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HAK İŞÇİ SENDİKALARI KONFEDERASYONU
HAK-İŞ TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

30.03.2020

Ms. Sharan Burrow
General Secretary
ITUC
Belgium

Subject: HAK-IS Confederation Report On Measures Taken In Turkey
Regarding Covid-19 Outbreak

Dear Ms. Burrow,

We would like to inform you about the measures taken in Turkey and the role of unions against the COVID-19 outbreak.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), which is spreading rapidly all over the world, has also affected our country. **Early and quick efforts** of our country regarding the COVID-19 are highly appreciated by every one of us.

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From the very beginning, Turkey has observed the situation very closely and has taken highly essential measures in a **quick manner**. Thus, comparing to other countries, Turkey could resist and postpone the exposure to the virus.

As HAK-IS, we have been following the developments in our country very closely and continue to work coordinately with the measures taken by the Government.

We would like to inform you about developments concerning COVID-19 measures taken in Turkey.

- Upon witnessing the cases all around the world, Turkey has acted quite fast and established the **Science Committee by the Health Minister Mr. Dr. Fahrettin Koca** under the lead of the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a presidential level. In order to follow the developments on the spot based on scientific principles, the Science Committee consists



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of **acknowledged doctors and academicians** in the field of science and medicine. In this period of time, the Science Committee works not only as an observer but also as an important decision maker as well.

- As of January 20, Turkey started screening all passengers from Wuhan City of China, Honkong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, America, Russia and Vietnam upon entering the country.
- On February 3, all flights were suspended from China.
- On February 23, all transportations by air, land transport and rail were suspended from Iran.
- On March 6, Turkey banned foreigners in Italy from entering the country.
- Turkey has suspended flights to/from many countries and closed its borders. The number of suspended flights reached 20 on March 17. Additionally, **according to decision of Science Committe**, on 21 March 2020, flights to/from **46 countries** are suspended. Some countries are as follows;

SUSPENDED FLIGHTS			
China	Germany	Belgium	Switzerland
Iran	France	Austria	Saudi Arabia
South Korea	Spain	Sweden	Egypt
Iraq	Norway	The Netherlands	Ireland
Italy	Denmark	UK	UAE

Finally, as of 27 March 2020, as the airline flying to the most countries **all international flights** are suspended.

- 14 days self-isolation was imposed to those who came from abroad regardless of a country.
- Especially upon returning of our citizens, who went to Umrah (Saudi Arabia) **weeks ago**, underwent a medical examination and have been put under quarantine implementation at special facilities. It should be



strongly highlighted that, **travelling for Umrah was suspended soon after the outbreak**; however, there were some of our citizens who went to Umrah before the outbreak.

- Moreover, Turkish students and Turkish citizens who came from abroad to their hometown Turkey, was also put under quarantine.
- Lastly, **all domestic flights are limited to only 14 provinces.**
- **Interprovincial bus trips are banned** and under the control of governors for the urgent needs.
- Immediate action has been taken regarding closing the schools in order to protect our children. Ministry of Education has launched a specifically designed TV channel for **distance education**, which can be reached via online platforms as well. By providing distance education via television broadcast and Internet, Turkey has enabled all the students to maintain their access to education.
- Additionally, the number of working **public officers and private sector** are **set to minimum** while **rotatory shifts** are provided with an administrative leave to prevent laggings on public services.
- All credit cards payments are **postponed** for 3 months.
- Additionally, all meetings, sport and culture activities are **cancelled** while all public places such as coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas theatres and shops and district bazaars are closed. However, for vital human needs, supermarkets and pharmacies are open to serve to the public. It should be highlighted that, at those places, workers use protective equipment and put high importance and hygiene and social distance.
- Likewise, number of passengers that can use one public transformation vehicle has been reduced by 50%. A circular statement on the usage of public transportation has also been transmitted.
- Mobility of the taxis are limited regarding the transportation by allowing the certain amount of taxis to be on roads.
- One of the measures taken regarding COVID-19 will be legislation on remission of sentence, which aims to **design a fair system** in order to **improve the conditions of prisons**. This legislation draft has been



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prepared along with the support and opinions of opposition parties that are CHP, İYİ Party and HDP as well. **Sexual assault, violence against women, terror and drug usage will be out of the legislation scope.**

- Our soldiers will be subjected to summons and disbandment in accordance with the quarantine practice for 14 days.
- With a great cooperation, vocational high schools continue to produce masks, glasses and disinfections even more than the demand.
- The production of **domestic respiratory equipment** has been quickly started by the Ministry of Health.
- Administrative leaves are provided promptly for those who are **65+ years, pregnant and for those who have chronic diseases**. Thus, the biggest risk group could have a chance to be in self-isolation without any concern regarding the work. It should be noted that, **this particular risk group haven't been left alone** and their daily life needs such as food, hygiene equipment and medicine are provided by the aid groups that are assigned by governorships from the Ministry of Interior. In addition to this respect, our elderly citizens are provided **free food packages, free masks, free cologne and free soap periodically**.
- In our all provinces, the **Pandemia Committees** will be formed under the leadership of governors and **extra measures will be discussed and decided according to the current needs of the provinces**.

Although our country has exposed to the virus inevitably soon after this preliminary measures, the process has been managed in an absolute transparent manner from the very first day. **Turkish citizens counts on the government** and trust with the full heart as they **genuinely follow the "Stay Home" call** of the government. Thanks to this, **Turkey could achieve 80% isolation across the country despite the fact Turkey has not declared State of Emergency**.

- The Minister of Health Dr. Fahrettin Koca, **briefs the whole country every single evening** since the outbreak. Facts are not left aside and the communication with the public is not neglected even a day.





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- As it is known, there is always flow of misinformation and disinformation on social media during crisis times which might cause a panic among society. In this regard, Turkey acted very responsibly and tackled with it by cyber polices under the Security General Directorate. In order to have **instant and transparent information flow**, Ministry of Health **launched an online platform** that demonstrates current situation on COVID-19 in Turkey, which can be easily accessible.
- Unfortunately, during the crisis times, opportunists pop up in every sector as well who unfairly increase prices to gain profits. Our government shows great efforts to prevent this to happen in the light of equal approach by relevant authorities.
- It should also be highlighted that, comparing to most of the countries, **healthcare system and healthcare infrastructure of Turkey is outstanding** for the last couple of years thanks to the latest investments. With the help of this, Turkey has been an important choice recently for health sector among patients all around the world.
- Additionally, we appreciate the decision on turning private health institutions and hospitals into a public base for COVID-19 as well. We have **transparent, safe and effective Free Health System in Turkey**; which can be utilized by every single citizen.

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Health System is Free in Turkey

- Our Public Health System serves **equal, free and easily accessible** during this crisis just like its everyday pattern before. **Free access to the Public Health System** is not an outcome of the outbreak; it was **already free** for many years. **Corona treatment is free even at the private hospitals.** We should emphasize that our trust in the healthcare system gives a great hope to the society. The approach of most of the countries can be observed very clearly. Turkey, approaches to the case with an interest of public by benefiting from science and scientists.



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- As Turkey, we are not only battling with this outbreak in our borders, but also **helping to the other countries** regarding equipments and medicine as a principal. With this understanding of solidarity, Turkey has been a helping hand for many countries in Europe and even USA during this crisis.
- Within this framework, a meeting has been held on 18 March 2020 led by The Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services, Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk within the scope of the fight against the new type of coronavirus. At the meeting, views were exchanged on the measures to be taken in the work life with the participation of all parties of the working life, a common sensitivity has been created to manage this process effectively and to survive it with the least damage. **President Mahmut Arslan has attended the meeting on behalf of HAK-IS and presented his opinions.**
- Moreover, **as a member of Turkey-EU Joint Consultative Committee**, HAK-IS has attended the "Coordination Meeting Against Coronavirus" which was held under the chairmanship of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan within the scope of the fight against coronavirus (COVID-19). Vice President, members of the Presidential Cabinet, members of the Presidential Economic and Health Policy boards, managers of public institutions and organizations, and representatives of non-governmental organizations have attended the meeting as well.

With respect to this, as HAK-IS President Mahmut Arslan, we submitted the views on;

- ✓ Overcoming the crisis with solidarity
- ✓ Supporting the recommendation of our Minister of Health on recruiting new healthcare workers
- ✓ Banning the dismissal of workers under the excuse of the crisis while employers who do not fire workers are supported with incentives.
- ✓ Preparing an action plan based on the needs by evaluating each branch of industry/sector.



- ✓ Supporting workers to get administrative leaves, annual leaves and short-time working allowances without layoffs.
- Upon analysis meeting of the outbreak, the government has released a package called “**Economic Stability Shield**” that refers 6 different areas, which are **Work and Social Life, Health, Industry, Trade, Finance and Banking**. The measures taken on “Work and Social Life” regarding the “Economic Stability Shield” was **within the context of our given opinions and suggestions during the meeting** that has been held by The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, which was attended by the all Confederations. The measures taken under the “**Economic Stability Shield**” are;

A. Work and Social Life

- **Short Work Allowance** will be implemented. Regarding this application, working times will be reduced by 1/3 and workers will be paid their wages while benefiting from the public health insurance. The required procedure to benefit from it expedited while the cover has been enhanced for this particular period of time so that everyone can get an advantage from it.
- To provide sustainability of the employment, **compensated working times** has been increased from 2 months to 4 months.
- 1.000 TL **cash support** will be provided for 2 million families with low income.
- The minimum retirement salary will be increased to 1.500 TL, which was 1.000 TL before. This corresponds to **50% increase in the salary**.
- The **minimum wage support** will be provided in total of 7 billion TL for the minimum wage earners.
- Regularly transferred funds for the social assistance and solidarity foundations will be increased to 180 million TL.



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- Eid promotions, which are paid for the workers right before the religious holy day, **will be paid earlier** and is going to be paid in April.
- Periodic monitoring program was put into use that covers social services and home healthcare services for the people who are 80 years and older.
- The government supports and ensures **flexible remote working** by realising it at the public work places.

B. Health

- Performance payments of health workers will be paid from its maximum wage by 3 months. **This implementation has been executed immediately.**
- **32 thousand new health workers** will be employed.
- **Guesthouse of the public institutions will be available** for all health workers during this period.
- Public transportation **will be free** for all health workers.
- 1 million **fast diagnosis** kit will be in use.
- Medication that was used and benefitted in China has been imported in order to use on COVID-19 patients.

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C. Industry

- **Rent payments are cancelled** 2 months for Technopark businesses.
- Payment of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization for SMEs are postponed until 30 July.
- Financial support of 6 million TL will be provided for the firms that **produce domestic disinfection, protective suit, glasses and masks.**





D. Trade

- **Extra custom tax has been lifted** on medical masks and respiratory equipment.
- **Custom tax has been cancelled** on the import of ethyl alcohol.
- Stock financing support will be given to the exporters.

E. Finance

- VAT declaration and **VAT payments are postponed**.
- There will be **no tax withdrawing** from municipalities for 3 months.
- There will be no application of accommodation tax until the end of November.
- VAT rate on domestic flights is reduced to 1% for 3 months.
- The companies whose cash flow have deteriorated will be provided **financial support** if needed

F. Banking

- The Credit Guarantee Fund **limit will be increased** from 25 billion TL to 50 billion in order to provide loans for SMEs.
- Tradesmen Credit Card will be provided with a limit of 25.000 TL **without any payments** for 3 months.
- All credit cards payment can be **postponed** until the end of July.

In general, the Government has declared 100 billion TL economic stimulus package.

HAK-IS Attempts on Measures

- ✓ As HAK-IS, we find these measures **very critical and fully support**. It is very promising to see that taken measures regarding the working life are mostly in line with the priorities of ITUC on COVID-19 crisis.
- ✓ During this period, our priority should be human health while **protecting the workers, employment and economy**. We would like to emphasize that; **we do not accept any action leading to unemployment, unpaid**



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wages, unpaid leaves that affect our workers who do not have any other capital rather than labour.

- ✓ For this reason, we should achieve this fight all together with the **government-worker-employer** to be able to overcome this without any tragic accident and without damaging the situated order. In this process, which is directly related to work life, as HAK-IS Confederation

we are ready to show all the support and required cooperation. In the light of this understanding;

- **The guesthouse of Hizmet-İs Trade Union of HAK-IS (for all municipality and service workers) has been made fully available for health workers during this period of time.**
- ✓ As one of the most important party of the labour movement; our sensitivity has been still ongoing that is concerning on applying measures taken on a national level and taking essential precautions at workplaces. Therefore, we put significant efforts to do our part as well.
- The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services have issued a circular letter on the Protection Measures for COVID-19. Within this framework, we made sure to **transmit this letter to the workplaces through our trade unions**. In this regard;
 - Sitting plans are revised inside the shuttle seats.
 - Rotation system has been applied at the cafeterias.
 - Sanitations practices are increased.
 - Protective safety equipments are distributed.
- ✓ Likewise, our Confederation has also pioneered the precautions against coronavirus disease at the workplace and acted early with our belief that human health is above all values. **Our Occupational Health and Safety Committee within the Confederation convened urgently and conducted a study on the measures to be taken in the workplaces.**





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HAK-IS and Public Relations:

✓ As HAK-IS Confederation, we strongly believe the significant of an informative manner during the crisis times therefore, we put remarkable efforts to show this manner with a full transparency for our members and for the public as well. In the light of these, we inform, advise and brief;

- Trade unions
- Workplaces
- Public

by our several prompt press releases regarding the measures taken among our organization. As HAK-IS, we find the measures taken by the Government very crucial and we support. Surely, we have more ideas, opinions and criticisms to reach the better. As it has always been, we are aware of our responsibilities and will actively present our opinions to improve. For example;

1. We demand more comprehensive economic package to cover for 83 million citizens.
 2. We also demand treatment for 4 million refugees hosted in Turkey.
 3. Better economic and safe conditions to be provided to health workers.
 4. We urge not to be fired of any workers because of the pandemic.
- ✓ The comprehensive **action plan** prepared by our Occupational Health and Safety Committee has been approved by the Executive Board of our Confederation and **sent to our entire affiliated trade unions**. In our action plan, which was prepared considering the concept of social distance, it has been decided that;





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- Re-arranging of the working hours of staff working in trade unions,
- Increasing the sanitation within the occupation health and safety framework,
- Encouraging staff to use their paid annual leave by offering them extra administrative leaves,
- Re-arranging the shared areas according to the latest situation (cafeteria, meeting rooms, kitchen and restrooms).

These decisions were implemented urgently and effectively by all our organization, primarily our Confederation. As HAK-IS, we find it highly significant to maintain the method of rotatory and remote working system with no disruption by closing the workplaces.

- ✓ From the moment coronavirus first came out in the world, we have been sincerely thankful for quick actions and successful works of our government, primarily our Minister of Health and all our ministers, all officials and without a doubt **we are indebtly thankful to our all health workers who are battling as frontline fighters.**
- ✓ In our point of view, taking the current situation seriously, realising appropriate precautions by all parties of the labour movement will save our today and future. For every country we hope to overcome this with a minimum harm, if possible, even with no damage.

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We are always pleased to keep informed and ask cooperation of ITUC and ETUC.

Sincerely yours,

Mahmut ARSLAN
President

