

UN High Level Meeting on AIDS

10 June 2011

More than 3000 people came together at the United Nations in New York for the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS to take stock of the progress and challenges of the last 30 years and shape the future AIDS response. The High-Level Meeting on AIDS took place on 8-10.6.2011 – ten years after the historic 2001 United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 signing of the Political Declaration where UN Member States committed to moving towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The International Trade Union Confederation welcomes the bold new targets set by world leaders and the inclusion of the Paragraph 85 into the new UNGA Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS that reads:

“Commit to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on workers, their families, their dependents, workplaces and economies, including by taking into account all relevant ILO conventions, as well as the guidance provided by the relevant ILO recommendations, including ILO Recommendation No 200, and call 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”

The final formulation of the Paragraph 85 concluded a long-term trade union advocacy aimed at securing the reference to the ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation no 200 in the new Political Declaration and recognising the role of the world of work in the HIV/AIDS response.

“We welcome the fact that the UN Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS calls for leadership around the world of work,” said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the ITUC. “Linkages between workplace and HIV policies and programmes can lead to important public health, socio-economic and individual benefits, ensuring involvement of people living with and affected by HIV, supporting young people in exercising leadership, addressing gender inequality and exclusion of marginalised groups. We need a worldwide mobilisation to tackle HIV and engage the private sector, especially companies and representatives of labour, and leverage contributions from other sectors for the HIV response.”

The declaration recognises the ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No. 200) as a key human-rights instrument in the global HIV response and calls on all UN Member States to redouble their efforts to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2015 as a critical step towards ending the global AIDS epidemic. A pledge to eliminate gender inequality, gender-based abuse and violence, and to increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from HIV infection was also made. Member states agreed to review laws and policies that adversely impact on the successful, effective and equitable delivery of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support programmes to people living with and affected by HIV.

It is important to note that on 07.06.2011 the UN Security Council adopted its Resolution no 1983 (2011) in which it encouraged the incorporation of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in the implementation of peacekeeping mandates.

Trade unions around the world mobilised to give their support to the HLM process. ITUC affiliates in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Maroc, South Africa, Senegal, Togo, India, New Zealand, Sweden, Belgium, Dominican Republic and Brazil called upon their Governments to adopt a progressive, rights-oriented negotiation position with regards the new Political Declaration. Trade union representatives from Canada, Senegal, Dominican Republic, Sweden, South Africa and Brazil took part in the High Level Meeting with the view to support the process. Trade union representatives also took part in the panel discussions during the HLM Thematic Panel Discussion 1, “Shared Responsibility: A New Global Compact for HIV/AIDS”, which took place on 08.06.2011 as well as during the HLM side event on migration and HIV, which took place on 10.06.2011.

The ITUC sees the benefit of the HLM discussion on responsible accountability and a country ownership framework, shared responsibility and mobilisation of leadership – including the workplace dimension – for the development of a renewed, democratic, sustained response to HIV and a clear road map of action to 2015 and beyond.

Background

Preparations to the HLM started early in 2011, with the ITUC and its affiliates addressing the UNAIDS Universal Access Reviews that took place on March –April 2011. The ITUC and its regional organisations approached UNAIDS Regional Support Teams in all regions with requests to include workplace dimension in the Reviews in Mexico (Latin America) 1-2.03.2011; Dakar (West and Central Africa) 1-4.03.2011; Johannesburg (East and Southern Africa) 10-11.03.2011; Kiev (Eastern Europe and Central Asia) 16-17.03.2011; Port of Spain (Caribbean) 22-23.03.2011; Bangkok (Asia and Pacific) 30-31.03.2011; and Windhoek (all Africa) 14-15.04.2011. Meetings in Dakar and Johannesburg were also joined by trade union representatives. The outcomes of the UA Reviews directly informed the High Level Meeting discussion on the new UNGA Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

Simultaneously, the ITUC and its affiliates were working intensively around building the momentum for the implementation of the ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation at the national level, asking the Governments for a proactive action within the process of submission of the newly adopted standard to the national parliaments, as required by the ILO Constitution.

From the beginning, trade unions were motivated to ensure that the new Political Declaration refers to the ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation, 2010 (No. 200), which was adopted last year by the International Labour Conference, and that the Declaration recognise the role of the world of work in addressing the pandemic, in offering a valuable entry point to reach various population groups, including women and men, young people, key populations, rural and urban communities, in the setting where they spend much of their lives – the workplace.

It was possible to organise a wide front of national trade union advocacy with regard to these priorities. On 9-11.05.2011 a regional ITUC Africa HIV/AIDS Conference was organised in cooperation with ILOAIDS, ACTRAV, CLC Canada, UNAIDS, PLHIV Networks from Tanzania and Kenya, in order to prepare an action plan on addressing, among other things, UNGA HLM. As a follow-up, only in Africa did national trade union centres approach their respective Governments in Senegal (on 16.04.2011); Burkina Faso (on 18.05.2011); Cameroon (15.05.2011); Ghana (on 26.05.2011); Maroc (on 26.05.2011); South Africa (on 27.05.2011 and 31.05.2011); and Togo (19.05.2011). In reaction to these actions, trade union representatives from Senegal, Togo and Burkina Faso have been invited by their respective Governments to national delegations to the HLM. The advocacy was strongly supported by reactions from other regions, including India, New Zealand, Sweden, Belgium, Dominican Republic and Brazil.

Trade unions from all over the world joined the High Level Meeting in order to represent the world of work. The trade union delegation gathered representatives from the Dominican Republic, Canada, Senegal, Brazil, Sweden, and South Africa.

The ITUC has been supporting the process both at the national and global level, advocating for the inclusion of the workplace paragraph in the zero draft of the HLM outcome document, co-organising the ITUC Africa Conference in Arusha, advocating for the need of trade union speakers at the HLM, taking part in the UNGA Civil Society Task Force, taking part in the UNAIDS International Advisory Group, supporting affiliates to join the regional UNAIDS Universal Access reviews in March and April 2011 and preparing two detailed circulars related to the UA and HLM process with background notes and model letters to all ITUC affiliates, all GUFs, and all members of Women Committee and Youth Committee (ITUC Circular 15/2011 of 01.04.2011 and ITUC Circular 18/2011 of 11.05.2011).

On 03.06.2011 the ITUC also sent a letter to South African Ministers of Health and Social Development with the intention to support and strengthen a progressive position of South Africa within the African Group during the final negotiations on the new Political Declaration.

The HLM allowed for several achievements:

- 1) The final text of the 2011 UNGA Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS includes the Paragraph 85 that reads:

“Commit to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on workers, their families, their dependents, workplaces and economies, including by taking into account all relevant ILO conventions, as well as the guidance provided by the relevant ILO recommendations, including ILO Recommendation No 200, and call 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”.

Inclusion of this paragraph constitutes a significant achievement of the trade union advocacy, and allows for a good follow-up on Paragraph 85. It sets up clear responsibilities and recognises the role of trade unions. Also, it refers directly to the ILO Recommendation no 200. It does refer to all relevant ILO labour standards, conventions and recommendations. This was not the case of the previous UNGA Declarations on HIV/AIDS in 2001 and 2006.

- 2) Ms Juneia Batista, Health Secretary of Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) Brazil, was a speaker at the Panel 1 “Shared Responsibility: a New Global Compact for HIV” together with the Executive Director of UNAIDS Michel Sidibe; the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis;
- 3) and the Minister of Development Cooperation of Denmark. This panel opened the HLM. It provided an opportunity for a high-level political discussion about the new landscape of leadership in the HIV/AIDS response, and a good visibility of trade unions. Juneia’s presentation was well supported from the floor, including the Governments of South Africa and Brazil.
- 4) Mr Mody Guiro, General Secretary of CNTS Senegal and President of ITUC Africa, addressed the IOM/ILO/UNAIDS side event on HIV/AIDs and migration to take place on 10.06.2011, together with UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director Paul de Lay; ILO/AIDS Director Dr Sophia Kisting; the Minister of Labour of El Salvador; and IOM Director General William Lacy Swing. This event allowed for evaluation of implementation of the Paragraph 50 of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment and discussing the way forward. The event was of crucial importance for the trade union position of HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue as well as an issue on migration and human rights.
- 5) The ILO Recommendation and its guiding role in shaping the HIV/AIDS response was also mentioned in the closing plenary speeches by Dr Sophia Kisting, Director of ILOAIDS, as well as the representative of the private sector, Dr Brian Brink from Anglo American South Africa.
- 6) Several Governments mentioned the importance of socio-economic aspects of HIV/AIDS, the role of the world of work and the need for adequate response.

ITUC sees the need for the following issues to be addressed in the renewed, democratised global response to HIV/AIDS that would implement the Political Declaration:

- (a) reduction of stigma and discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status in recruitment, employment and occupation – as a part of the “getting to zero discrimination” strategy;
- (b) increased access to prevention services through workplace HIV service delivery, including workplace peer education as a part of the “getting to zero new infections” strategy;
- (c) supporting countries in responding to HIV/AIDS within broader plans and actions related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty reduction strategies and development, including scaling up of national workplace HIV policies as outlined in the ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation no 200;
- (d) scaling up social protection strategies and access to treatment, care and support through workplace HIV/AIDS service delivery, including access to mother to child transmission (MTCT) treatment – as part of the “getting to zero new AIDS related deaths” strategy;
- (e) continuous HIV reviews by the UN and ensuring that HIV and human rights issues retain priority in the broader health context, including the development and ratification of a set of human rights indicators for national monitoring, accountability and budgeting.

Videos:

UNGA 2011 HLM on AIDS: Thematic Panel discussion 1 “Shared Responsibility – A New Global Compact for HIV”
08.06.2011 10h00-13h00

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/06/panel-1-shared-responsibility-new-global-compact-for-hiv-2011-high-level-meeting-on-aids.html>

UNGA 2011 HLM on AIDS: Thematic Panel discussion 1 "Shared Responsibility – A New Global Compact for HIV"
08.06.2011 10h00-13h00 – Summary discussion

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/06/summary-of-panel-discussion-1-denzil-i-douglas-saint-kitts-and-nevis-2011-high-level-meeting-on-aids.html>

Statement by Sophia Kisting, International Labour Organization (ILO), at the 2011 High Level Meeting on AIDS 10.06.2011

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/06/international-labour-organization-ilo-2011-high-level-meeting-on-aids-95th-plenary-meeting.html>