

# *Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel at ILO Summit: "The moment is dramatically serious and demands coordinated action";*

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The address of Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel at Virtual World Summit of the International Labor Organization, Wednesday, July 8, 2020

Mr. Director-General:

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government

I am honored to bring to this virtual Summit the voice of Cuba, a small developing country, where the workers in power struggle daily to consolidate all the justice, dreams and commitment of the founders of

the nation.

Today, as always in the last 61 years, Cuba makes its own the new and serious challenges with which the International Labour Organization is beginning to move forward in its second century of life.

When the effects of COVID-19 are added to the challenges already faced by the world of work under the harsh rules of the market, the devastating consequences that the multiple crises generated by this pandemic will have on the economy of all countries are undeniable.

Unemployment has multiplied. The lack of social protection is increasing, and with it, inequalities and poverty.

But we must not delude ourselves. The terrible impacts and dire consequences of the pandemic throughout the world are not due solely to this deadly virus. Years of neoliberal policies and savage capitalism, governed by the designs of the market, are the deepest cause of the serious global situation.

According to experts, 305 million jobs have already been lost and 1.6 billion workers see their livelihoods threatened. Hundreds of millions of people are about to join those who already suffer from the inequalities of an unjust international economic order and whose survival is certainly at stake.

The moment is dramatically serious and demands coordinated action. Neither governments, nor workers nor employers can sit idly by. We have colossal commitment and must make demands to find solutions that place workers' rights in the best interest.

Those who generate employment, particularly small and medium-sized producers, will also require assistance.

It is necessary to consolidate social dialogue in the definition and implementation of policies for confrontation and recovery from the pandemic.

Mr Director-General:

Cuba, a small nation that has faced the COVID-19 pandemic, is suffering from the brutal and opportunistic intensification of the U.S. policy of economic, commercial and financial blockade, aimed at totally strangling our trade and access to fuel and international currencies.

In spite of the growing world demand, the blockade against Cuba was not only maintained when the epidemiological threat to the entire planet came to light, but it has been escalating in its criminal harassment of the entire people, punishing the Cuban family with particular fury.

In the midst of that suffocating economic war, our government has implemented actions to protect the health of all the people, maintain employment and defend labor guarantees and rights for all, which are the bastions of our social project.

Thirty-six labor, wage and social security measures have been implemented: distance work and teleworking have increased; workers have been relocated to other jobs and wage guarantees have been extended to those who are at home taking care of minor children, older adults and those in fragile health conditions or who could not be relocated; more than 240,000 workers in the non-State sector have been exempted from paying taxes; pensions have been maintained; and social workers are paying special attention to families that require it, among other actions.

No one was left stranded. The conditions exist to start the recovery process and the road to a new normality, based on the widest participation of the people in the decision-making process.

Mr. Director-General:

Today, international cooperation and solidarity are more necessary than ever. Nothing is worth more than a person's life. This is a fundamental principle of the Cuban Revolution, on which our international cooperation in health, education and everything related to human dignity is based.

That is why we reject, condemn and most emphatically repudiate all unilateral coercive measures imposed on sovereign nations such as Cuba, Venezuela and others that today suffer the most cruel and massive punishment for choosing a political or social system different from that of the dominant economic powers. Such measures are inhumane and must be eliminated, even more so in the context of the current pandemic, when sanctions are aimed at genocide.

The International Labor Organization, with its extensive work for social justice, the promotion of decent employment and the protection of workers' rights, can contribute, within its mandate, to helping the world of work move beyond the crisis caused by COVID-19.

Cuba, as a founding country of this Organization, reiterates its willingness to continue strengthening the indispensable multilateralism, solidarity and international cooperation, with the commitment to continue guaranteeing the protection of workers' rights and to advance in the construction of a more just world.

Work is a value and a sacred right. As the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, said: "... only by working can we advance, only by working can we produce the goods that the country needs, only by working can we produce more food, only by working can we get out of the most pressing difficulties that we have."

Thank you very much.

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