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International Workers' Day: A Call to Reinvent the Normal

Indigenous and social movements, human rights organizations and defenders around the world call for global action towards transformative change in response to COVID-19

(May 1, 2020) On International Workers' Day, social movements, Indigenous Peoples, and human rights organizations across 77 countries, united in [ESCR-Net -International Network of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), have launched a [Global Call to Action](#) to demand that human rights are prioritized in every response to COVID-19 crisis, guided by impacted communities. Under the theme "Reinvent the Normal," the call underlines the realization of human rights for all as the only path forward.

The launch of the Global Call to Action on International Workers' Day recognizes the political significance of its origins as a worldwide collective push for advancing workers' rights. "Today, millions of people around the world face loss of jobs and livelihood," says Priyanthi Fernando, ESCR-Net Board Secretary and Executive Director of International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (Malaysia).

ESCR-Net warns that many workers—including domestic and agricultural workers—are employed in the informal sector with no access to social security and employment insurance. Others are forced to work in increasingly precarious conditions, without adequate protective gear and paid sick leave, or risk losing their jobs permanently.

"Glaring gaps in social protection systems have translated into intensified care burdens for women workers, who bear the brunt share of unrecognized and unpaid care work," says Ms. Fernando. "The pandemic has revealed what is truly essential work, yet those performing it continue to be systematically undervalued."

ESCR-Net emphasizes that despite decades of so-called corporate social responsibility, corporations are implicated in consistent abuses of workers' rights, as well as of wider environmental and human rights, and continue to capture government institutions and decision-making in attempts to benefit from the crisis.

“The COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it have both exposed and intensified systemic injustices. The current focus on ‘saving the economy’ instead of ensuring human rights is an alarming echo of longstanding trends. Neoliberal policy reforms have weakened labor protections, allowed capital to flow to wherever human rights and environmental protections are weakest, privatized and commodified basic necessities and imposed austerity on the majority while providing subsidized prosperity for the few,” says Fernanda Hopenhaym, ESCR-Net Board Chair and Co-Executive Director of PODER (Mexico).

The call points out that governments and corporations are imposing false choices. People are being asked to stay at home without secure housing, wash hands without access to clean water, and fill gaps in care amid failing healthcare and public systems. Likewise, ESCR-Net warns that public health measures provide some governments a pretext to adopt increasingly repressive measures that undermine human rights and pose long-term threats to civic engagement.

ESCR-Net calls for long-needed systemic transformations capable of making human rights and social justice a reality for all. In line with states' existing obligations, these demands include revaluing and ensuring care, defending hard-earned rights, banning profiteering off the pandemic, providing for a just recovery and ultimately “reinventing the normal” based on alternatives already being modeled by Indigenous Peoples and other communities.

"There is an urgent need to ensure Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determine their own economic, political and cultural models. These alternatives value care and the mutual well-being of people and nature. Other marginalized and impoverished communities are also practicing vital models of solidarity, mutual aid and cooperation,” says Binota Moy Dhamai, ESCR-Net Board Member and Executive Council Member of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (Thailand).

More about our response to the COVID-19 crisis here: <https://www.escr-net.org/covid19>

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