

# **BUILDING A UNITED AND STRONG ITUC FOR WORKERS AND DEMOCRACY**

**Luc Triangle**

**T**he International Trade Union Confederation is the spokesperson and defender of all workers in the world. We have a huge responsibility. Solidarity and unity must be our leading strategy for and in the interests of hundreds of millions of members and workers. They count on our strength; they count on our common and powerful voice and our unity.

Unlike the usual manifestos, this short document focuses first on how to build and rebuild unity, consensus, confidence, and trust. this is a pre-condition for working efficiently and in unity on our political priorities. The political priorities and work programme for the next years have been intensively debated and decided in the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in November 2022 and do not need to be rewritten.

## BUILDING UNITY AND CONSENSUS

The realities facing workers and trade unions, the state of democracy and the nature of inequalities are different throughout the world. This diversity is a challenge for the global trade union movement, but it is also an opportunity to create debate, understanding and solidarity. It is our common task and duty to take forward this debate and create unity and consensus. Unity is our strength. That makes us the most powerful social movement in the world, defending fundamental human and workers' rights.

It is the task of the General Secretary to facilitate this debate and search for this consensus. In this debate every voice must count, every organisation's opinion must be heard. Not only the voice or opinion of the strongest or biggest. The 340 member organisations all have the right to speak up, to express their opinions. And in consensus building, these opinions should be reflected. Every organisation should feel included in the decision-making process.

The role of our regional organisations in the process towards unity and consensus is crucial and the cooperation between the regional organisations and the ITUC must be strengthened.

Although Global Union Federations (GUFs) are not a direct member

organisation of the ITUC, the cooperation with them will also be important (including through the Council of Global Unions) as we are all together the Global Trade Union movement.

## BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

There is an urgent need to rebuild trust and confidence. Member organisations must be sure that the ITUC is a reliable organisation, well managed and led, democratic, transparent and with integrity. The priority of the General Secretary must be to build this trust and confidence.

That must happen through:

### Clear and understandable democratic decision-making structures and processes

We must evaluate again the way decisions are taken in the ITUC. The role and frequency of the decision-making bodies must be looked at, in view of the next ordinary Congress. In the meantime, we don't need to wait to adapt what can already be adapted. Agenda setting, follow-up of decisions, frequency of meetings, broader participation in internal decision making structures involving more women, young people, migrant

workers, workers from the informal and new emerging sectors, to ensure our decisions are as representative and democratic as possible, should be open for possible adaptation already.

### Recognition that the organisation is owned by the 340 member organisations

The General Secretary is a facilitator. He/she is elected to run the internal and external organisation in the best possible way and under the mandate of the Constitution and Congress. The General Secretary is NOT the ITUC, or vice versa. The ITUC is in the hands of its member organisations.

### Transparency

Transparency is a fundamental pillar for creating trust and confidence. With respect for the role of decision-making bodies and their specific role in the organisation, the highest level of transparency should be created. That is a basic condition for rebuilding trust.

### Integrity

The ITUC needs to apply the highest standards for its own organisational and financial integrity. We need to lead by example. That's what workers expect from us. It is a condition for our credibility at global level. This integrity must apply for the ITUC, for its regions, but also for its national

member organisations. There are no reasons to 'compromise' on internal and external processes that need to be strengthened or developed to guarantee this integrity.

## BUILDING A FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE ITUC

Not only decision-making processes need to be looked at, but the next General Secretary will also have to look to the financial and organisational reality of the ITUC: the departmental structure, the regional structures and financing, the staffing needs of the organisations etc.

The ITUC must spend its financial resources wisely and responsibly. We work primarily with contributions of our members and they need to have the guarantee that we spend those contributions in the most responsible and efficient way. Transparency is key in this respect.

Creating a financially sustainable ITUC does, however, also mean that we must look into our income side. Member organisations have the responsibility to report the correct membership levels to the ITUC, as they also do to other international organisations. The ITUC must also further explore external donor support, as long as this is aligned with our political priorities and values.

## WHEN WE HAVE BUILT MORE UNITY, TRUST AND CONFIDENCE, WE WILL BE STRONGER TO DELIVER ON OUR POLITICAL PROGRAMME

The Melbourne Congress in November 2022 decided on the political priorities for the ITUC for the next four years. That important work does not need to be redone. The General Secretary, the elected team, the ITUC staff team and all our member organisations must work on the implementation.

The ITUC has a progressive agenda and the four pillars of the ITUC work remain the core of our work:

### ■ Peace, democracy and rights

Workers and civilians are the first to suffer from the consequences of war. Trade Unions are part of the global peace movement, and we must continue our efforts to rebuild peace in countries and regions which are today suffering from war and we need to campaign for the New Social Contract as a means of avoiding conflict.

The 2023 ITUC Global Rights Index, launched on 30 June, provided shocking evidence that the foundations of democracy are under attack. There is a clear link between workers' rights being upheld and the strength of any democracy.

The Melbourne Congress voted an important emergency motion on combatting the far-right. Far-right extremism, neo-fascism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism and tyranny promote hatred and division, and generate violence and conflicts. As the ITUC, we must continue to take a strong position against any of these threats.

There is an increase in violations against fundamental workers' rights: the right to form or join a trade union, the right to collective bargaining, the right to strike. Murders of trade unionists, brutal police responses on demonstrations and similar forms of repression are still common practice in many parts in the world.

Unity and solidarity should be our leading principle in all these cases. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. The General Secretary and the ITUC Team must lead in creating this solidarity and worldwide action.

### ■ Regulating economic power

While the world today has never been so rich (three times more wealth than thirty years ago), inequality has also never been so high. The top 1 per cent has taken 38 per cent of all wealth accumulated since the '90s whereas the bottom 50 per cent has gained only 2 per cent. 685 million people live in extreme poverty and hundreds of millions of workers are in the informal economy.

Millions of workers earn a wage which does not allow them to live in dignity. Wage inequality is increasing, with the highest earners enjoying wage rises multiple times faster than the average. Shareholders received record-high dividends in 2022, while billions of people around the world were and still are suffering from a cost-of-living crisis.

As ITUC we need to continue our fight for an economic model that tackles this unacceptable, growing inequality and creates economic security and shared prosperity for all.

### ■ Global Shifts – Just Transitions

Workers and people with no or low income are the first to suffer from global warming. Especially, but not only, in the global south. The global trade union movement must campaign for adequate and ambitious climate policies that can stop this trend. But climate action must go hand in hand with Just Transition. No worker and no region can be left behind. Workers working in sectors which might be targeted in this transition processes must be offered a new future, with new decent jobs. Unions must be at the table at all levels to negotiate the Just Transition measures required to ensure trust in the necessary shifts.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an opportunity to advance goals that are critical to the labour movement.

### ■ Equality

Building an equal world means building a better world. Equality and equity in society and at work are core trade union values. Trade unions around the world need to stand up against all forms of discrimination.

The ITUC does important equality work, and we need to strengthen that. One of the core priorities in this is gender equality which includes women's equal representation, women's rights and protection.

The four pillars of the ITUC work are complemented by the **decisions of the ITUC Melbourne Congress of November 2022**, and more specifically the final statement on the **New Social Contract**.

The New Social Contract is based on six demands: Jobs, Wages, Rights, Social Protection, Equality, Inclusion. Implementing these demands will create a better world with dignity, equality and prosperity for all. Where young people, migrants, platform workers and other groups of workers with precarious conditions will benefit. Action on these pillars is to be done also in the context of the three intersecting challenges identified in the Congress Statement – climate change, public health and technology.

The ITUC New Social Contract is our agenda for upcoming high level events such as the **2023 SDG Summit**, the **2024 Summit of the Future** and the **2025 World Social Summit**. But we also need to work with our affiliates on the implementation of the New Social Contract at national level. The ITUC needs to support our affiliates in discussing and advancing the New Social Contract with their governments.

To deliver on our political programme, we need to work in the International Institutions, with the ILO, with ACTRAV, with the Global Union Federations and TUAC, with all the national member organisations. We need to hold the International Financial Institutions and the WTO to account and put working people at the centre of global policy.

The ITUC Work Programme, our agreed New Social Contract, our agreed priorities can only be realised if we see the ITUC work as a common and joint responsibility. The General Secretary is

just one person in this work. The success of our work needs the commitment and involvement of all of us. The ITUC staff members are very dedicated. They have shown a great sense of responsibility over the last 10 months. We must all value that immense commitment. Now, it is back to the member organisations and the new General Secretary to continue the good work of the Melbourne Congress.

**Power in a union, Power in a united union, Power to the ITUC!**

**Luc Triangle**  
August 2023

