

Commonwealth Trade Union Group commentary on the sub-themes for CHOGM 2021

The Commonwealth Trade Union Group submission for the 2021 CHOGM is available at

https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ctug_submission_to_the_2021_commonwealth_heads_of_government_meeting.pdf

Governance and the Rule of Law

This sub-theme provides the context for the reaffirmation of the Commonwealth's fundamental values and is a standard feature of all CHOGM communiqués. As popular demands for democracy, tolerance, inclusivity, equality, and prosperity increase globally against the rise of nationalism and threats to multilateralism, the Commonwealth must continue to show global leadership as a values-based organisation in line with its Charter.

The Kigali CHOGM will coincide with the start of the last decade for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (the 2030 Agenda). Ensuring peaceful, just, and inclusive societies anchored in strong institutions will create a conducive environment for attaining the 2030 Agenda. Such a commitment to good governance requires transformational leadership that is accountable and transparent, and that prioritises citizen engagement. At CHOGM 2021 the Commonwealth will reiterate and provide leadership on these core Commonwealth values by building on achievements in governance and the rule of law.

CTUG commentary

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 act in the interests of people, not elites. That means going beyond free and fair elections, and ensuring that people have a voice through civil society, tripartite structures and social dialogue. And it means support for multilateral institutions and implementing their rules. The Commonwealth needs to play its part in stemming the rising tide of authoritarianism and right-wing extremism, by promoting the values in the Commonwealth Charter. The CTUG supports the work that the Commonwealth does on peace-building and election monitoring, and we stand ready to take part. Unions also want to see more countries adopt the 2014 ILO protocol on modern slavery.

CTUG proposals

- The development of a coherent and robust peer review mechanism to audit performance by member states against the Commonwealth Charter.
- Reference of eSwatini to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group for persistent breaches of the Commonwealth Charter.
- Clear human rights conditions for the readmission of Zimbabwe.
- Explicit support for the rights of LGBTI people in the CHOGM Declaration.
- Action to address racism in the global economic system, migration and discrimination.
- The re-establishment of a regular meeting of Commonwealth Labour Ministers to agree action on the future of work, decent work and the rights of working people.

- 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.

Sustainability

This is a new overarching theme, encompassing 'Trade and Environment.' In light of the global economic recession brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, this sub-theme recognises that the Commonwealth cannot continue doing "business as usual." The Commonwealth must realign its resources and efforts towards a more sustainable model that is centred around people and the environment.

Since adopting the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment in 1989, Commonwealth Heads of Government have continued to advocate for multilateral solutions that support member countries in meeting commitments under national, regional, and international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, the Montreal Protocol and Kigali Amendments. The Commonwealth is proud of outcomes achieved in this area, which include its collective contribution to the ambitions of the Paris Agreement at the CHOGM 2015 (Malta) and the adoption of the Commonwealth Blue Charter at CHOGM 2018 (London). CHOGM 2021 will build on progress and bolster the Commonwealth's global leadership on the environment.

CTUG commentary

By CHOGM 2021 we will have only a decade to stabilize 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 Glasgow, we call on Commonwealth countries to adopt ambitious Nationally Defined Contributions under the Paris Accord, in discussion with social partners; and to join the new ILO Just Transition Partnership, launched in September 2019.

The global economic model has failed working people, resulting in massive inequality, low wage levels, unsafe workplaces and the exclusion of women, migrants and young people from formal work. The growth of giant technology companies has had a serious impact on democracy, tax revenues and data rights. People want governments to change the rules to promote growth and shared prosperity. 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. Decent work and social justice must be the objectives of every Commonwealth country. Meanwhile the threat of trade wars around the world increases. We need to restore confidence in and support for the global multilateral trading system, based on the rule of law, due diligence and workers' rights in supply chains.

CTUG proposals

- Commonwealth countries to adopt ambitious Nationally Defined Contributions under the Paris Accord in collaboration with social partners and including Just Transition plans.
- Commonwealth countries to join the ILO Climate Action for Jobs Initiative.
- 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 nationally mandated due diligence with access to remedy and a UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights.
- 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 access to education and increased investment in the public sector care economy.)

Health

This is a new standalone sub-theme and was adopted following the devastation wrought by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Since the announcement of the pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020, COVID-19 has claimed more than two million lives worldwide.

Countries, rich and poor, were not prepared to deal with this pandemic, raising questions about the state of public health systems around the world. The highly infectious nature of the coronavirus also highlighted the importance of having coordinated responses nationally, regionally, and globally, noting the interconnectedness of the world. Information and experience sharing among countries remains key in strengthening public health policies and systems.

CTUG commentary

The trade union movement has stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic only revealed, and did not cause, the weakness of public health systems afflicted by decades of neoliberalism, privatization and austerity. There has been insufficient funding, wages that are too low, and measures to integrate occupational and public health have been inadequate. Without proper health and safety at the workplace (based on social dialogue, joint safety committees and union safety representatives); international and national standards; decent social protection including arrangements for adequate sick pay for those with symptoms or shielding; and proper reporting and testing systems, we will remain susceptible to the next pandemic. We advocate access to vaccines for all, and would hope that the Commonwealth could take a leading role in promoting COVAX, a TRIPS waiver, and support for manufacturing to ensure that no one is left behind.

The CTUG's response to the Commonwealth's early statements on the pandemic is at [Commonwealth COVID19 statement CTUG response \(ituc-csi.org\)](#)

CTUG proposals

- Support for occupational health and safety to become a fundamental right for working people.
- Support for access for all to health coverage, free education for all and universal social protection (including adequate sick pay from day one for all workers), delivered through fair taxation and a Global Fund for Social Protection.
- Support from the Commonwealth collectively for a TRIPS waiver and for proper funding for vaccine access.

Youth

Two out of every five citizens of the Commonwealth are under the age of 30. The Commonwealth has a track record of advocating youth empowerment on the global stage while supporting the participation of young women and men at all levels of decision making, including through national youth networks.

Progress achieved so far includes: dedicated Secretariat support to member countries in mainstreaming youth in national policies for the past forty years; supporting youth designed and led networks of which there are currently nine including the Commonwealth Youth Council, the official representative voice of the more than 1.2 billion young people in the Commonwealth; the creation of a globally accepted measure of youth development, the Youth Development Index; advocating for the professionalization of youth work, and sport for development and peace.

CHOGM 2021 will highlight youth entrepreneurship and employment - issues that affect a significant number of member countries and pose a threat to young people's ability to realise their full potential.

CTUG commentary

Economic exclusion and youth unemployment are two of the major challenges young people face. Two out of three young people in developing economies are without work, are not studying, or are engaged in irregular/informal employment. Also, in developed countries, they are also often stuck in temporary jobs, or working under precarious contracts, or in unpaid apprenticeships.

CTUG proposals

- Universal quality public education that is free, equitable, non-discriminatory, inclusive and accessible to all vulnerable groups, with holistic and broad curricula that include a focus on climate change, as well as lifelong learning opportunities;
- Quality apprenticeships systems and programmes governed by collective agreements, providing a decent living wage and standard social protection coverage; and
- Quality jobs that guarantee a decent living wage, work security via standard employment and access to social protections, good working conditions in safe and healthy workplaces with good work-life balance, as well as trade union representation and bargaining rights.
- Commonwealth countries to join the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, as the UK has done.

Technology and Innovation

Though the fourth industrial revolution has contributed to closing major access gaps related to information, knowledge, services and business, the COVID-19 crisis contributed to exposing the digital divide that still exists.

To be future-ready, the Commonwealth must continue to prioritise access to ICT for all, including through a gender and equity lens, in national development plans as highlighted by Heads in the 2018 Communiqué. National development plans must prepare citizens, especially young people, with the skills necessary to adapt and fully benefit from a secure cyberspace. Additionally, the Commonwealth must show leadership in the use of innovation and cutting-edge technology that ensures its relevance beyond the 21st Century.

With half of the top 20 global emerging cities in the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth should be moving towards sustainable urbanisation with smart and resilient communities and cities. This can be

done by adopting a holistic approach to social, economic and environmental challenges faced by cities and communities, to encourage the development of sustainable cities that can serve as models of sustainable urbanisation.

CTUG commentary

Technological change can provide enormous new opportunities, a more productive economy, and cleaner, greener work. 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, and make sure that workers receive their fair share of the benefits. Full employment – but potentially shorter working time – and a universal labour guarantee remain our goals, so we need a just transition to address the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. That will require consultation, social dialogue and collective bargaining with unions, including over surveillance protection, tax rules and, most urgently, digital platforms.

CTUG proposals

Our top priority is that the Commonwealth should support a global standard of governance of digital platform businesses, and that Commonwealth countries should work through the ILO to agree such a standard as well as taking steps with unions and business in their own countries.