

Declaration of the 9th BRICS Trade Union Forum (St.Petersburg. October 30, 2020)

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1. National trade union centres of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa, that have joined together to form the BRICS Trade Union Forum, held their 9th Plenary meeting during the Russian Chairmanship of BRICS in 2020 by videoconference to discuss and develop common approaches to the most pressing issues in the sphere of labour and employment in the midst of an unprecedented and worsening crisis caused primarily by the pandemic of novel coronavirus, as well as the adverse global economic environment.

2. By the beginning of 2020, the indicators of our national economies were either at a satisfactory level or were experiencing a decline, which called for decisive action to develop programmes to support economic activity, create new jobs, increase wages and improve social protection systems for the disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of the population. However, with the growing spread of COVID-19 and increase in the death toll caused by it, all attention has been focused on measures to prevent further spread of the pandemic and protect the health of workers and their families. Restrictive measures have led to significant changes in working conditions and economic activity as such. Whole sectors of economy, such as passenger transport, hotel services, organisation of mass cultural and sports events, public catering, have faced severe problems, and the threat of job losses and bankruptcy have become real for both large companies and MSMEs. At the same time, most governments of the world have not been able to avoid negative consequences of the pandemic - increased unemployment and declining incomes of the working population. The tools of social dialogue and tripartism should be used more extensively to mitigate them.

3. Labour markets in BRICS countries, as well as worldwide, have faced an unprecedented growth of unemployment. The workload of employment agencies has increased dramatically, while the number of available jobs is declining due to business closures, and the impact on employment in informal economy is devastating. Under the circumstances, the creation of new jobs is impossible without active financial support, benefits and preferences from the state. We welcome the efforts of those BRICS governments that are working to preserve jobs through incentives and support for the most vulnerable industries and enterprises. Additional active measures are required to support

youth employment, to provide young people with a first secure job allowing them to integrate into the labour market and gain initial work experience.

4. The working population is not only negatively affected by restrictive and preventive measures that require extra expenditures from family budgets, but also feels an erosion of wages and salaries against the concurrent increase in spending due to growing prices. Measures of social support for families with children, elderly people, women and youth from high-risk groups and other vulnerable categories must be supplemented by determined efforts to curb the growth of prices and tariffs that have a significant impact on workers' incomes.

5. There is a growing number of confrontations between employees and employers due to disagreements about wage levels and deterioration of working conditions. Crisis phenomena caused by the disruption of cooperation ties, narrowing of sales markets and logistical constraints due to pandemic restrictions should not be ignored at the state level. Additional efforts are needed to create protective mechanisms to prevent a sharp drop in workers' incomes both in the area of setting fair minimum standards, such as the minimum wage, and in the area of mandatory compliance with the existing standards by all actors on the labour market. We believe that taxation of citizens' income should be subject to further modification towards a fair increase in the tax rate for super-profits and a tax reduction or tax exemption for incomes below the subsistence level.

6. We are facing one of the worst job crisis and States have a crucial role in generating decent jobs and incomes through public investments. However, some BRICS countries are using this crisis to privatise essential and strategic sectors, not to mention the worsening of labour conditions in these sectors. There is a strong need to promote social dialogue and collective bargaining to face this crisis and to come up with alternative solutions. The guarantee of industrial reconversion and fair transition is an essential pillar on determining what our future will be like.

7. Restrictive measures have led to the widespread use of remote work, which has provided unscrupulous entrepreneurs with new levers of pressure on workers and their unions, as well as additional opportunities to expand informal employment. We believe that the time has come to improve the legislative support for such expanding forms of employment as "remote work" and "flexible employment", which implies increased guarantees of fair remuneration, protection from arbitrary changes in working conditions and unjustified dismissals.

8. Medical staff has come under unprecedented strain in the workplace while saving the lives of those infected with the new coronavirus. In doing this they all stay in the highest

risk area. General on-the-job infection rate is growing. We believe that in the face of a pandemic, employers should take on the responsibility of vaccinating all employees directly involved in detection, transportation, treatment and rehabilitation of infected patients. We strongly believe that COVID-19 infection in the workplace should be included in the list of occupational diseases.

9. We further emphasise that safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work and call for the integration of emergency preparedness into OSH management systems. This is even more significant today, as ensuring safety and health at work is indispensable in the management of the pandemic and the ability to resume work.

10. As we look back, we note that despite the extremely grave situation in the global and local BRICS economies caused by the pandemic, some headway has been made in responding to the demands and wishes expressed by the national trade union centres during previous meetings and discussions. We note with satisfaction that the ILO has been involved in the discussion on matters of relevance to the BRICS countries related to the world of work and aimed at ensuring social justice. With varying success we engage employers' organisations in a dialogue. At the same time, no significant progress has been made so far on the track of interaction with BRICS institutions, such as the Business Council and the New Development Bank.

11. In assessing the conclusions drawn in the Declarations of the summits of BRICS heads of State and Government adopted after 2015, we note that the aspects of economics and governance have been formulated largely in accordance with institutional and managerial approaches established after World War II, which, in our opinion, are inconsistent with the ideas proclaimed at the initial stage of the BRICS formation concerning the need for alternative models of economic development. We are convinced that it is necessary to adhere to the fundamental ideas that served as a platform for the formation of a new international association called BRICS.

12. We welcome further deepening of interaction between the BRICS Ministers of labour and employment and support their efforts to maintain social dialogue. We recognise that the topics chosen by the Ministers for discussion and further elaboration during the Russian Chairmanship - Development of a preventative safety and health at work culture, Poverty alleviation through social and economic transformations, and Future of work in the digital economy - are relevant for all parties to labour relations and agree with the main provisions of the LEMM Declaration 2020.

13. We reaffirm the position expressed in the 2019 Brazilian Declaration of the Trade Union Forum regarding the danger of the spread of informal employment, and note the lack of tangible progress in formalisation of informal sectors.

14. We share serious concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of advanced technology companies; we support international efforts aimed to increase competition in the field of innovation and business development, which is more conducive to solving social problems. We support the "human-driven" approach to artificial intelligence, which ensures that final decisions affecting the organisation of work are made not by algorithms, but by people. The practice of algorithmic management, supervision and control using sensors, wearable devices and other monitoring tools should be regulated in order to protect the dignity of employees.

15. A positive thrust to any technological breakthrough is given by an equitable socio-economic structure balancing the interests of business, employees and the state. The Fourth industrial revolution should be aimed at improving the quality of life and well-being of all population groups, but not at just another redistribution of wealth, at growing inequalities and further atomisation of societies. The digitalisation of economy and introduction of artificial intelligence should be accompanied by the creation of an appropriate legal framework based on the standard-setting and enforcement mechanisms of the ILO.

16. The 9th BRICS Trade Union Forum is held in the year of the 75th anniversary of the victory over fascism in World War II, which inflicted immense disasters, casualties and destruction on humanity. The past decades cannot erase from our memory the grief and suffering endured by the peoples that became the target of military aggression. We call on the BRICS governments to do everything possible to reduce political tension, to end hostilities wherever they occur, to ensure security and stability in the world and promote active and unconditional application of international law to resolve regional and local conflicts to build a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind. Together, we can make the world a better place for everyone.

17. Facing the virus, we should enhance our solidarity and get through this together. We should follow the guidance of science, support the leading role of the World Health Organisation, and launch a joint international response to beat this pandemic. Any attempt of politicising the issue or stigmatisation must be rejected. We should stay true to multilateralism and safeguard the international system with the UN at its core.

18. We reiterate our commitment to the fundamental ideas of a just world order based on the national sovereignty and equality of States, non-interference in each other's affairs and cooperation on a wide range of mutual interests that formed the basis for the creation of

this new international association. We highly value the principles of openness, solidarity, mutual trust and support that have become basic for our Forum.

19. We express gratitude to the trade unions of the Russian Federation for holding the 9th BRICS Trade Union Forum in a very difficult situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. We are pleased to note that under the Russian Chairmanship of BRICS the Trade Union Forum has been included in the programme of official events.