

**International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**  
**Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG)**

**CTUG submission to the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting  
(CHOGM)**

**Malta, 27 – 29 November, 2015**

**“Adding Global Value”**

*“Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter, to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development for all”*

*Commonwealth Leaders Communiqué, Colombo, 2013*

The Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG) represents over 30 million workers in Commonwealth countries. With this statement we call the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to commit to measures and take action in order to promote human and trade union rights, decent work and human well-being. The CTUG calls on Commonwealth Leaders to follow the recommendations herein and to adopt the requisite decisions at their Malta Summit in November 2015.

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.

The CTUG urges the CHOGM to take efforts to fulfil the following cross-cutting priorities:

- The establishment of an annual meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers to discuss and take decisions on the jobs crisis
- Adopting a target for full ratification of the ILO Fundamental Rights Conventions by all Commonwealth countries
- Develop a Youth Employment Strategy with clear employment targets as well as principles for the support of vocational education and quality apprenticeships
- Adopt ambitious climate policies within a timeframe that allows our societies to stay below the 2°C temperature increase threshold, that way supporting the creation and transformation of jobs in the low carbon economy, and ensure the deployment of Just Transition strategies for workers and communities which could face challenges in the transition
- Provide resources and support to the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and the Barbados Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
- Developing a coherent and robust peer review mechanism to audit performance by Commonwealth member states against the Harare Principles
- Develop an urgent common strategy to tackle at source the problem of irregular migration particularly in the Mediterranean and take action to eradicate all abuses on all migrant workers.
- Keep up the pressure on Fiji and Swaziland to ensure human rights are respected and democracy restored.

## **Democracy in Fiji & Swaziland**

The CTUG has expressed grave concerns for the continuous abuse of rights and the suspension of the Constitution of Fiji, and has called on the Fiji regime to immediately lift the restrictions on workers and other human rights and the media, and ensure full respect for the rule of law and the Constitution.

The CTUG welcomes the small and limited improvements in the human rights situation in Swaziland, including the registration of our trade union affiliate TUCOSWA and the release of certain political prisoners. But we note that this was only achieved after pressure from the US and EU, the ILO and the appointment of a Commonwealth special envoy. We call upon the Commonwealth to keep pressing Swaziland to allow multi-party democracy, and to respect fundamental human rights.

## **Strengthening Democracy, Human, Trade Union and Equal Rights**

Democracy and human rights are at the heart of the Commonwealth's values, and we believe that the Commonwealth needs to do more to promote freedoms and rights enjoyed in democratic societies and act against breaches. We welcome the endorsement of the 'Charter of the Commonwealth' in 2013 and we state our support for the principles and rights embodied in the Charter. The CTUG also supports the implementation of the Harare Principles, including "the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world".

- The Commonwealth must hold a peer review to audit the performance of Commonwealth governments against the Charter of the Commonwealth, as well as the Harare Principles.

In 2013 the Joint Meeting of Labour and Finance Ministers of the G20 agreed to promote *"implementing labour market and social investment policies that support aggregate demand and reduce inequality, such as broad-based increases in productivity, targeted social protection, appropriately set minimum wages with respect to national wage-setting systems, national collective bargaining arrangements, and other policies to reinforce the links between productivity, wages, and employment"*.

- The CTUG calls on CHOGM to establish a target for all Commonwealth governments to ratify all eight ILO Conventions on Fundamental Rights at Work as soon as possible, and to undertake annual reviews of progress towards that objective and to publish the results of their reviews.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat should monitor progress towards the ratification by all Commonwealth countries of ILO Convention No. 144 on Tripartite Consultation, and to report to the next CHOGM in 2017. Commonwealth Member States should be urged to invite and involve tripartite constituents in the Commonwealth meetings.
- The Commonwealth countries should ensure that their legislation follows the principles of the ILO Convention No. 102 on Social Security and the ILO Recommendation No. 202 on Social Protection Floors.

The 100th session of the ILO Conference in June 2011 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 ILO Convention No.189 and Recommendation No. 201 on Domestic Workers.

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.

- In view of achieving universal implementation of the Harare Principles, 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. In the same spirit, the Human Rights Act of the UK needs to remain in place, if not reinforced.
- We call upon the Commonwealth to take action to ensure human rights and equality for LGBT communities in particular, starting with a programme to decriminalise homosexuality across the Commonwealth.

### **Job creation with investment**

Massive public investment is needed to develop new infrastructure and maintain the existing, to green the economy, and to upgrade the care economy. Public investment in these areas has high job creation potential and it will improve the productivity of the Commonwealth economies with equity and in a sustainable way. In particular, investment in social services, childcare, healthcare and education have a great potential to address poverty, ageing and other demographic trends, as well as create a highly skilled and productive workforce.

- The Commonwealth Leaders should strengthen cooperation in promoting productive investment in green economy, infrastructure, social services, education and other sectors.

Youth unemployment runs rampant in many Commonwealth countries as well as in the rest of the world. At the CHOGM of 2011, the Leaders recognised “*the important role of government, the private sector and technical and vocational training institutions in addressing youth unemployment*”. In 2013, the Magampura Declaration of Commitment to Young People highlighted the issue of high unemployment levels and marginalisation of youth. The CHOGM must promote policies on both the labour supply and demand side in order to improve youth's capacity to participate in the labour market and create new opportunities.

- The Commonwealth must develop a Youth Employment Strategy with clear employment targets and bi-annual reviews of progress, sharing of best practices in training and vocational education, promotion of quality apprenticeships, and enhanced cooperation on youth innovation.

## **Trade and Development**

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. The EPAs are not always negotiated on a block to block basis and they damage regional integration. It is vital that developing countries, least developed countries among them, always enjoy adequate policy space 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.
- We encourage developing countries to put the EPAs on hold until structural transformation is achieved.

The CHOGM in Malta should address the over-reliance of some Commonwealth countries on commodities trade. Possible quick fixes include a mechanism to provide aid in times of price shocks and to stabilise commodity prices in countries in risk. Measures to address speculation in commodities markets would provide great benefit to poor Commonwealth countries and assist them to move towards a long-term solution through industrial policy and diversification.

The CHOGM should reaffirm Commonwealth developed countries' commitment to duty-free, quota-free access to LDC's products and take measures to provide it. 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 waiver for the protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) in order to enable quicker technological dissemination and cheaper intellectual property related products, including medicine, seeds and others. The CHOGM should also support that food programmes be secured from WTO sanctions and work to deliver the Doha Round's Developmental Mandate before trying to put market access issues on the post-Bali agenda.

## **Decent Work and the Post-2015 International Development Agenda**

The International Development Community has commenced a process to develop a successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals. The importance of decent work for development and poverty eradication was already recognised in the Millennium Development Goals, where a specific target on full and decent employment was added under the poverty goal (MDG1b). The employment target, however, has not received the attention it deserved and remained far from being achieved, undermining global efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable human development. Likewise, in reality, 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. There is a risk that the future development framework narrowly addresses employment generation without considering its quality dimensions. Decent work should be placed at the core of social and economic policy development.

Inclusive growth, decent work and full and productive employment are currently included as a specific goal in the Post-MDG framework, accompanied by national employment targets and indicators as well as suggested policy measures. The challenge is now to establish proper indicators to measure the attainment of this goal: freedom of association, social dialogue and collective bargaining should be in the forefront in this context.

- The CHOGM should establish a fund for capacity enhancement activities by trade unions, covering, among others, workers in informal work and export processing zones, and linked to ILO assistance and technological cooperation.
- Member States must be support the inclusion of indicators on freedom of association, social dialogue and collective bargaining relating to the goal on Full and Decent Employment in a Post-MDG Framework.
- 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).

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.

## **Climate change**

The trade unions have embarked on the global effort to ensure the world of work is part of the solution to the challenges posed by both the impacts of climate change, as well as the need to transition our economies into zero carbon ones. Trade unions have expressed their demands to governments meeting at the upcoming COP21 (see box). The adoption of an ambitious framework for action, accompanied by a commitment to Just Transition is critical

### **Box 1. Trade Union expectations for COP21**

The Paris Climate conference can play an important role in stimulating climate action, and supporting governments in their efforts to tackle carbon emissions. For this, it must achieve at least three ambitions.

#### **A Fair framework**

It must establish a framework for international climate action that is fair in the distribution of efforts (particularly when it comes to emission reductions and financing) and set an objective for long-term climate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that the likelihood for the temperature increasing by more than 2°C is reduced. In this regard, many have called for zero carbon emissions.

#### **Doing more**

It must establish a process for requesting increased efforts from governments that are not meeting their responsibilities and capacities with regard to emission and financing targets in order to put the system on track towards the 2°C target between 2015 and 2020, when the agreement is expected to enter into force. It also needs to stimulate stronger action in the short term, so that the potential for job creation in the low carbon economy is fully grasped.

#### **Just Transition**

It must commit to developing Just Transition policies so that workers are accompanied in the transformation needed in all sectors and jobs towards new decent work opportunities, social protection and new skills, as well as other policies. International action, while key, will never suffice to address climate change. Trade unions are therefore calling on all countries to use social dialogue to build a long term plan for decarbonizing the economy while also securing jobs.

The CHOGM should work towards the adoption of ambitious targets including mitigation goals that would sustain the global increase in temperature within the 2°C threshold 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.

- The CHOGM should promote the integration of decent work with climate action in the framework of the ‘to-be-released’ Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), adopting targets for green job creation and promote 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.

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 Green Climate Fund. 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.

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.

## **Public Health**

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 ILO Recommendation No. 200, on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work and should set targets for adopting the ILO Code of Conduct on HIV/AIDS.

## **Immigration**

The CHOGM in Malta should be an excellent forum to plan a common front to fight abuse of migrants. A genuine effort must be made by all Commonwealth countries to take a holistic approach on

migration. This approach should tackle migration at source; take action against migrant traffickers, setup a logistic infrastructure to process refugee applications, enact legal frameworks which encourage integration, lawful residence and equal treatment at work.

The CTUG urges developing Commonwealth countries to adopt, protect and enforce fundamental working rights. This approach should be based on the guidelines issued by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) from time to time and should include health and safety regulation and protection from social dumping.

CTUG urges national governments to involve trade unions in a sustained and concrete dialogue to tackle irregular and regular migrant workers abuse. The ultimate aim should be to ensure continues fight against the exploitation of migrant workers in developed countries.

In order to ensure that such rules and regulations are in place and enforced, adequate monitoring should be carried out.

### **Internet access**

The CHOGM recognises the substantial progress which has been made in ensuring that people have access to the internet. Nevertheless, around half the world's population still does not have internet access. The CTUG supports efforts to ensure that the entire world's people have internet access, including through linking expansion of internet penetration to infrastructure development programmes. The CTUG also supports the retention of multi-stakeholder internet governance which is free from domination by private or governmental interests.

### **Conclusion**

As the international development community commences the post-2015 process to develop a Sustainable Development Goals framework we emphasise the significance of employment as a means to escape poverty. However, millions of working poor today do not enjoy full employment and decent work and they remain trapped in precarious work and informality. Even though many Commonwealth countries have achieved some growth, there has been no corresponding significant decrease in the poverty levels due to increasing trends in vulnerable employment. Unemployment and particularly youth unemployment soar in both the developed and developing Commonwealth countries posing new threats to social cohesion.

In response to the employment consequences of off-shoring and outsourcing, 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 Leaders took commitments to promote inclusive education and quality universal primary education as well as universal access to health care and services and to address youth unemployment with action by the government, the private sector and technical and vocational training institutions. Commitments were also made to promote women's rights and cooperate to promote migrants' well-being and to reduce the cost of remittances. These commitments should be delivered.

The CTUG urges the Commonwealth Leaders to implement their own current commitments, while also considering the suggestions from the CTUG including in particular the pursuit of an employment-led sustainable growth model with high quality jobs, productive investment, social protection and access to quality public services that will provide jobs and improve the livelihoods of millions of people. The CTUG supports strongly the successful development of intergovernmental cooperation through the Commonwealth in order to attain democracy, human and trade union rights and decent work in all its countries so as to enable growth that bears benefits for all.