

CTUG submission to the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

Kigali, Rwanda, June 2020

“The Commonwealth has a proud history of acting to strengthen good governance and the rule of law, to protect and promote democratic principles and human rights, to promote peace and security and to strengthen democratic institutions.” Affirmation by Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth on its 70th Anniversary, Marlborough House, London, 10 July 2019

The Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG) represents 71.8 million workers in 41 Commonwealth countries, with most of our country organisations being part of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) which brings together over 200 million workers around the world.

On behalf of those working people, their families and communities, we call on the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to agree actions to promote human and trade union rights, decent work and a new social contract. The Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved without progress on these key issues.

In particular, we call for:

1. The re-establishment of a regular meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers to discuss and agree action on the future of work, decent work and the rights of working people.
2. Adoption of a target for full ratification of the ILO Fundamental Rights Conventions by all Commonwealth countries, and especially the 2014 protocol to ILO Convention 29 on forced labour, and the recently adopted ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment.
3. The development of a coherent and robust peer review mechanism to audit performance by member states against the Commonwealth Charter.
4. Reference of Swaziland to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group for persistent breaches of the Commonwealth Charter.
5. Clear human rights conditions for the readmission into membership of states such as Zimbabwe.*
6. Commonwealth countries to adopt ambitious Nationally Defined Contributions under the Paris Accord, in discussion with social partners.
7. Commonwealth countries to join the new ILO Just Transition Partnership, launched in September 2019.
8. Explicit support for the rights of LGBTI people in the CHOGM Declaration.
9. Commonwealth countries to join the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), and discuss measures to implement equal pay with social partners.
10. Practical measures to ensure equal participation of women in the labour market (including raising participation rates in secondary education and increased investment in the public sector care economy.)
11. Commonwealth countries to ratify and implement the 2019 ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment.
12. Commonwealth countries to join the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, as the UK has done.

* the Maldives were removed from item 5 on page 1 on 1 February 2020 when it was re-admitted to the Commonwealth.

Democracies for people

Around the world, trust in democracy is broken and the space for civil society engagement is shrinking. ITUC surveys show that only 30% of the world's people believe their voice matters. People want governments to rewrite the economic rules to promote growth and shared prosperity. They want governments to act in the interests of people, not elites.

That means going beyond free and fair elections, and ensuring that people have a voice between elections through civil society, tripartite structures and social dialogue. This is the only way to stem the rising tide of authoritarianism and right-wing extremism, and the Commonwealth needs to play a key role by promoting the values in the Commonwealth Charter.

We call for:

- **The development of a coherent and robust peer review mechanism to audit performance by member states against the Commonwealth Charter.**

A new social contract

The global economic model has failed working people. The power and greed of huge global corporations, especially in information technology, have encouraged governments to act against the rights of their own working people. We need to change the rules.

The 2019 centenary ILO Conference adopted a declaration on the future of work based on a new social contract which provides a universal labour guarantee, whether people work in the formal or informal sector, as employees or in the gig economy – a key recommendation of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work co-chaired by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. Decent work and social justice must be the objectives of every Commonwealth country, but the Commonwealth has rarely if ever taken part in the work of the ILO and has ignored the needs of working people.

We call for:

- **The establishment of a regular meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers to discuss and agree action on the future of work, decent work and the rights of working people.**

Just Transition

Dealing with massive change – whether in the environment or the workplace – leads to instability, fear and lack of trust. We need to ensure that no one is left behind as climate change and the fourth industrial revolution – among other massive changes – transform the world in which we live and work. The trade union movement has developed the concept of just transitions to ensure that, as change happens, working people are involved and engaged, so that their voices are heard and their needs considered.

Climate change

By CHOGM 2020 we will have only a decade to stabilise the planet at a 1.5C temperature rise. Commonwealth trade unions are concerned about the increased frequency of extreme weather events, the growing threat to small island states, and the lack of concerted multilateral action to address climate change. The social and economic costs are already evident. Every Commonwealth government must raise its ambition and determine national development plans including just transition measures to protect workers, their families and communities. Every employer must have a plan for climate proofing their operations, agreed with their workforce and unions.

We welcome the United Kingdom's legislation on tackling climate change. As we head towards the 2020 COP in the UK, we call for:

- **Commonwealth countries to adopt ambitious Nationally Defined Contributions under the Paris Accord, in discussion with social partners.**
- **Commonwealth countries to join the new ILO Just Transition Partnership, launched in September 2019.**

The future of work

Technological change can provide enormous new opportunities, but it will also disrupt jobs and current supply chains. Digitalisation, automation and data all need to be managed and regulated (nationally and globally) to protect and improve jobs and living standards. Full employment – but potentially shorter working weeks - and a universal labour guarantee remain our goals, so we need a just transition to deal with the challenges. That will require consultation and collective bargaining with unions, including over surveillance protection, tax rules and, most urgently, digital platforms.

We call for:

- **Commonwealth support for a global standard of governance of digital platform businesses.**

Peace, democracy and rights

The ITUC's 2019 Global Rights Index put Bangladesh and Zimbabwe in the ten worst countries for workers' rights. Over the past year we have expressed serious concern about the reforms of labour laws in India, backsliding by the Fiji regime including the arrest of the union leadership, and continued repression in Swaziland which we believe would justify formal reference to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group for flagrant breaches of the Commonwealth Charter. We believe that before Zimbabwe is re-admitted to the Commonwealth, it must demonstrate its adherence to the Charter, and in particular that freedom of association, assembly and speech are guaranteed, and that this must also apply to other new and reapplying member states.

The CTUG supports the work that the Commonwealth does on peace-building and election monitoring, and we stand ready to take part, emphasising the role trade unions play in these fields. Trade unions are taking part in the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative's Commonwealth 8.7 Network, and want to see more countries adopt the 2014 ILO protocol on modern slavery.

We welcome the role that the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) continues to play in promoting human rights in mega-sporting events, and our affiliate in the UK is working with the organisers to ensure that those principles are practiced in the 2020 Birmingham Games. The CGF and ITUC have helped to create the Centre for Sport and Human Rights along with NGOs, business and governments.

We call for:

- **Adoption of a target for full ratification of the ILO Fundamental Rights Conventions by all Commonwealth countries, and especially promote ratification and implementation of the 2014 protocol to ILO Convention 29 on forced labour, and the recently adopted ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment.**
- **Reference of Swaziland to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group for persistent breaches of the Commonwealth Charter.**
- **Clear human rights conditions for the readmission into membership of states such as the Maldives and Zimbabwe.**
- **Commonwealth countries to join the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, as the UK has done.**

Regulating economic power

The current global economic model based on corporate greed has resulted in massive inequality, low wage levels, unsafe workplaces and the exclusion of women, migrants and young people from formal work. And the growth of giant technology companies has had a serious impact on democracy, tax revenues and data rights. Meanwhile the imminent departure of the UK from the European Union adds to the threat of trade wars around the world and increases the need for due diligence to ensure workers' rights in supply chains.

We call for:

- **Commonwealth countries to develop nationally mandated due diligence and access to remedy so that the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are implemented.**
- **Support for an ILO Supply Chains Convention and a UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights.**

Fairness and equality

The Commonwealth Charter makes clear the importance of fairness and equality. They are values we need to put into practice through instruments from global regulation to collective bargaining. As well as extending rights to LGBTI communities, we need practical measures to challenge violence and harassment, deliver equal pay and increase participation of women in the labour market.

We call for:

- **Explicit support for the rights of LGBTI people in the CHOGM Declaration.**
- **Commonwealth countries to join the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), and discuss measures to implement equal pay with social partners.**
- **Practical measures to ensure equal participation of women in the labour market (including raising participation rates in secondary education and increased investment in the public sector care economy.)**
- **Commonwealth countries to ratify and implement the 2019 ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment.**