



TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF SWAZILAND (TUCOSWA)

Masalesikhundleni Street,
Plot #290

P. O. Box 1158
MANZINI

Opposite: *Lulama Health Clinic & Makhosi X-ray* Tel: +268-25059514

Email: tucoswa@swazi.net/tucoswa@yahoo.com

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TUCOSWA WORKERS' DAY STATEMENT - 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Trade Union Congress of Swaziland joins the workers of the world in extending honour and gratitude to the health workers and all front line workers whose hands are on the deck, day and night defending humanity against the Coronavirus which is having prospects of causing extinction of humans in the globe.

These selfless workers needs all our support, they need moral support at home and in the communities where they live. Most importantly they require to be provided with adequate protective equipments and training to be prepared to correctly defend the human life. They should not be expected to defend us with their bare hands, our defence should not be "**at all cost**" to them.

It cannot be at the expense of their lives and those of their families. With the Coronavirus clearly, we are fighting a guerrilla warfare, our frontline commandos needs the necessary equipments to fight and further protect themselves to avoid a mutiny to occur at the battle field. The Government must provide at all cost.

THE WORKERS DAY

Since we started celebrating Labour Day in the late 90's, we have always met in big gatherings to share our joy and pain in a relaxed manner.

This year, that is not the case, we are justifiable indoors to protect ourselves and our families against an act of God, a virus which has shook the world and closed even the biggest cities of the world. This pandemic has called for us to have a serious discussion on the character of the future of work post the virus. As trade unions we will need to be vigilant in our defence and demands for the protection of worker rights.

The virus situation has caused serious harm to the income of the majority of the workers in some sectors, like the Hotel and Catering, Manufacture and Sale of craft, Textile and Apparel as well as some in the Manufacturing and Processing Sector. These workers are not getting paid for the period of the lockdown, their situation is dire and they have become literal beggars. These workers need our collective support and practical solidarity.

Our affiliates with budgets for social responsibilities or their entities with corporate social responsibilities are called upon to consider lending some one or the other form of practical solidarity to these workers. The Government and the Employers on their part should make sure that all the workers affected by the Covid-19 must be paid in full. There are pockets of resources that can be used for this call i.e. royalties from the mines and Tibiyo Taka Ngwane including consideration for the use of all the funds allocated for social responsibility in all Pension Funds specifically the Eswatini National Provident Fund.

We all know the definition of an essential services, it is accepted by our Labour Laws to mean a "**service whose disruption could result into the loss of life**", it is not the one that is in the mind of the Minister of Commerce which is intended to protect the profit interests of businesses of some selected politically connected individuals and institutions. We call upon all the rest of the workers in non-essential services to stay home for the duration of the lockdown. The lockdown has been seen to have presented an opportunity for some cruel employers to exploit workers under the Coronavirus veil.

What should be our response?

This May Day should present us an opportunity to rethink our strategies to intensify the worker rights defence models. We need more innovative ways, as most employers for a prolonged period would want to justify the exploitation using the effects of the virus as a shield. The projection of 20 million job loss in Africa as a consequence of the lockdown here in Eswatini and elsewhere, it follows that the trade union movement will negatively be affected not only because of reduced membership but it's bargaining power will be weaker due to a frail economy.

In order for us to meet the obvious challenges of the future, we need to consolidate our unity; our collective power is the only available tried and tested tool to fight the socio economic instability ahead of us. The lay-offs currently obtaining in various industries is an indication that retrenchments are on us. As we go for those possible retrenchment package negotiations we must not allow to be hoodwinked into accepting less favorable settlements.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a general battle for survival, the real war for us is yet to come at our workplaces as we defend our rights from being taken away in the name of the pandemic. Let's fight that war with all our might and zeal as employers would want to recover their lost profits by engaging in all sorts of unfair labour practices. They would want to engage us in precarious employment contracts, force us to work in excess of our usual working hours and all sort of habits that will be designed to circumvent the generally accepted worker rights and freedoms. We must resist that; we must oppose all initiatives that would seek to suggest that our rights at work should be secondary to the employer profits.

The Government Response to the Covid-19

The Coronavirus clearly found our Government with its pants down. We have always warned the government on its spending patterns and priorities, which was neglecting the public health systems. Our health system was, and still remains in a paralyzed condition. The lack of personal protective equipments and accessories including basic medicine is not a phenomenon synonymous with the Covid-19, it has been with us for some time without being attended.

The number of confirmed cases among the health workers is alarmingly high and that's a serious concern. The health institutions are no longer safe working places for the workers. We note that a health worker can infect many people than a normal person as they attend to many already sick individuals.

We reiterate our call for the government to provide all the necessary working tools to all frontline workers. The Government must provide life insurance for all the health and frontline workers. The compensation provided for under the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act must be reviewed in haste to increase compensation for health workers who may have contacted the virus in their line of duty.

The predicament faced by the government in its efforts to balance the current situation and the future is noted. It is however on such occasions that the worth of political leadership is tested. We need a decisive leadership which should execute its functions without fear and favour. The government's responses have been wanting in many aspects; at the center of the confusion caused by the government was the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions at the peak of the Covid-19 in the country. We insist it was a political blunder and this error of political judgment will haunt the country for many years to come.

It's a very unfortunate situation that the government is unable to provide some relief to the workers who are not getting paid. This would have been a different case had the government heeded to the call from the Federation to establish an Unemployment Insurance Fund. This is despite the fact that same was agreed to, at the Labour Advisory Board and subsequently included in the Employment Bill as far back as 2013. That Bill has to-date not been tabled before Parliament for enactment as some individuals within the Executive are against some of its provisions, specifically the banning of Labour Brokers. This is despite a Parliament resolution which singled out and agreed with us that in fact labour was not a commodity and that labour brokerage was slavery and should be banned. We shall prepare ourselves to continue our fight for enactment of the Employment Bill which provides among other benefits to us, the following:

- Payment of Severance (service benefit) allowance at retirement.
- Banning of Triangular Employment (labour brokers)
- Introduction of Unemployment Insurance Fund.
- Banning of perpetual fixed contracts on occupation and jobs of a permanent nature.

We know from experiences of the past that to push the government to heed our calls requires our collective efforts. We should prepare ourselves for a lockdown of our making soon after the government partial lockdown, to compel the government to pass into law the Employment Bill and the Bill seeking to convert the Provident Fund into a Pension Fund.

PLEASE STAY HOME AND BE SAFE FROM THE VIRUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!.

AMANDLA!!

Issued by the TUCOSWA Secretariat

Mduduzi C. Gina

Acting Secretary General -+26876119211

Muzikayise G. Mhlanga

Deputy Secretary General- +26876023348