

**Ayuba Wabba**

President  
Président  
Präsident  
Presidente

**Sharan Burrow**

General Secretary  
Secrétaire générale  
Generalsekretärin  
Secretaria General

**To all ITUC affiliates in India**

Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)  
Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)  
Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)  
Confederation of Free Trade Unions of India (CFTUI)

**HTUR/JB**

**20 May 2020**

**Global solidarity with Indian day of protest against the persistent onslaught on workers' rights**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I write to express the solidarity of the ITUC and its 200 million workers across the world with your struggle against the persistent onslaught on workers' rights in your country.

As the COVID19 pandemic has put unprecedented challenges to governments and pressured economies, the world is witnessing the failure of a global economic and political model. A new social contract to build stability and prosperity through social justice is more urgent than ever. All over the world, working people are demanding that rights are respected, jobs are decent with minimum living wages and collective bargaining, social protection is universal, due diligence and accountability are driving business operations, and that social dialogue ensures just transition measures for climate and technology. These basic rights must apply to all workers – informal and formal.

Millions of workers - especially women in healthcare and other essential services - have continued to work to save lives and provide vital products and services to their communities, often in unsafe conditions and putting their own lives at risk. In many countries around the world governments are reminded that their duty is to protect the rights, including the health, of people and that their economies depend on workers. In different forms, including in India, immediate protection measures were taken to support workers, families, communities and real economy businesses with guarantees for paid sick leave, wages protection and public health and other areas of vital care. This was recognition that all are essential as the first step to stabilising the fallout from the pandemic.

In many places the respect for human and labour rights has now come under severe pressure. Despite all the lessons from the 20th century, governments are irresponsibly repeating the mistakes of the past and resorting to 19th century models based on exploitation of workers that lead to devastating poverty and insecurity.

In this context, the ITUC has closely followed the latest attacks on workers' rights in India as part of the anti-worker labour law reform initiated by the central government in 2015 to cut labour regulations to advance business interests; and in particular the recent decisions made by the state governments of India to suspend the major labour laws for three years and expand working time to 12 hours. These draconian measures will facilitate brutal exploitation of formal and informal workers without their rights for several years to collective bargaining and dispute settlement over proper wages, health and safety at the workplace, and social security. Moreover, the central government is repealing labour protections for migrant workers, who are already facing precarious living and working conditions, at the federal level.

Rather than recognising the efforts made, and the hardship faced, by workers the government has chosen to pursue its callous attack on workers' rights and drive its own people into poverty and 21st century slavery. If the central government neglects to intervene and lift the state suspensions of labour laws, it is knowingly setting India up for a national race to the bottom with disastrous consequences. As a major economy, there is a serious risk that it forces a domino effect on other countries in the region and ultimately affects the entire global economy.

Sisters and brothers, your struggle to prevent this is critical. The trade unions of the ITUC applaud the unprecedented, united trade union front in India and the coordinated protest action to date. We join your fight in solidarity. On 22 May and all other days, we are all Indian workers.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B.' followed by a stylized flourish.

General Secretary