

International Trade Union Confederation

World AIDS Day Statement 2011

1. Today, on World AIDS Day 2011, the ITUC joins with people across the world in memory of those who have lost their lives to AIDS. Trade unions around the world will be using today as a focus to promote action on HIV and AIDS in the workplace and to call for renewed international commitment to tackle the pandemic, on the basis of shared ownership of the AIDS response. Unions will highlight this year's WAD theme, "Getting to Zero", to build awareness about the need to achieve:
 - Zero employment related discrimination on grounds of real or perceived HIV status;
 - Zero new infections - through addressing socio-economic determinants of vulnerability to HIV infection, including those directly related to the world of work;
 - Zero AIDS related deaths – through addressing social injustice in access to treatment and through extending social protection, as a means to support individual and collective human development and productivity.
2. This year is a special anniversary. 2011 marks 30 years since the first case of AIDS was identified, 10 years since the UN General Assembly's Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS) meeting, 5 years since the 2006 UN High Level Meeting that made an unequivocal commitment to attain universal access by 2010 and 1 year since the adoption of the ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation no. 200 (2010), the first ever international human rights standard to focus specifically on HIV and AIDS.
3. Today, almost 34 million people live with HIV worldwide and more than 7,000 new infections occur every day. About 64% of people eligible for ARV treatment (meaning that they are already in a severe stage of AIDS) in low – and middle- income countries continue to have no access to life saving treatment. Young people (aged 15-24) account for 42% of the new HIV infections among adults. A major source of concern is that the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) which underwrites AIDS treatment for about half its recipients in developing countries announced on 23 November that it will make no new grants for the next two years because of the worldwide economic downturn.
4. 2011 therefore provides a critical moment to evaluate gaps in global AIDS action, following the Political Declaration "Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS" adopted by the United Nations General Assembly's High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2011 in which all Member States committed themselves 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 Recommendation No. 200" and called on "employers, trade and labour unions, employees and volunteers to eliminate stigma and discrimination, protect human rights and facilitate access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support"

(Paragraph 85 of the 2011 UNGA Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS)

Trade unions all over the world believe that this commitment could play a game-changing role for achieving universal access, finding new models of cooperation,

reviewing the role of trade unions in the partnership landscape for HIV/AIDS and considering synergies for delivering on multiple development outcomes.

5. The ITUC however remains concerned that we will not achieve a prevention revolution or universal access without promoting an integrated health and development agenda. Accordingly, the ITUC has welcomed the recommendations of the new report “Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization” presented in October to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon by former President of Chile and UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, and ILO Director General Juan Somavia. The report underlines the urgency of building a global social protection floor for all women and men who have no such protection, highlighting the fact that 75% of the world’s population are not covered by adequate social security, 1.4 billion people live on less than US\$1.25 a day, 150 million people suffer financial catastrophe annually and 100 million people have been pushed below the poverty line due to needing to pay for health care. The ITUC is convinced that if governments have the political will and work in close coordination with the social partners, social protection 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, while ensuring that HIV and human rights issues retain priority in the broader health and development context.
6. The ITUC remains concerned about the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection related to cultural, economic and social factors, gender inequalities and gender-based violence. Women and girls constitute more than 50% of all people living with HIV globally, and 80% of women and girls living with HIV live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, trade unions will continue to call for gender sensitive approaches to HIV responses and for gender equality and the empowerment of women, combatting human trafficking and gender violence.
7. 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 already existing structures such as workplaces - as venues for “combination prevention”, non-discrimination campaigns and treatment adherence - is the best 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.
8. Therefore, 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 achieving universal access.
9. 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 a human rights based approach to HIV and AIDS and the world of work as well as joint efforts to make HIV/AIDS a priority for trade unions.
10. The ITUC reaffirms that this is not the time to weaken efforts to address HIV and AIDS. By continuing our work, by intersectoral, multistakeholder action to reduce inequities, secured commitment of the leadership, and closing the existing gaps the trade union movement is determined to significantly reduce new infections, stigma, discrimination, and AIDS – related deaths.