

**African Regional Organisation of the  
International Trade Unions Confederation – ITUC-Africa**



**4<sup>th</sup> ORDINARY CONGRESS**

*Abuja (Nigeria), 20 – 21 November 2019*

**“Unite and make a difference”**

**DRAFT CONGRESS STATEMENT**

**UNITE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

1. The contemporary African trade union movement draws inspiration from the great and heroic struggles waged by earlier generations, their resilience and the gains of rights of freedom of association, collective bargaining, improved conditions of employment including better wages, health and safety at work, employment security, maternity rights, pension rights and others. These rights today are under relentless attack from neoliberal forces that threaten to condemn the majority of Africans to insecurity and precarious working and living conditions.

2. The trade union movement needs to hold itself together and work to withstand the systematic onslaught on the historic gains of the working people. Trade unions must build workers’ power and move steadily to achieve decent work and social protection and to consolidate rights, peace, democracy, social justice and progress for our people. Workers’ power can only be built through unity.

3. African workers deserve an Africa in which rights are respected and exercised and where the wellbeing of the people is secure. The current situation of Africa with its 54 neocolonial states born out of colonialism during the second half of the last century is a challenging one in which most

states are predominantly subject to the dictates of global capital characterized by massive exploitation of natural resources, particularly minerals and oil, leading to the impoverishment of the majority of the population.

4. The situation of global African workers in other parts of the world, particularly in the Americas, Europe and the Middle East is also marked by exploitation, domination, oppression, subjugation and subordination that spans several centuries.

5. ITUC-Africa demands a united Africa; an Africa that is independent, strong, purposeful and one which provides a safe home to all its people; an Africa where development is anchored on the principles of democratic participation, transparent management of its natural resources and equitable distribution of wealth, creation of decent and sustainable jobs, rights at work, gender equality and social inclusion. The vision of ITUC-Africa is to achieve a united, representative, democratic and independent regional trade union organisation that works for the welfare of all African workers, in a world where everyone can realize their full potentials under conditions of freedom, equality and social justice.

6. Trade unions have the potential to be among the most representative, democratic and powerful organisations with the ability to drive social transformation. But there is a great deal to address in our trade unions before we can impact on what happens in our societies at large. Thus, trade unions must do their own self-reflection and overcome their internal governance challenges relating to democratic participation and accountability. Our unions must become places where women can fully participate and play a meaningful role leading our movement; a place where young people can be politically educated, respected and given opportunities to build their leadership skills; and where all workers can feel that they have finally come home.

7. There is thus much to gain from organizing and uniting Africa's working people, in empowering the youth and women and harnessing the creative energies of all to rally behind the goal of a peaceful, socially just and economically prosperous Africa.

## **OUR ORGANISING GOAL**

8. We adopt and reaffirm the mandate of the global labour movement to organise to build workers' power. To organize effectively, we must unite. Congress sets the goal of achieving unity and cohesion within the trade union movement at the continental level during the coming quadrennial.

Congress also demands of affiliates to commit to clear objectives and set in motion programs for achieving unity among trade unions at national level and within and across sectors.

## **THE AFRICAN CONDITION AND THE IMPERATIVE TO UNITE**

9. Among Africa's population of 1.2 billion people today is a large labour force of approximately 600 million about 70% of whom are made up of youth between the ages 15-24. Formal Employment is only about 10% with the remaining 90% of the labour force located in the informal economy.

10. The 10% workers in the formal economy are not faring well on the average. Most are working as casual labourers employed through third parties, are on short-term employment contracts, receive low incomes, are subjected to large wage gaps especially between men and women, have limited social protection coverage and their rights to belong and exercise their freedom of association are continuously and systematically violated.

11. The informal economy where about 90% of the labour force is located is neglected in many respects, as most workers work very long hours without corresponding remuneration, with unsafe working conditions, limited access to social and physical infrastructure, uncertain access to energy, subject to the impact of climate change with their properties often destroyed by heavy rains and floods or ravaging fires.

12. Many African workers - women, men, and even children - are compelled to migrate to other countries within the continent and beyond in their quest for a better life. Many are subject to different forms of discrimination including racism and xenophobia due to low regional integration, weak national security, undeveloped labour market institutions and the absence of inclusive labour market policies that facilitate free movement of people. These factors prevent individual migrants from contributing fully to their countries of migration and robs the continent as a whole of the social and economic benefits that migrant workers can bring.

**13. Low industrialisation** - Structural Adjustment Programs and economic liberalization have resulted in to the collapse of national industries leading to massive and wholesale retrenchments as well as the weakening role of the state in economic development. Foreign monopoly capital represented by multinational companies and other big foreign corporations dominate the economic space with national enterprises relegated to the periphery. Prevailing ideology across

most African states projects foreign capital as an essential ingredient for achieving development and facilitates its exploitation of natural resources with Africa benefiting relatively little in return.

14. Africa deserves to industrialize. However, industrialization cannot be achieved against the backdrop of continuous exportation of its raw materials, especially as commodities. African governments as a matter of urgency must pursue policies and programs that ensure that value to natural resources is added on the continent to ensure sustainable employment creation along the value chains.

15. Besides, Africa's agenda for industrialization has to be complemented by steady steps towards the achievement of integration for the continent as a whole. Free movement of goods, services and people, including labour, as envisaged under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as well as common projects of infrastructure need to be diligently pursued to leverage the effort towards African unity for the progress and well being of its people.

16. **Corruption** is prevalent and has become endemic in governance institutions of the state and throughout the public service in most of Africa. Personal commissions on public contracts by public officials - political office holders and bureaucrats - largely accounts for the signing of bad contracts between many of our countries and MNCs that lead to the loss of hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars in public funds. Corruption at the top, which gives rise to bad contracts, to the privatization and cheap sale of public assets, to cronyism and crass political patronage, all create the conditions and environment for corruption throughout the public services and contributes to poor quality public service delivery, undermines the rule of law and leads to overall debasement of integrity in public life.

17. **Monetization of politics** is also an aspect of corruption. Democracy is threatened in Africa by the extent to which electoral politics has been monetized and the increasing role money plays in determining who gets elected as representatives of the people and as President, Governor or Mayor; and on who gets appointed as Minister or other Chief Executive Officer of a public institution. The political establishment in most African states is ridden with corruption and cynicism and has undergone loss of public trust and incurs the growing disenchantment and anger of the people. Again, the trade union movement must rise up to its historic responsibility in Africa as champion of democracy and one of the leading forces of the African revolution. Trade unions need to build their capacity to mobilize the workers in support of policies that advance the interests of the people and contribute to the development of Africa as a whole.

**18. Illicit Financial Flows** - The Mbeki Panel Report to the African Union demonstrated that a minimum of 50 billion United States dollars leave Africa annually through illicit financial flows that are engineered through corporate greed of multinational companies actively aided by African agents who are either politicians, bureaucrats or other professionals or business persons. The Tax Justice Campaign championed by the Africa Tax Justice Network, the PSI and ITUC-Africa needs to be pursued with renewed vigor to free and secure resources for social protection and provision of quality public service to the African population at large. There is need for real trade union action at national level in securing tax justice and the redistribution of incomes and resources to combat poverty and promote the well being of working people.

19. The organizational power of trade unions can assist in turning the tide against corruption and its consequential ills. It is therefore absolutely necessary for trade unions to mobilize workers against corruption in all spheres of public life as corruption is at the core of the woes facing Africa today.

#### **THE AFRICAN TRADE UNION SITUATION**

20. A striking feature of the trade union movement in Africa that accounts for its weakness and relative ineffectiveness is its fragmentation and disunity. Disunity bedevils the movement from the bottom to the top, from the sectoral through national to the continental level. Fragmentation and disunity affects trade union existence in a variety of ways and undermines union ability to stand and deliver effective services and benefits to members.

21. Trade unions grouped in national centers across Africa belong to the African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) and to the Organisation of Trade Union Unity (OATUU) with a huge overlap in membership. The two organizations nominally share between 80-90% common membership with both organizations laying claim to represent African workers on the continent. They operate with some cooperation within the ILO and African Union without the ability to achieve the synergies and punch that would be attained by a united organization acting for African workers. The two organizations tug at common resources which could be harnessed for the benefit of African workers. Both depend primarily on external resources to remain viable, ITUC-Africa on the ITUC and OATUU on some African governments.

22. The other components of the African labour movement are sub-regional formations including East African Trade Union Confederation (EATUC), the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council (SATUCC), the Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA), the Central African

Workers Trade Union Organization (OSTAC), the Horn of Africa Trade Union Confederation (HATUC), the Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC), (which groups some workers in North Africa and the Mediterranean); Global Union Federations (GUFs) that cover sectoral workers across African countries; and other African workers trade unions and platforms like the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and other African workers' caucuses in Western countries and the Americas. The cohesion among these different components of the African labour movement is limited and does not wholly inure to the benefit of Africa's working people.

23. Following in the wake of division at continental level is the division and fragmentation of unions at national and sectoral levels. Multiple national trade union centers and unions exist in many African countries and prevails the most in West, Central and parts of Southern Africa. Multiple national centers and unions create a challenge for securing their representativity. Already, union density in most African countries is low at 10% or below of the labour force and having multiple national trade union centers and unions has implication for the representativeness of each of the national centers or unions.

24. Disunity also prevails at shopfloor and sectoral level leading to a plurality of unions organizing similar groups of workers resulting in multiple unions for the same constituency. Thus, for example, among teachers in a number of countries, especially in West Africa, many unions exist. Several organize primary school teachers; while several others organize teachers at Secondary/High School and other levels. Also at national level in many countries of relatively small populations of less than five to ten million inhabitants, multiple national trade union centers exist who lay claim to represent the national interests of workers.

25. A major consequence of the multiplicity of national centers and unions is that organizations become relatively numerically small and command or receive less in membership subscription and therefore have weak financial bases. Multiplicity that undermines union strength at industrial or sectoral level also undermines union strength and ability at national level. Once unions are not financially autonomous there is even less likelihood of the financial autonomy of national centers to which many are affiliated and have to pay affiliation fees. Numerical strength of unions operating as one of multiple unions range from a low of thousands of members to the high of tens of thousands of members. In a few countries where there are not so many multiple centers membership sizes of national centers range from membership of a few hundreds of thousands to a few unions with more than one and half million members.

26. The absence of financial autonomy exposes unions to the undue influence and manipulation of employers, governments or foreign donors who may be desirous of securing local spheres of influence for various reasons and purposes. Unions that are compromised in their relations with

employers, governments and/or foreign donors or are the objects of their manipulation are unlikely to serve properly the interests of their members.

27. Again, in the absence of financial autonomy the union is unable to recruit qualified technical personnel to serve the union. This affects the union's ability to deliver on a range of important services to affiliates or members - education; research; negotiations; communication, information and campaigns; legal support and others that may be deemed appropriate.

### **Factors that account for disunity and fragmentation**

28. A range of factors account for disunity and fragmentation among African trade unions. These include:

- weak trade union internal democracy and poor management;
- trade union election disputes;
- leadership perpetuating themselves in office;
- leaders serving their selfish interests as against those of their membership;
- political interference; and
- external interference by donor organizations.

Division and disunity among unions allows for the exploitation of their differences to undermine the collective demands and interests of workers.

### **IMPORTANCE OF UNITY**

29. At its 4th World Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2018, the ITUC underscored the need to build workers' power in order to change the rules of the global economy for the benefit of working people and their families. Congress endorsed four pillars for global trade union action around peace, democracy and rights; regulating economic power; global shifts - just transitions; and equality. The frontlines of union action that emerge out of these pillars raise their demands for union effort at regional, national, sectoral and shop floor levels for the effective pursuit of workers rights and achievement of policies that deliver decent work and decent life to the world's working people.

30. Against the background set by the ITUC, ITUC-Africa sets out its strategic goals as:

- organising;
- promoting trade union internal democracy;
- deepening democracy and advancing workers' rights and interests;
- promoting economic and social transformation for the people ; and
- advancing social protection for all.

31. The quest for unity is at the heart of African trade union ability and effort to become viable organizations and to become effective in protecting and advancing the strategic goals set above. Unity is essential for confirming the character of trade unions as mass membership organizations that derive their strength from their numbers who sign up as members and are able to act together in defense or pursuit of common interests.

32. While the first national trade union center which originated in the UK marked its 150th anniversary in 2018, the oldest trade union center in Africa marks its 7? anniversary in 2019; there is also a history of over five decades of organisation at continental level and more than three decades at subregional level. Over the last decade there have been countless discussions and conversations about African trade union disunity at continental and national levels and common wisdom has pointed us all in the direction of unity.

33. At its 2nd Congress in Johannesburg in 2011, ITUC-Africa adopted a resolution on unity of the African trade union movement at national and continental levels. This resolution was reaffirmed at the 3rd Congress in Dakar in 2015. At national level, efforts at implementing the resolution on unity has led to the establishment of 'inter-syndicales' and 'inter-centrales' in a number of countries and to the pursuit of mergers in a few others. At continental level, the initial effort at pursuing unity between ITUC-Africa and OATUU as the two main organizations fizzled out after some initial effort.

#### **THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW**

34. Congress is called upon to go beyond lamentation and to revisit the imperative of unity at continental level in order to build the African trade union movement into a countervailing power

against corporate greed and those who seek to continue with the subordination Africa's working people. Congress demands concrete steps to achieve unity between ITUC-Africa and OATUU during the coming quadrennial. In pursuing this process, Congress calls for the establishment of a Committee of leaders from a selected number of affiliates, who belong to both ITUC-Africa and OATUU, to be charged with responsibility for fostering cooperation with a view to achieving the objective of unity between the two organizations. In pursuing the process engagement should be sought with the sub-regional trade union organizations as well as regional GUFs to explore together the possibility of a common operating organizational framework that allows optimal coordination and coherence of the African trade union movement.

35. At national level, Congress affirms the need for unity and requests all affiliates to commit to the quest for unity and to consolidate their actions for unity where these already exist and where they do not, initiate firm actions for achieving unity.

36. Congress affirms that trade union unity is an imperative for the survival and continued relevance of trade unions in Africa. We must do all in our power to achieve trade union unity. We must follow our word and fulfill the behest of the workers we organize and lead. We must rise up to the call for unity to avoid irreparable damage to the fortunes of the workers we purport to lead and serve.

**A M A N D L A !**