



Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council

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Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic

The Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) representing 22 major federations in 14 of the 16 Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Member States with a combined membership of more than 5.8 million working men and women, extends solidarity and sympathy to the workers and entire population around the globe who are facing a huge health risk because of the COVID-19 outbreak which now records a large number of cases and deaths.

This COVID-19 pandemic emerges at a time when most millions of workers in SADC region and beyond, do not have access to paid sick leave, and many do not access affordable quality health care. These are the people who face the greatest health and economic risks from the spread of the Coronavirus that is reported to be causing COVID-19 disease.

The grim reality is that if such workers become infected by COVID-19, they will in line with health requirements stay at home and self-isolate to protect fellow workers and communities. Yet for the millions of informal, contract and casual workers who would lose pay from this, or if employers deduct pay, how are they expected to settle their bills? Unless there is continuity of pay or some form of social protection for these circumstances, there is a risk that people will continue to work while ill for their and their families' survival. This is a public health risk that cannot simply be put on the shoulders of the poorest workers.

Without a proper, detailed economic support package and social protection measures for the millions of workers who have no access to paid leave, there is not only going to be a negative economic impact on those workers but also a significant health risk to the broader community in as far as COVID-19 pandemic is concerned. Even for workers who have paid sick leave, the duration needs to accommodate the self-isolation period or any treatment period required, including for those likely to suffer more severe illness due to underlying health conditions.

As governments, workers and communities respond to the outbreak of COVID-19, SATUCC will together with its affiliate unions and workers in the region endeavor to play our role in promoting information, responsible public health practice and to provide community support to the most vulnerable in our communities. We further propose the following concrete measures to protect workers and families:

1. All workers, whatever their formality, contract or status, should be guaranteed that they will be able to perform their jobs in a safe working environment, with access to water and soap for handwashing, good ventilation and clear policy information on their workplace responses, rights and duties relating to Covid19. Workers who show symptoms should have access to free COVID-19 testing services in line with national guidelines and those who are ill should have access to relevant health services and paid sick leave. These provisions should be made available to all workers.
2. Frontline health promotion, prevention and care workers and other workers who care for and treat potentially infected or ill people should be provided with the appropriate information, protective equipment and organizational infection control measures to eliminate their risk of infection. The stress and demand on these workers needs to be recognized, planned for and responded to.
3. All workers are entitled to safe work environments, including the resources, equipment and protocols to protect them, infectious disease and other biological risks; and to worker compensation benefits if they are infected as a result of their work. For public sector workers and those in informal employment the duty is on government to ensure this in a manner that protects public health and human rights.
4. Special attention must be given to the situation of migrant workers many of whom are particularly vulnerable. Migrant workers must be able to return to their habitual place of work as soon as it is practicably possible should local and/or national containment measures financially or logistically inhibit them from doing so. Public health measures and health care services for prevention and treatment of Covid19 should be available for all workers and their families, whatever their residence status.
5. The COVID -19 crisis requires the best forms of social partnership to ensure that we contain the spread of the virus and make every effort to protect employment, earnings and industrial output. Employers and the private sector must also go beyond their current contractual obligations and complement governments' efforts. Rapid Response Teams comprising of social partners should be established in all SADC Member States to fast track, support and address any constraints that may arise.



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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

16th March 2020, Gaborone, Botswana