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**On 1 May 2020, Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA) issued Statement for observation
of International Workers Day - 1 May Workers Day**

The global community was caught unexpected by a daunting epidemic that is plunging humanity unabated worldwide. Sadly, this invisible is spreading fast around the world by physical interaction with people, gathering of people, and movement of people. COVID 19 has claimed lives of nearly a quarter million of people. It has devastated families, destroying the sacrosanct cultural practices known to have existed for many generations performed to honour the dead and to pay last respects. It has overwhelmed health systems, institutions, health workers, scientists, physicians, and pharmacists. The ongoing scenarios are holding the world at ransom. It has left world leaders with difficult decisions to make for saving lives. The commercial activities of countries are heavily overburdened and business is intensively affected. With movement of people constrained. Spirits are low, worship in churches, temples, mosques is prohibited, and schools are closed even sports. Only a few qualifying as essential service providers are permitted to open.

The pandemic impacts severely on livelihoods in vulnerable communities mostly surviving as informal traders. They face further risks in working in insecure environments with no fringe benefits like thirteenth cheques or bonuses, insurance, medical health care, pension fund or housing. It is an area where the true meaning of survival of the fittest and living from hand to mouth is a lived experience. It is sad that the harsh environments in which income is generated mostly affect Africans who voted African leadership in power. This picture is always dismissed by shifting blame on the legacy of economic inequalities. The question is how many billions and trillions of Rands meant for uplifting Africans disappeared under the noses of our own government with living conditions having worsened in communities, townships and the constantly mushrooming squatter camps. There is no way that workers living in such deplorable conditions can contribute to the wellbeing of people, including protecting their lives and practicing hygiene.

Today we are humbled by the informal traders who have for decades sweated building the country's economy. Had it not been for Coronavirus, we would have continued business as usual. We are still grappling with policies that promote people in low income market brackets, like domestic workers, recycling waist pickers and alternative system to look after the unemployed.

It is only in the last two weeks that measures were put in place to support the needy with relief grants for lockdown period. At least we know that relief grants will be provided to needy unemployed, retrenched workers, independent traders unable to operate because of the social distancing requirement. Our constitution promotes everyone's freedom of trade or occupation and the states has a duty to ensure protection of workers in risk employment, run genuine skill building programmes for job seekers and unemployed.

The Department of Labour has updated data on the status of retrenched workers and unemployed people since they began distribution of the relief grant. This data will help the country set a viable system to manage all workers in the country. The need for constructive engagement with retrenched workers, and the unemployed to devise future strategies to overcome unemployment challenges facing the country cannot be overemphasised. Unemployment stands at a staggering 26%. It is not surprising that so many thousands of people that have submitted their names as early as 2 April 2020 to support centres for food relief, have up to now not received. The government should have included a focus on efficiency in the food relief to prevent the dilemma and peril of starvation created by the local municipalities. We believe that the expertise of Electoral Commission of South Africa, as well as South Africa Local Government Association in reaching people and ensuring delivery, should be explored. We need to know that the needy and vulnerable of South Africa are treated with human dignity, mostly informal traders whose financial situation has been destroyed by the lockdown.

The solidarity funds and philanthropical acts from generous hands is appreciated. But most importantly, we urge the government to see to it that the private sector does better than it has been doing regarding undermining workers with low income at the benefit of employers that are vastly over paid with added fringe benefits. The Department of Labour with support with the South African Revenue Services should find ways of fixing these huge gaps privileging employers.

The current COVID 19 environment is calling for protection of all essential service providers, including providing volunteers with appropriate personal protection equipment for mitigation of the spread and protection of themselves, their families and communities. We appreciate the mandatory requirement for wearing of face masks from entering of level 4 of lockdown. We believe the early consideration of this requirement would have made a big difference in mitigating the virus. The government should see this as an income generation opportunity for informal sector and provide education and awareness in the trading activities for practice of hygiene.

We are also encouraging the Department of Basic Education and Higher Education to pay attention to voices from the public and related stakeholders concern with school reopening. Educators occupy a very challenging position of educating our children. The majority of them work in unfavourable conditions characterised by ill-discipline, overcrowding, and no infrastructure for safe water and sanitation, required for practicing hygiene. The Recovery Plan Readiness for school reopening has not convinced all people of South African about its preparedness and readiness for schools to reopen. This is due to a number of risk factors which the DBE has to demonstrate its capacity to deliver comprehensive care and safety to teachers and learners.

For more details

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