

POSITION OF CTH, CTSP, CNOHA AND ESPM-BATAY OUVRIYE ON THE GOVERNMENT DECISION REGARDING THE PANDEMIC COVID-19

The Haitian Confederation of Workers (CTH), the Confederation of Workers of Public and Private Sectors (CTSP), the Central National of Haitian Workers (CNOHA) and May First Union Confederation – Workers’ Struggle (ESPM-BO) are joining forces to take a stance regarding the response measures the government has taken to combat the CoVid-19 pandemic that is shaking the world.

Our national labor unions advocating workers' interests in the country are appalled to see how the government rushed into taking swift measures to protect the population, leaving behind many hungry and unprotected workers without the sanitary protection the current situation requires.

Today, the Workers who have already been subjected to severe food, economic, health, physical, and generalized insecurity have to face the outbreak of the Coronavirus. This double crisis makes the Haitian people more vulnerable, while they have no peace of mind and their condition of misery is increasing.

It is in this context that the following Union Federations: CTH, CTSP, CNOHA and ESPM-BO, note the following after the president's speeches on March 19 and 21, 2020:

1. Contradictions of narratives between the two branches of the Executive. On the one hand, the President has announced, in his two (2) speeches, a dialogue between the parties (Government, Worker unions, and Employers) to decide on measures to be taken in favor of workers in the textile sector. On the other hand, the Prime Minister has announced in a tweet, in social media, and newspapers that 50% of the wages will be paid to the factory textile workers with a portfolio of 343 million Gourdes (without saying on what basis it was calculated). Considering that there are more than 55,000 workers in the textile factories, how much is the monthly wage with this amount in that portfolio? And only the textile workers will be paid. The other categories of private sector workers have no idea where they stand with regards to wages.

2. There are many workers in the private sector whom the government does not consider the risks and dangers under which these workers continue to work in places where the disease might potentially spread the most in the country. Isn't that a discrimination among the workers? For us, all the workers must be protected in both formal and informal sectors. In fact, the government has no definite work plan for other categories of workers listed or not listed in the 2 speeches. These speeches communicate to us that there is no comprehensive strategic plan that offers good health insurance with adequate healthcare and good financial support for all workers.

3- There is no provision made to support the most vulnerable such as the elderly, the disabled, the pregnant women, the unemployed youth representing the largest group in the country alongside the day-to-day workers in the informal sector who live on only what they get for the day in the cities and the countryside.

For all these reasons, CTH, CTSP, CNOHA and ESPM-BO think that the government decisions to close many work sites, such as schools, universities, factories, etc. in order to prevent the spread of Coronavirus in the country, would be a good decision if it was taken on the basis of a dialogue. The government should have consulted with corporate leaders, workers organizations to analyze how private enterprises work and together agree on a method to pay workers during the time the enterprises are going to close down, and to take other appropriate measures required for this time.

In addition, to date, the government has not put in place adequate conditions for health workers to provide services to the population. There are no materials, no protective equipment, and more than 3 months unpaid wages. The measures announced in the President's speech exclude a large number of informal workers such as the peasants and rural workers, public market and street vendors and the public transport sector. The government does not even mention the dangerous conditions people are riding massively in close proximity to each other in the public transportation system. Isn't this a great path for the fastest spreading of the virus in the population? In spite of all this, the government mainly prioritizes an overload of propaganda in the media.

In our organizations, we are deeply saddened at how this pandemic has set the stage for worldwide turmoil, where everyone has to stay home. We believe that it is important for economic, political and state leaders to rise to the occasion by focusing on prioritizing the interests of the people rather than positioning themselves to plunder moneys the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank will give to countries facing this pandemic.

In this dire situation, the CTH, CTSP, CNOHA and ESPM-BO require the government to:

1- Provide the means, materials, and appropriate equipment for the health personnel to do their job properly;

2- Make arrangements with the employers to pay factory workers 100% of their wages; 50% from employers and 50% from the Government (based on the last 3 months average wages) without taking legal fees (ONA, IRI, FDU, CAS) as long as these employees have to be confined to their homes.

3- The Government and the owners of schools and universities must pay the private school teachers and university professors, without having to take taxes from them.

4- The government must reduce by 75% all the privileges of the senior civil servants, particularly the President, the Prime Minister, the Ministers, the rest of the Senators, the electoral college members, the general Directors and the Directors of Services such as ONA, APN, AAN, SONAPI, BMPAD who have big money on their debit cards and to put that collected money in the FDU fund at the disposal of workers in unemployment situation.

5- Rationally manage all of the country's resources so that this disease does not become an opportunity to make state officials wealthier.

6- Put the carnival money that was not spent in the services of the population;

7- Fight against big retailers engaging in price gauging and the black market in all products, without regulations;

8- Establish a scientific committee composed of physicians, sociologists, psychologists and other competent professionals to evaluate the evolution and impact of Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 and CoVid-19 on the Haitian population;

9- Create well-equipped quarantine centers for infected people in each community so that they may get proper care;

10- Appeal to all retired medical personnel and those who have studied abroad and who are in-country, as well as all those who are not working now to help the population face the Coronavirus;

11- Launch a program of sanitation, distribution of drinking water and disinfectants, gloves, masks, hydro-alcoholic gels, soaps etc.;

12- Launch an appeal for civic solidarity to all sectors of society in which all citizens must collaborate to protect the elderly, the disabled, the pregnant women, the children and the most vulnerable of the population;

13- The Government must comply with ILO protocol on CoVid-19 (COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses, March 18, 2020) (www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus)

The Union Federations, CTH, CTSP, CNOHA and ESPM-BO, are asking the population to keep their eyes open on how these de-facto authorities want to manage the coronavirus crisis. And we hope that no state authority take pleasure in deceiving the people, announcing a series of measures that will never be truly effective.

Finally, the authorities should use the Coronavirus as an opportunity to boost the economy by supporting the national production and establishing a health system for everyone with no distinction so that the people may have better living conditions.

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