

Ayuba Wabba

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Sharan Burrow

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Republic of Croatia

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HTUR/JB

27 March 2020

Suspension of labour rights in response to COVID19 pandemic

Dear Prime Minister, Dear Minister,

These exceptional times demand exceptional measures. Governments across the world are responding to protect the health of their citizens. Governments must also act decisively to protect the income of families, low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises and the informal sector and put in place comprehensive measures that respond to the most urgent needs of workers and businesses that operate in the real economy to prevent their economies from collapsing. Important agreements have already been adopted between social partners in many countries, including most European countries.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is, therefore, dismayed to learn that your Government is unilaterally – without prior consultation with trade unions - drafting an Act on regulating labour relations in response to the COVID19 pandemic that would anticipate allegedly temporary exemptions to the Croatian Labour Code, such as:

- Enabling employers to cut wages down to the level of the minimum wage, and to abolish workers' rights to payment of one-off benefits in collective agreements;
- Suspension of provisions of the Labour Code related to severance pay;
- Enabling employers to unilaterally shorten workers' working time (and thus lower wages);
- Enabling employers to impose annual leave of 15 days without further notice
- Abolishing the obligation of periodic medical check-ups of workers employed on jobs with specific working conditions,
- Enabling employers to unilaterally impose telework with disregard of workers' health and safety
- Abolishing compulsory consultation with the works council to adopt any of such decisions by the employer.

These proposed measures would constitute clear violations on international human and labour rights standards, enshrined in international treaties to which Croatia is a party. As recently recalled by the ILO, the COVID19 crisis should not be used, even temporarily, to dismantle human rights and social rights, in particular trade union and workers' rights. On the contrary this COVID19 crisis is a brutal reminder of the importance of protection of workers' rights. When implemented, the anticipated measures would suppress demand and structurally undermine Croatia's economy. This irresponsible

initiative stands in stark contrast to the constructive measures being taken by many other Governments around the world in close collaboration with trade unions and employers' organisations.

The ITUC therefore urges your government to withdraw the bill without delay and to engage in good faith social dialogue to develop measures to protect jobs and wages while upholding the rights of workers and citizens in response to the ongoing crisis.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B...', written in a cursive style.

General Secretary

CC:

International Labour Organisation Director General Guy Ryder

ETUC General Secretary Luca Visentini

UATUC, NHS Croatia