

Cosatu: Statement by Patrick Craven, Congress of South African Trade Unions spokesperson on World day for decent work (08/10/2009)

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The pickets to mark the World Day for Decent Work got off to a great start throughout the country in South Africa yesterday, with COSATU President, Sidumo Dlamini, joining hundreds of workers who picketed outside their firms during the tea and lunch breaks.

In South Africa, the focus was on labour broking, which COSATU has vowed to see outlawed.

The President joined the picketing workers at Formscaff and Bell Equipment in the east of Johannesburg. The workers told the President that the two firms have a track record of employing workers through labour brokers.

Workers embarked in various forms of actions including marches and picketing in major towns, shopping malls, workplaces, business chambers and handing over of memorandum to the Department of Labour offices throughout the country.

Addressing the workers, the President said that COSATU had been steadfast in its call for the total banning of labour brokers; a practice that he said was tantamount to human trafficking.

He said that labour broking in the country had opened floodgates for the exploitation of workers. "This practice has undermined the principle of equal pay for equal work because workers employed by labour brokers do not enjoy the same benefits as permanent workers and their salaries are ridiculously low," said the President.

Workers employed by labour brokers laid bare all the hardships they constantly face in their workplaces as a result of the labour broking practice. The workers said that labour brokers have refused to allow them to unionise as they were anti-trade unionism.

One worker said she had been working for a labour broker for seven years, but she did not have a place of work and she did not know who her employer was. Another employer said she had been working at the post office for 10 years under a labour broker and her colleagues who are permanently employed by the post office earn much better than her although they are doing the same job. While my colleagues also enjoy benefits such as medical aid, housing allowance, pension and unemployment insurance fund, I have no benefits at all.

In the Afternoon, the workers, led by the COSATU President, picketed outside the Ekurhuleni Municipality's Council Chambers where the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Labour conducted public hearings on whether labour brokering in the country should be scrapped. COSATU, who mobilised workers employed by labour brokers, community and its affiliated members, made submissions to the portfolio committee, calling for the total banning of labour brokers.

After the hearings, the President joined the Members of Parliament in an unannounced visit to Primrose Mines, in Johannesburg to inspect the conditions in hostels under which the workers employed by labour brokers lived. The delegation was shocked to learn that there were still employers who put workers in squalid conditions such as the ones they witnessed at Primrose Gold Mines. The workers lived in hostels with broken windows, dirty walls and leaking roof.

They also told the delegation that they had not been paid for two months and as a result they are unable to support their families back home as the employer had told them that the production had not been up to scratch for the past month.

The COSATU leadership together with the Members of Parliament vowed to alert the Department of Labour about the working conditions at the Primrose Mine and assured the workers that they would return soon in the mine with Labour Inspectors.