongora, TUCNA Secretary General (second from left), Dr. Hod Anyigba, Executive Director ALREI & Chief Economist ITUC-Africa (first from right)

During a recent courtesy call by the African Regional organization of the International Trade Union Confederation Africa (ITUC-Africa) and the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation in Namibia on November 8, 2024, a range of proposals were presented to address key issues in Namibia's labour sector, with a special focus on advancing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) implementation and enhancing labour protections. Key representatives from ITUC-Africa, TUCNA, and the Ministry shared their insights on how to promote economic growth, social protection, and unity within the

Namibian labour movement. This visit was made possible by the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland through the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK),

Advancing AfCFTA Implementation: Proposals by ITUC-Africa General Secretary

Comrade Akhator Joel Odigie, ITUC-Africa General Secretary, highlighted the potential of AfCFTA in fostering economic growth across Africa, emphasizing the need for Namibia to take a leadership role in advancing labour provisions within the trade agreement. Comrade Joel noted that despite AfCFTA being operational for four years, intra-African trade remains low, hovering around 16%, far below the level of other continents. To address this, ITUC-Africa called for the ratification of the African Union's Free Movement Protocol, which is essential for the mobility of skills and competence across borders to facilitate trade. Currently, only four countries have ratified the protocol – Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, and Rwanda – a situation the General Secretary urged Namibia to help change.

Addedly, he also raised the issue of enhancing social protection systems in Africa to move away from poverty and expand safety nets as we invite investment under AfCFTA across Africa. In addition, he underscored the importance of standardizing qualifications to facilitate the free movement of skilled workers across the continent. Most importantly, ITUC-Africa also appealed to the Namibian government to champion the inclusion of labour protocols in AfCFTA during the upcoming review in 2025, a critical step to ensure that the agreement serves not only economic interests but also workers' rights and social welfare.

Labour Unity and Youth Representation: Insights from TUCNA Secretary General

Comrade Karvihuha Monhongora, TUCNA Secretary General, addressed the importance of unity within Namibia's labour movement, noting that the lack of cohesion among trade unions has undermined their effectiveness. Comrade Monhongora highlighted the government's role in fostering unity, as one major labour centre is affiliated with the ruling party, which has led to divisions among unions. He called for the Ministry of Labour to play a greater role in ensuring that all unions are represented fairly, without favouring any particular group.

He also emphasized the role of TUCNA in leading Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives on behalf of workers, advocating for the formation of a national steering committee that includes trade union representation. He underscored the importance of capacity building for trade unions, especially when it comes to effectively representing workers in critical areas such as the implementation of global initiatives like the SDGs and AfCFTA. He admitted that such capacities existed in the unions hence government should engage through social dialogue to tap into this expertise.



Supporting Labour and Social Dialogue: Acting Executive Director's

Ms. Aune Mudjanima, Acting Executive Director of the Ministry of Labour, acknowledged the proposals put forth by ITUC-Africa and TUCNA, emphasizing the Ministry's commitment to collaborating with trade unions on these critical issues. Ms. Mudjanima reiterated the government's progress on the ratification of occupational safety and health conventions (C155, C187, and C167), which are currently under review by the Attorney General for legal compliance. The Ministry also aims to finalize an Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) bill that will integrate these conventions, with a target completion date of 2025.

Ms. Mudjanima encouraged ITUC-Africa and TUCNA to submit formal proposals, assuring them that the Ministry would formally respond and address the issues raised. The Ministry is actively involved in drafting new OSH regulations to protect against biological hazards, ensuring that Namibia's labour standards are in line with emerging global challenges.

The Role of Unions in Policy Influence: Views from the Special Advisor to the Minister

Ms. Vicki Erenstein ya Toivo, Special Advisor to the Minister, echoed the importance of AfCFTA in unlocking Africa's economic potential, noting that the unions have an essential role to play in ensuring that the benefits reach workers. However, she expressed concerns about the low trade union density in Namibia, highlighting that

unions need to be more proactive in articulating their value to workers and in contributing substantively to policy discussions. She urged unions to present specific economic policies, such as proposals on a Sovereign Wealth Fund, and to play a more significant role in reducing inequalities in global supply chains. Ms. Toivo also emphasized the need for unions to focus on issues like the National Minimum Wage and informality within AfCFTA, urging unions to support the Ministry's efforts in developing these policies. She noted that the development of a National Minimum Wage in Namibia has been a long process and encouraged unions to take an active part in this initiative, which is crucial for addressing economic inequalities.

Additionally, Ms. Vicki Erenstein ya Toivo highlighted the critical need for trade union unity in Namibia, emphasizing that disunity weakens their collective influence on policy. She noted that unions are often in competition with each other, raiding members instead of collaborating on shared objectives. Platforms where unions can collectively address government with one voice were deemed essential for promoting policy changes that benefit workers. She stressed that if unions work together, they could maximize their role in influencing economic policies, such as those related to employment and inequality, thereby enhancing their relevance and impact in society.

Moving Forward

The courtesy call underscored the importance of collaboration between trade unions, the government, and international organizations in shaping a fairer labour market in Namibia. The proposals put forth by ITUC-Africa and TUCNA, ranging from the ratification of key conventions to the strengthening of social protection and trade union unity, highlight the critical role of unions in shaping policies that protect workers and promote inclusive economic growth.

As Namibia's TUCNA prepares to host the preparatory meeting of the governing body members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) – trade unions chapter – in 2025, there is an opportunity to showcase leadership in labour reforms. By implementing these recommendations, Namibia can not only strengthen its domestic labour market but also serve as a model for other African nations striving for a fair and equitable economic landscape.

Additionally, ITUC-Africa called on Namibia to review and enhance its visa facilitation processes for African travellers, emphasizing the importance of easing access to the country in support of the African Union's integration agenda. Recommendations included implementing online visa applications and establishing visa-on-arrival arrangements for Africans.

Additionally, ITUC-Africa urged Namibia to support the the Women and Youth Protocol of AfCFTA Secretariat, especially in its implementation. Comrade Akhator Joel Odigie highlighted that woman, who are particularly active in cross-border and informal economy trading, would greatly benefit from the protocol, as it aims to enhance their participation in trade arrangements.

**By ALREI, ITUC-Africa
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