

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)
COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION GROUP (CTUG)
Commonwealth Trade Unions Annual Meeting
Room IV, ILO Building, Geneva
Tuesday 18 June 2019

1. Welcome

The annual meeting of the Commonwealth Trade Union Group (CTUG) took place on 18 June 2019 in Geneva and was attended by over 40 delegates. ITUC Deputy General Secretary Owen Tudor introduced the meeting and welcomed the participants. He reported that, in the 70th year of the Commonwealth, national trade union centres in 43 Commonwealth countries were affiliated to the ITUC and that they had over 70 million members. But any trade union in a Commonwealth country could take part in CTUG meetings.

Sir Leroy Trotman (BWU Barbados) was elected to chair the meeting. He thanked and greeted the participants. The agenda was adopted and the minutes of the 2018 meeting were accepted, with the amendment of the section on Swaziland/Eswatini (where it was clarified that the courts had made clear that only documents referring to Eswatini would be recognised.)

2. Commemoration of Bob Hawke

Tom Roberts (ACTU Australia) addressed the meeting about the role played by Bob Hawke, former President of the ACTU and Prime Minister of Australia, who had died earlier in the year. He had played a key role in establishing the Commonwealth Trade Union Council as a member of the ILO Governing Body, as well as being the greatest Australian Prime Minister. The chair sent the meeting's sympathy to the ACTU.

3. Plans for 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

It was reported that the 2020 CHOGM would take place in Kigali, Rwanda. The secretariat was in touch with Rwandan unions, and would prepare a draft CTUG submission to CHOGM as usual, on the basis of previous years' demands, and comments made at the meeting. As usual, a CTUG delegation would be constructed to take part in pre-CHOGM meetings and, hopefully, meetings with Ministers. Representatives from CESTRAR, Rwanda reported on preparations for CHOGM, which was arousing considerable interest in Rwanda. Contact with the Foreign Ministry had already been made.

Key issues suggested for inclusion in the CTUG submission included climate change, technology, freedom of association and other fundamental rights, rights for informal economy workers and other 'Future of Work' issues, decent work and social justice, widening democratic space, and trade. A representative from the ZCTU Zimbabwe said that the submission should cover conditions for Zimbabwe's readmission to the Commonwealth.

The draft CTUG submission would be drawn up and circulated for comment, with the objective that it would be ready for submission to the Committee of the Whole at its meeting in New York in September.

4. Future of the Commonwealth Trade Union Group

It was suggested that the CTUG should be put on a more formal footing, with an elected President and steering group to keep activity going between annual meetings, and a way for non-ITUC affiliates to become engaged. More activity should be arranged, and the secretariat should circulate a paper for comment after the meeting.

There were proposals that the annual meeting should discuss CAS cases, and that speakers in the CAS should speak on behalf of Commonwealth trade unionists. Technology should be used for virtual meetings, and the CTUG should do more to organise and involve workers in Commonwealth countries. The CTUG should share experiences and agree priorities. An MOU or constitution would make the functions and roles of the organisation clear.

5. Country reports

Mduduzi Gina (TUCOSWA – Eswatini) reported on the situation in Swaziland, where on top of the regular harassment and repression, the government was now resorting to establishing fake unions. Other reports were received from Samoa and Zimbabwe, and it was noted that Bangladesh was also on the ITUC list of countries at risk.

There being no other business, the chair closed the meeting. Sir Leroy was thanked for his contribution.