

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG)

CTUG submission to the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

Perth, 28 - 30 October, 2011

“Creating socially and environmentally resilient growth through decent work”

Introduction

1. The Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG) represents over 30 million workers in Commonwealth countries. We submit this statement to the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in order to defend and advance the interests of all workers and people in the Commonwealth. The CTUG calls on Commonwealth Leaders to follow the recommendations herein and to adopt the requisite decisions at their Perth Summit in October 2011.

2. The CTUG supports strongly the successful development of intergovernmental cooperation through the Commonwealth in order to attain democracy, human rights and decent work in all its countries. In honouring the 62nd Anniversary of the modern Commonwealth, the CTUG calls on Commonwealth leaders to make this unique institution play a greater role in achieving socially equitable and sustainable development for all - a message channelling the principles of equality, consensus and cooperation of the 1949 London Declaration. The CTUG believes strongly in the institutions of the Commonwealth and we call on Commonwealth leaders to devote resources to, and increase the political priority given to the work of those institutions.

3. The Commonwealth countries as well as the rest of the global community face multifold challenges including recovering from the economic crisis, addressing extreme poverty, tackling the need for climate adaptation and diversifying their production. While there has been some progress in reduction of poverty and the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the financial and food crisis undermined much of the progress made and dropped millions of people back into poverty. Even though many Commonwealth countries have achieved some growth since CHOGM 2009, due to widening income inequality, there has been no corresponding significant decrease in the poverty levels. The governments in the Commonwealth countries need to pursue an employment-led growth model that would allow all their citizens to have opportunities for improving their livelihoods.

4. In order to avoid future crises and reverse decades of increasing inequality, the CHOGM should commit to promote the reform of the global economic governance system by promoting policy coherence. Global governance needs to be enhanced and more organisations should take part in it. The IFIs, the OECD and the WTO should start cooperating with the ILO, FAO and other organisations in promoting a coherent solution to the world's recurring crises in food, employment, finances and climate. **The CTUG calls on the CHOGM to support a new global economic governance that can adopt new policies to mitigate the crises, including by increased social spending and counter-**

cyclical economic policies, regulation of financial markets, financial transaction taxes and action on tax havens, elimination of speculation on food and the increase of food production, and commitment to mitigate and adapt to climate change while providing for food security.

Priorities

Our main priorities, set out in more detail below, are:

- Developing a coherent and robust peer review mechanism to audit performance by Commonwealth member states against the Harare Principles
- The establishment of an annual meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers
- Adopting a target for full ratification of the ILO core conventions by all Commonwealth countries
- Adopting ambitious targets including mitigation goals that would sustain the global increase in temperature within the 2°C objective and pursue a Just Transition to the low-carbon economy
- Establishing an observatory to monitor the impact on Commonwealth countries of trade agreements

Strengthening Democracy

5. Democracy and human rights are at the heart of the Commonwealth's values, and we believe that the Commonwealth needs to become more effective at promoting democracy and acting against breaches. We support the proposal of the Eminent Persons Group for a Commissioner for Democracy and the Rule of Law, and we look forward to taking part in the development of the proposed 'Charter of the Commonwealth'. But our starting point must be the Harare Principles: **we believe there is no reason to delay a peer review to audit the performance of Commonwealth governments against the Harare Principles.**

6. Free, independent and representative trade unions give working people a say in their own futures. Consultation of trade unions and of representative employers' organisations must be increased and made more effective. **The Commonwealth Secretariat should monitor progress towards the universal ratification by all Commonwealth countries of ILO Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation and to report to the next CHOGM in 2013; and Commonwealth Member States should be urged to invite and involve tripartite constituents in the preparation of Commonwealth meetings.**

7. Equivalent structures to build tripartism at the Commonwealth level are needed in a process of reinforcing the priorities given to decent work and job creation by Commonwealth governments. The Commonwealth's annual intergovernmental cooperation on Finance, Environment, Legal, Education and Women Ministers is insufficient. **There should be an annual meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers – possibly alongside the International Labour Conference - organised on a tripartite basis.**

Human, Trade Union and Equal Rights

8. Human rights are under severe attack in an unacceptably large number of Commonwealth countries. The CHOGM must decide upon effective measures to promote reform and change in Commonwealth member countries that violate human rights and undermine democracy. Serious tensions, growing militancy and threats of war and terrorism are a commonplace on too many

Commonwealth borders. The Commonwealth must take a much stronger stance, a more effective role in building and achieving peace between Commonwealth members.

9. Among the most essential human rights are the rights of workers. All countries in the Commonwealth should ratify Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association and the right to organise and bargain collectively, and take measures to enforce those Conventions and protect unions from harassment and anti-union discrimination, as well as from denial of recognition by companies or other actors. The other ILO Core Labour Standards would provide workers the right to fight child labour, forced labour and discrimination in employment. The resulting improved economic and social resilience would bear benefits for all.

10. All members of the ILO should have ratified the eight fundamental Conventions of the ILO¹, yet such is far from the case in a range of Commonwealth countries. **The CTUG calls on CHOGM to establish a target for all Commonwealth governments to ratify all eight core labour standards by 2015, to undertake biennial reviews of progress towards that objective and to publish the results of their reviews.**

11. Discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, caste, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability or other grounds is a blight affecting all Commonwealth countries. Achieving gender equality depends on equal rights of inheritance, land ownership, workers' rights, wages, property rights, and access to banks and financial institutions. It requires determined governments to tackle the spread of the unprotected economy where a great majority of women, children, migrants, young people and minorities continue to be exploited. **The CTUG calls on the Commonwealth to promote the adoption by Member States of international human rights conventions (including the core conventions of the ILO), by developing peer review and audit.**

Decent work and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

12. The progress registered towards meeting the MDGs and in tackling many of the root causes of poverty is hindered by multifold crises. The key to the future is to invest in people - in their access to justice, to labour protection, to education, to health care, to safe and nutritious food and to clean water. **The Commonwealth Secretariat should be mandated to publish a biennial stock-taking of progress towards attaining the MDGs for each developing country in the Commonwealth.** Member States must be encouraged to adhere to the UN National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) process for reporting on progress and to promote such strategies in combination with the development of ILO Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP).

13. Decent work is recognised by the United Nations as central to poverty alleviation and should be placed at the core of social and economic policy development. Yet currently, decent work and job security are increasingly threatened in many Commonwealth countries. Many workers once employed in formal jobs are being pushed into informal, precarious and unprotected work and millions more stand to lose their jobs because of the economic slowdown. To counteract these trends, governments must bring work within a legal framework where workers' rights can be enforced, with enhanced priority to ensuring labour inspectorates are effective. **The CHOGM should establish a fund for capacity enhancement activities by trade unions, covering inter alia workers in informal work and export processing zones, and linked to ILO assistance and technological cooperation.**

¹ Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of forced or compulsory labour and child labour; equal remuneration, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

14. The 100th session of the ILO Conference in June this year adopted the universal standards to promote decent work for domestic workers. There are over 100 million domestic workers in the world, including in the Commonwealth countries. Most of them are girls, women, and often migrants. Their work is undervalued, underpaid and unrecognized. The adoption of this International Convention supplemented by a Recommendation is a step forward to address basic human rights and decent work gaps for these workers who have been neglected for too long by the international community. **The CTUG calls on the Commonwealth to promote the ratification of the new Convention and Recommendation..**

15. The CTUG also calls on Heads of Government to work with the ILO and trade unions to establish a universal Social Protection Floor. This would ensure the availability, continuity and access to essential services such as water, sanitation, health and nutrition. Social protection could include active labour market measures with a view to developing human capital and increasing the re-employability of those adversely affected by globalisation and the crises.

16. In order to succeed in delivering decent work and attain the MDGs, the United Nations' target for official development assistance (ODA) of 0.7% of GDP must urgently be restated as achievable by all industrialised Commonwealth countries. ODA needs to be oriented towards projects and aid recipients that promote decent work, and complemented by action to reduce the debt burden on developing countries. **CHOGM should support the call for all industrialised countries in the Commonwealth to adopt binding timetables to meet the UN aid target, should review biennially their progress towards that end and publish the results of their review.**

Sustainable Development, Environment and Public Health

17. The trade unions have embarked on the global effort to mitigate and adapt climate change. Through its active engagement and lobbying efforts the international trade union movement has achieved the inclusion of Just Transition in the UNFCCC process at COP 16. The unions have also elaborated an ambitious programme to cut emissions, promote renewable energy, improve management of water and other resources, and reduce waste. The union programme addresses also the massive creation of green and decent jobs, reinforce social and economic resilience to climate change through social protection schemes and provides for trainings for those who would become redundant by the transition to the low-carbon economy.

18. Overall, the COP16 outcomes lay some foundations for the UNFCCC process, and the forthcoming COP17 in Durban (28 November – 9 December) must be a destination with the political mandate necessary for a fair, ambitious and binding agreement. **The Commonwealth must play an important role in COP17 in reaching such an agreement and CHOGM should adopt ambitious targets including mitigation goals that would sustain the global increase in temperature within the 2°C objective and pursue a Just Transition to the low-carbon economy.** In addition, Commonwealth Member States should become a positive symbol of sustainable development, whereby social and environmental issues are integrated into economic planning and where social impacts are understood and addressed as part of decision making, at all levels.

19. **CHOGM should adopt a target of at least a 50% increase in green and decent jobs by 2015** and start developing a Commonwealth Just Transition strategy aimed at protecting the most vulnerable from climate change risks and from the consequences of climate change adaptation or mitigation measures. These transitional strategies must also include provision for skills development schemes, consultation with social partners and civil society and cooperation towards a more equitable and sustainable future for the Commonwealth Member States and societies.

20. The CTUG urges the industrialised countries of the Commonwealth to provide financial and scientific support to the poorest countries of the Commonwealth to facilitate the challenges of climate change, including through the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund. Additional resources could derive from innovative sources of finance, including by introducing a financial transactions tax which will deliver funds while reducing speculation in financial markets.

21. The small island developing countries of the Commonwealth face particular problems from the impact of climate change on their shores, exacerbating the already grave natural disasters in the form of increased incidence of hurricanes, tropical storms and through rising sea-levels. **The Commonwealth must create structures that can deliver rapid solidarity assistance in the event of natural catastrophes and assist countries to deal with the challenges of employment transition to a more sustainable economy.**

22. HIV/AIDS continues to menace the future of Commonwealth countries, its people and their health. **The CTUG calls on CHOGM to encourage Commonwealth countries to implement the new ILO Recommendation No. 200, 2010 on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work and should set targets for adopting the ILO Code of Conduct on HIV/AIDS.**

Trade and Development

23. Many developing countries in the Commonwealth stand to be affected by Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union (EU). Under their current form, the EPAs risk to be significantly detrimental to development and employment prospects in the developing countries concerned. If they are to be applied, EPAs need to be re-negotiated in order to result in more resilient economies and promote regional integration. It also is vital that dangers to employment be fully anticipated and that adequate policy space be preserved for attaining domestic development priorities. A full impact assessment of the employment repercussions and industrial policy implications is required. **The CTUG calls CHOGM to establish an observatory to analyse the effects of EPAs and of potential WTO agreements on Commonwealth countries and address the social dimension of trade.**

24. In response to the employment consequences of off-shoring and out-sourcing, more effective international rules to shape globalisation are needed. Many developing countries are competing intensely for export markets and investment and the problems stand to be generalised as competition increases. The result is increased work precariousness, informal economic activity and vast labour rights abuses. The Commonwealth governments need to guarantee core workers' rights through effective implementation of labour standards. Further to this, the Leaders should support international instruments that provide clear guidance for acceptable corporate social practices, namely the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration on Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

25. The CHOGM in Perth should address the over-reliance of some Commonwealth countries on commodities trade, with a mechanism to provide aid in times of price shocks, stabilise commodity prices and provide for measures to address speculation in commodities markets, including innovative tax measures. Such a mechanism would provide great benefit to poor Commonwealth countries and assist them to move towards a long-term solution to their dependence on a few basic products through industrial policy based on creating decent and green work and concluded through social dialogue.

26. **CHOGM should reaffirm Commonwealth developed countries' commitment to duty-free, quota-free access to poor countries' products.** Other measures on the multilateral level that would

have a positive effect on poor Commonwealth countries include the simplification of rules of origin and a major reform of the treatment of intellectual property rights (IPRs) in order to enable quicker technological dissemination and cheaper intellectual property related products, including medicine, seeds, software and others.

27. It is also important that CHOGM proposes a trading model based on regional integration among Commonwealth countries and pro-development trade relations. To this end, investment in building connectivity among groups of Commonwealth countries is necessary in fields such as resilient physical infrastructure, trade agreements, customs cooperation, enterprise interconnectedness and labour and skills mobility. The developed countries should provide technical assistance to such ends in addition to the ODA they already offer. This aid should be used to develop physical, institutional and human capacity in trade.
