

ITUC General Secretary's Congress Plenary Statement on Ukraine (23 May 2014)

"Trade unions around the world are monitoring with the highest concern the mounting conflict in Ukraine and the dangerous spillover effects in the region and beyond. The main repercussions, however, are primarily and directly affecting the ordinary people – the continuing disruption of their lives on a daily basis; dysfunctional communities and civil structures; and the mounting uncertainty for their future in the years to come.

Congress mourns the tragic deaths taking place in Ukraine, expresses its deepest condolences to the families and the people of Ukraine, condemns the violence and the burning of trade union buildings in Kiev and Odessa, joins the demand to make an independent investigation and to punish those guilty in the arson actions that have led to casualties.

Congress urges the relevant policy makers from Ukraine, within Ukraine as well as the key international actors involved – the Russian Federation, the USA, the EU – to use all their authority, to spare no effort, to implement the Geneva agreement and to prevent armed extremist actions spiralling out of control. It is of utmost urgency to redirect the process towards one of dialog and political solutions and to open space for the voices of normal people, trade unions, civil society to be part of the process and contribute to the final outcome.

Congress calls for the de-escalation of tension, respect for the Constitution of Ukraine for territorial integrity, allotment of Russian troops away from the border with Ukraine, the disarmament of illegal groups and military forces and the withdrawal of armed forces from the southeast of Ukraine as the situation stabilises. It also calls for the strengthening of commitments in the field of human rights, instruments of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is the main competent security institution in the region.

We recognise with regret that since then the economic and social situation has deteriorated significantly with increasing risks of current tensions, and violence persists. The value of the national currency has already dropped 28% in just the five months in 2014, significantly undermining working peoples' incomes and living standards on the eve of a forthcoming major economic adjustment process. The grim macroeconomic picture has been confirmed in the latest outlook in EBRD with 7% decline of GDP in 2014 and stagnation in 2015 provided the adjustment starts reducing imbalances, and no further escalation of tensions.

Disruptions in the economic and social system are on the rise, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Companies are facing difficulties in maintaining normal operations, in keeping jobs, while people face problems about getting to work, about maintaining their incomes and their way of life. We further recognise the magnitude of the challenge Ukraine is confronting with the need to maintain a critical mass of consensus, to open space for the reforms to work while securing an effective level of social justice and social protection to keep people motivated in the process. The costs of the adjustment process, they need to be shouldered fairly by all and not fall solely on the working people and socially vulnerable groups.

Congress reaffirms that social dialog is an indispensable tool for designing and implementing the forthcoming reform policies. It points out that the trade unions have already demonstrated their readiness to contribute to this process. This demand from the representatives of working people and the most representative civil society organisations remains the only satisfactory solution to ending the crisis, saving lives and charting a course for the future based on peace and social and economic justice, and peaceful coexistence.

We express solidarity with the trade unions of Ukraine and support restoration of peace and tranquillity as desired by the majority of the population of Ukraine, who have become hostage to geopolitical games."