

Statement of SADC national TUs at ILO, Geneva, 11 June 2008

Press Conference Statement by the national trade union federations in the Southern African region directed to the SADC governments on Zimbabwe issues as at the 11th June 2008

We the workers and economic engines of the Southern African region of the African continent (SADC) and under the auspices of various national federations in the region, met here in Switzerland (Geneva) at the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

After having read from the committee of experts' report, that irrespective of the fact that Zimbabwe is a signatory to a few ILO conventions including the convention on Freedom of Association, the governments has continued to aggressively violate same, including among other things, malicious police violence, brutality, arrests and detentions of trade union leaders, activists, and human rights defenders.

Currently as we speak, Wellington Chibebe and Lovemore Matombo, the Secretary General and the President respectively of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) were incarcerated in remand centres for 12 days for having addressed workers during May Day, and in the process of their incarceration, they were fitted with leg irons like convicted hard-core chronic criminals, and they were reluctantly allowed bail of 280 billion Zimbabwe dollars each.

The ILO committee of experts and the committee on the application of standards have continuously advised government not to use the Public order and Security Act (POSA) and the Criminal Codification Act against worker activists.

We are also aware that the government has similarly ratified and aligned itself with several treaties and protocols including, among others, the SADC electoral protocol which allows for free and fair elections. As such we are at pains to try to understand the deplorable pre- and post-election violence taking place against innocent Zimbabwe citizens, particularly now that preparations for a run-off election are under way.

We are deeply alarmed and stressed by the announcement by government that all food aid programmes should stop forthwith until after elections, because it is a recipe for disaster, which is not conducive for a peaceful environment.

We are further concerned about the withdrawal of identity documents from some citizens because it is our view that if such is allowed, it can be used to manipulate the results of the forthcoming run-off elections by denying some citizens their right to cast their ballots, yet all Zimbabweans have a right to self-determination, which is an inalienable right.

As citizens, economic generators and taxpayers of the Southern region of the African continent, meeting here in Geneva, we humbly demand from Southern African Development Community (SADC) to act on the following as a corrective measure to the current crisis as a matter of urgency:

- * Immediate restoration of food aid supplies to all deserving Zimbabweans without any discrimination
- * Call upon government to ensure that all forms of violence is stopped forthwith
- * Put in place as of immediate, peacekeepers to ensure and guarantee

peaceful environment for the ongoing election process

* Call upon the Zimbabwe government to guarantee all civil liberties for all the people of Zimbabwe without discrimination

* To call the Zimbabwe government to forthwith stop taking identity documents from some citizens since that would disqualify those citizens their right to vote

* Call upon SADC to ensure vigilant monitoring and observing of the run-off elections and that such observers should include the United Nations and other international bodies

* Call upon government to unconditionally withdraw all the charges against the union leaders

* Call upon Zimbabwe government to ensure that the Public order and Security Act is not used against workers

* Call upon Zimbabwe government to ensure that the State of Emergency laws such as the Criminal Codification Act are revoked

* Call upon the government to ensure that people who were displaced as a result of the spate of violence are allowed and assisted to peacefully return to their homes and to be compensated commensurate to the costs incurred

* Call upon SADC to allow for urgent dialogue between itself and the leadership of the Southern African Trade Union Federations on the issue of Zimbabwe before the 21st of June, 2008

We come from a backdrop that says those that govern should do so on the mandate of the governed and that taxation without participation is tantamount to tyranny, and in this equation the governing have an imperative duty to account to the governed.

We, the representatives of the trade unions in the region, cannot help but blame SADC for the deterioration of the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe due to the passive strategy in dealing with issues of human rights violations and constitutionality.

Finally, the workers in the region cannot allow the election and the expression of the people of Zimbabwe through the ballot box to be stolen. We demand that their decision be respected by all.

We call for an urgent response to our most genuine submissions for engagement on this issue and as such, we thank you in anticipation.

The Southern African Trade Union Federations represented here in Geneva who are declaring these demands are as follows:

- Zambian Congress of Trade Unions (ZaCTU), e-mail hikaumba@yahoo.com
- Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU), e-mail jbradibe@yahoo.com
- Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA)
- Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), e-mail alinah@cosatu.org.za
- Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU), e-mail sftu1@swazi.net and jansithole@yahoo.com