



Realizing Social Justice for a Fair Globalization – the Centrality of the Decent Work Agenda

**Trade Union Statement to the Special UNDP-NGO Briefing on the theme
Social Justice for a Fair Globalization
marking the First World Day of Social Justice
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Marking the First World Day of Social Justice...

Today, the 20th of February, 2009, we are gathered here at the United Nations to mark the first World Day of Social Justice. With its message on *Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, and coming at a time when we face the worst global economic crisis since the great depression, this day accords the international community a moment to reflect on what has gone wrong with globalization. We have to explore why, instead of producing social justice and decent livelihoods for working women and men and their families all over the world, it is rather producing massive unemployment, worsening poverty, hunger, homelessness and human misery. This is of great concern to the international trade union movement – in particular the International Trade Union Confederation, with workers organized in 312 national trade union centres in 157 countries, and counting 170 million working women and men worldwide.

Against the backdrop of a looming global jobs crisis

In its Global Employment Trends Report 2009, the ILO has estimated that the global unemployment rate could well rise to 7.1%. This would result in an increase of 50 million people joining the ranks of the unemployed. This would also mean a rise to 1.4 billion people classified as the working poor, earning less than USD \$2 per day, and unable to lift themselves out of poverty. This would represent 45% of the world's employed. The ILO predicts even harsher labour market conditions for sub-Saharan Africa, where, already, around 75% of the employed are in the informal economy, and could be classified as the working poor. It looks as if it will be extremely difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015 – indeed, the ILO now predicts that due to the increase in poverty, ten years of gradual progress towards achieving MDG 1 will be wiped out, and world poverty will return to its level of 1997 instead.

Social Justice with Decent Work for a Fair Globalization

For this reason, trade unions wish to emphasize that marking this day on *Social justice for a Fair Globalization* provides a mobilizing opportunity for the international community to come together to reflect on solutions that could restore economic and employment

growth, in order to put our countries back on a path to poverty eradication and achieving the MDGs. As trade unions, we want to be fully involved in the search for, and in the implementation of sustainable solutions.

We feel that the *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, adopted at the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2008, provides a very good policy framework for restoring employment growth. The Declaration emphasizes that all ILO Member States have an important responsibility to implement strategies for the realization of the Decent Work Agenda. These must be in line with the four strategic objectives of decent work: **employment creation, social protection, social dialogue and fundamental principles and rights at work.**

It must be emphasized that social protection, including social services and social safety nets is particularly important in this time of crisis. Unemployment benefits, health care and other essential household support provide a way of cushioning the shock and easing the pain of the recession. By providing cash to households, public programmes will allow families to have income for spending on essential needs, and this will also help to jump-start the economy, revive small businesses and small-scale enterprises, and restore jobs. Stimulus packages are a good idea, provided they focus on these aspects, namely, social protection, and productive investments targeting sectors where jobs can be created or restored.

Investing in Decent Work for all

As trade unions, we were very active in Doha last December for the Review Conference on Financing for Development, making these very points; advocating for investments in income-generating activities, decent jobs, and social protection. We were pleased that the Doha Declaration reflected our concerns, and committed Member States to investing in “the realization of full and productive employment and decent work for all,” as well as in “the provision of, and access to, financial and credit services to all, ... [and in] fostering diverse local and supporting industries that create productive employment and strengthen local communities.”[para 12]. It is very important, even urgent, that governments follow up on these commitments made in Doha.

Workers in unprotected and informal work – the case of Ghana

Decent work support policies must not neglect workers in unprotected and informal work. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, over 75 % of workers are in the informal economy, working long hours for meagre incomes. A majority of these are women. In rural areas they are food producers and small-scale retailers, or they may be low-paid agricultural workers. In coastal areas they may be engaged in fisheries. In urban areas they are street vendors, market vendors, or domestic workers.

The Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC), an affiliate of the ITUC, provides an example of how trade unions can be actively engaged in organizing and supporting working women and men in the informal economy. Given the lack of legal avenues for the protection of the rights of workers in the informal economy in Ghana, the GTUC decided to amend its Constitution to allow for affiliation with workers in this sector.

The GTUC subsequently established a desk in its structure to support the workers in the informal economy, and has affiliated several sectors, notably: the Makola Traders Association, the Madina Shoe-makers/sellers Association, the Tomato sellers Association and the Musicians Association of Ghana (MUSIGA).

Similarly, some of the sectoral unions affiliated to the GTUC have brought informal sector workers into their fold. For example, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) has organized the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association, the General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU) has organized the informal agricultural workers, the Timber and Wood Workers' Union (TWU) has organized casual forestry workers, the Public Services Workers Union (PSWU) has incorporated the Lotto sellers Association and the Photographers Association.

Support activities of the GTUC to its new informal sector membership include vocational training programs to enhance work skills and employability, cooperative credit schemes for small entrepreneurs, and the establishment of a Labour Enterprises Trust (LET), aimed at creating income-generating opportunities. LET has set up an insurance company, a car parking facility in the central business district of Accra, a water tank service and a taxi service. Through dialogue with the Social Security authorities, the GTUC has succeeded in providing an avenue for informal sector workers to make contributions into the social security system. The GTUC has used its shareholder strength in the United Bank of Africa (UBA Ghana) to offset job lay-offs and to improve job security for bank workers.

Giving effect to UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/62/10

Trade unions in Ghana and around the world stand ready to intensify such activities in the fight against poverty and in the quest for social justice for all. In doing so, they join with the United Nations in marking the World Day of Social Justice, in keeping with UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/62/10 which “Recognizes the need to consolidate further the efforts of the international community in poverty eradication and in promoting full employment and decent work, gender equality and access to social well-being and justice for all...” In face of the worsening global jobs crisis, trade unions wish to highlight the urgency for such consolidation of the efforts of the international community around these objectives, stressing also dialogue with the social partners (employers' and workers' representatives), and respect for rights at work.

Giving effect to *the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*

Furthermore, the inadequately coordinated nature of the international response to the economic crisis demonstrates vividly the importance of *the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, which places Social Justice at the heart of the promotion of a fair globalization and recognizes decent work as a tool to achieve it. This is fully in line with the original mandate of the ILO, reinforced by the Philadelphia Declaration, and further re-affirmed by the Social Justice Declaration which calls on the ILO to examine all economic, financial and trade policies as they affect employment. The ILO can provide that coherence missing from the international architecture at this time, and take the quest for social justice and decent work to the centre of the priorities of all the multilateral institutions.

This message was further recalled in the joint statement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, together with the leaders of the IMF, World Bank, WTO and ILO, just two weeks ago in Berlin. They stated that the ILO's "Decent Work Agenda" must form part of a new charter for sustainable economic governance. Chancellor Merkel called for the ILO Director-General to be invited to the next G20 Summit in London. It is essential also that the ILO should be invited to take full part in all the G20 working groups, and in the preparatory process for the UN Conference on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impacts on Development, as well as other follow-up processes, so that the social dimension is adequately integrated into all of this work.

The London Summit must also be the occasion for the G20 Leaders to review the measures each country has so far taken; to assess their adequacy; and, almost certainly, to conclude that what they have done has been inadequate, and to decide on new, more far-reaching efforts to stimulate the global economy.

Democratic global governance is key to socially just outcomes

The G20 process is broader than that of the G8. Yet it is clearly insufficient. It can only be the starting point of a process of review and reform of the governance of the world economy, based upon priority for the social principles so valued by the ILO and the United Nations. The institutional arrangements for global governance must be inclusive and operate democratically, allowing representative groupings of all countries to participate in the process of finding solutions to restore sustainable economic growth with decent livelihoods for all. Trade unions, - the representatives of the working people who did not cause the crisis but who stand to be worst hit by its social impact – must equally be part of the process, which otherwise stands to be overseen by the very central banks and financial ministries whose delinquency brought about the crisis.

These messages also need to radiate from the attention we give to Social Justice on this new Day adopted by the United Nations.