



XVIII INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE
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Right Here, Right Now



TRADE UNION MESSAGE TO THE 2010 IAC VIENNA CONFERENCE

The AIDS 2010 theme, Rights Here, Right Now, emphasizes the critical connection between human rights and HIV. A rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS action at the workplace is the core of the trade union strategy.

Stigma and discrimination are major barriers to HIV prevention and treatment scale up. They also contribute to misguided policies and misallocated resources.

The workplace cannot be left out of coherent action on the epidemic: HIV/AIDS has the face of a worker, since infections are concentrated among people of working age – 15 to 49 years. As Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, put it, “Nine out of ten people with HIV get up and go to work each day”. HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue. The economic and social impact of the epidemic is disastrous and the workplace is crucial for successful action to combat the pandemic.

The workplace provides an ideal setting for HIV/AIDS responses – thanks to its established structures of social dialogue and representation. Providing education, prevention, testing, treatment, care and peer support through workplaces has already proved to be very successful.

The broader HIV/AIDS community should be more exposed to the reality of workplace responses and the key role of trade unions [as well as employers’ organizations].

Trade unions also recognise that HIV/AIDS is a social disease. **Transmission mainly takes place along the faultlines caused by poverty, gender inequality and social injustice**, including the disempowerment of women, young people, migrants, sex workers, informal sector, unemployed, refugees, sexual minorities. Medical science will therefore never be enough to combat it.

The following principles should characterize any workplace action on HIV/AIDS:

- a focus on employment protection and creation for all workers, regardless of their real or perceived HIV status;
- prevention of occupational HIV exposure through investing in occupational health and safety;
- social inclusion;
- recognition of the workplace as a key entry-point for combating HIV/AIDS;
- investing in prevention;
- building an environment of trust, including protection of privacy and confidentiality;
- support for the role of workers’ organisations and social dialogue in combating HIV/AIDS.

The newly adopted ILO Recommendation on HIV and AIDS and the world of work is the first international labour standard on HIV/AIDS and one of the few human rights instruments to address the epidemic directly. Our role is to promote this instrument among the wider HIV/AIDS community and highlight that, from now on, (a) national responses to HIV/AIDS must include the workplace, and (b) workplace action on HIV/AIDS must respect the new Recommendation.