

ITUC Statement for 2012 World AIDS Day

Today on World AIDS Day (WAD) 2012, the ITUC commemorates the many millions of people who have lost their lives to HIV/AIDS, and pays tribute to those living with HIV and those who have fought to bring attention to the epidemic and advocate for action.

Despite the progress achieved, still 2.5 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2011. Only 54% of people in need have access to ARV treatment, and people infected and affected by HIV continue suffering from discrimination, stigmatization and deprivation of rights. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most affected, with 23.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS on a world total of 34.2 million, but HIV/AIDS is also threatening many other countries and regions. For example, AIDS-related deaths are rising in regions such as Eastern Europe, Central Asia (21%) and the Middle East and North Africa (17%).¹

Trade unions are vigorously committed to uphold their strong and continued leadership in confronting HIV/AIDS in the world of work and to ensure that the progress and investments already made will not erode.

Trade unions will therefore highlight the 2011-2015 WAD theme, “Getting to zero: zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS related deaths”, to call for more social justice, equality and fairness of the future action and the recognition of the role of the world of work in the AIDS response.

Although all people are born equal, our chances to enjoy health, prosperity and justice continue to be shaped by global injustice, whereby hundreds of millions of people are condemned to suffering. A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that the gap between rich and poor has reached its highest level in over 30 years while the income gap between the richest and poorest 10 per cent is still 50 to 1. Middle-income countries are home to three-quarters of the world's poor, who struggle on the margins of existence.²

The rise of global inequality and injustice has direct implications for AIDS response. Developing countries account for the overwhelming majority of deaths from AIDS as well as 80% of all deaths from many other diseases such as heart diseases, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. Consequently, 90% of all premature deaths from these diseases take place in the developing world – meaning premature, preventable deaths among people of working age³. At the same time, globally one third of the world population lacks access to essential medicines (80% of these people live in low-income countries), while 75% of the world's population are not covered by adequate social security, including access to healthcare.⁴

The ITUC is convinced that if governments have the political will and work in close coordination with the social partners, social protection and social justice can be made universal including in the poorest countries. Accordingly, the ITUC considers that the AIDS response should be situated within the broader development agenda and integrated with other human rights, development and health efforts. Consequently, in order not to risk the gains of the last decade, health and AIDS should be given a place in the post-2015 development framework.

¹ 2012 UNAIDS World AIDS Day Global Factsheet

http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/20121120_FactSheet_Global_en.pdf

² 2011 OECD Report “Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising

<http://www.oecd.org/els/socialpoliciesanddata/dividedwestandwhyinequalitykeepsrising.htm>

³ 2011 WHO Factsheet on Non-Communicable Diseases

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/index.html>

⁴ 2011 WHO World Medicines Situation Report http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/policy/world_medicines_situation/en/index.html

Therefore, the ITUC wishes to highlight the importance of optimizing the contribution of the world of work to the global HIV response in order to effectively achieve universal access. Using workplaces as venues for “combination prevention”, non-discrimination campaigns and treatment adherence – this is an important way to optimize limited resources and work towards universal access. Accordingly, addressing protection of workplace-related human rights of people living with or perceived to be living with HIV can lead to important public health, socio-economic and individual benefits.

Social protection is a global opportunity to confront the global economic crisis and its effects on people – and accelerate recovery. It has many potential entry points to influence health outcomes. For social protection to work, especially for prevention, multi-sectoral frameworks are required. Social protection should be included in the AIDS response and should be AIDS-sensitive, in order to increase realization of equal rights and social justice as well as assistance and social services for all.

Trade unions therefore call on the Governments to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on workers, their families, their dependants, workplaces and economies, including by taking into account all relevant Conventions of the International Labour Organization, as well as the guidance provided by the relevant International Labour Organization Recommendations, including ILO Recommendation No. 200 on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, as they committed to in the Political Declaration “Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS” that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly's High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2011.

Special attention to gender-sensitive approaches is needed. Trade unions emphasize that HIV/AIDS continues to pose a threat to development and to the lives, health and well-being of individuals, in particular women and youth. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are crucial as well as tackling problems of structural unemployment among the youth that today account for more than 40% of global unemployment.

That is why the ITUC will continue to play a decisive role by strengthening its leadership in the response to HIV and AIDS and by better aligning trade union activities and advocacy to the changing context of HIV at the global, regional and national levels. The challenge now is to keep AIDS high on the agenda and to accelerate action to end the epidemic. The ITUC stays committed to the scaling up of the response of the global community and to support the achievement of all MDGs globally by 2015 including by accelerating progress in order to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support.

Moreover, trade unions are committed to support respect for human rights, and elimination of barriers of discrimination, stigma and exclusion in the achievement of universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. The ITUC reaffirms its commitment to collective action to promote human rights and rights-based approaches to address HIV/AIDS.

The Global Union Federations play a highly significant role in various sector-specific aspects of HIV/AIDS at global, regional and national levels. The ITUC welcomes continued and common advocacy for HIV and AIDS and the world of work as well as joint efforts to make HIV/AIDS a priority for trade unions.

The ITUC reaffirms that this is not the time to weaken efforts to address HIV and AIDS. By continuing our work, strong and proactive political leadership, better governance and continued efforts to reduce inequities, we can progress towards the goal of universal access and open the road to a world with zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and discrimination, and zero deaths from AIDS.