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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

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ITUC Statement on World AIDS Day (1 December)

Brussels, 30 November (ITUC OnLine): The massive human suffering caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the failure to date to check and reverse its growth, is due in large part to the lack of political will of governments. The ITUC remains committed to action to combat HIV/AIDS discrimination in the workplace, to ensure a rights-oriented approach to the interventions, to advocate for strong privacy and confidentiality safeguards and to ensure equitable access to HIV/AIDS treatment.

The ITUC is deeply concerned at the impact of the financial crisis on development and thus on combating HIV-AIDS. There is clear evidence that the crisis has deepened the already existing inequalities in the world. With 60 million people expected to lose their jobs and 200 million more falling into absolute poverty, trade unions call on governments to keep their promises to deliver resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals on HIV/AIDS - to achieve universal access to treatment, and to halt and begin to reverse the spread of the pandemic. HIV and TB are not decreasing in frequency. The global economic crisis has already put HIV prevention and treatment programs in jeopardy. According to the most recent World Bank report, the negative impacts of this crisis on HIV programs will affect 70% of people receiving anti-retrovirals in Africa within the next 12 months. The broken promises and changed priorities of governments and donors risk turning the commitments to the right to health and access to treatment into unattainable rhetoric.

Patterns of HIV infection are symptomatic of the deeper social and political crisis facing the world. The transmission of HIV takes place mainly along "social lines" created by poverty, inequality and social injustice. Accordingly, the devastation from HIV/AIDS is not spread equally around the world, as 90% of people with HIV are living in circumstances of economic and social disadvantage and the same proportion of new HIV infections occur in low-income countries.

The gravity of the pandemic, and indeed the prevalence of other infectious diseases, is linked directly to social and gender inequality, including especially the disempowerment of women, as well as young people, migrants, the unemployed, refugees and LGBT persons. Even with access to medication or knowledge about protection from HIV infection, many more people living under economic and social disadvantage will become infected and develop AIDS.

The ITUC is convinced that the workplace is a key battleground in the struggle against the pandemic and that as a result, governments, employers and trade unions all have important responsibilities.

Accordingly, ITUC reaffirms the importance of the International Labour Organization's role in addressing workplace aspects of HIV/AIDS and welcomes the standard-setting process in the ILO that is meant to lead to the adoption of a new ILO instrument on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work in 2010.

The ITUC expresses its support for the Global Unions HIV/AIDS Programme and the work being carried out to promote trade union action on HIV/AIDS in the workplace, with unified trade union advocacy for a rights-oriented approach to the pandemic.

The ITUC also reaffirms its support for working together with the World AIDS Campaign to hold governments accountable for the HIV/AIDS-related commitments and to insist they provide the resources necessary to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates.

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