GENERAL COUNCIL

Brasilia, Brazil, 3 - 5 December 2024

Agenda item 9

ITUC Policies

(c) Peace and Common Security

1. "Not only does war kill workers by the thousand, nay, by the million, destroy their homes, lay waste the fields which took them centuries of effort to cultivate, raze to the ground the factories they built with their own hands, and reduce for years the standard of living of the working masses, but it also gives man an increasingly acute feeling of his helplessness before the forces of violence, and consequently severely retards his progress toward an age of peace, justice, and well-being." Léon Jouhaux – Nobel Lecture 1951 – NobelPrize.org

Historic background

2. The international trade union movement has historically been closely connected to the peace movement rooted in the desire for social justice, workers' rights, and human dignity and a shared belief that true peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of equitable conditions for all people. From their early existence, trade unions recognised that wars were often fought for the benefit of the elite, at the expense of the working class, who were sent to the front lines and have advocated for peace, linking the broader goal of preventing wars that disproportionately impact the working class to the struggles of workers.

3. The international trade union movement fought for the abolition of slavery and against colonialism, recognising them as deeply violent systems of oppression that laid the groundwork for global conflict and tensions leading up to the First World War. European powers violently exploited African, Asian, and the Caribbean, extracting resources, enslaving populations, and asserting control through brutal colonial rule. This scramble for colonies, driven by industrial competition, exacerbated rivalries among European nations as they vied for dominance and territorial expansion. The dehumanisation inherent in slavery and the oppression of colonialism not only devastated colonised societies but also fostered nationalist tensions in Europe. These

imperial ambitions fuelled militarism and alliances, contributing to the geopolitical volatility that ultimately sparked the First World War.

4. After World War I, trade unions supported the establishment of the International Labour Organisation and the League of Nations as vehicles for maintaining peace and preventing future conflicts. The labour movement's push for social justice was intrinsically tied to the idea that lasting peace could only be achieved through international cooperation and the fair treatment of workers globally. While the League of Nations Covenant focused on territorial integrity and disarmament, the ILO's constitution confirmed that vision in its first sentence: 'universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice'. In Europe, the rise of fascism further united the labour and peace movements in their opposition to totalitarian regimes that threatened both workers' freedoms and global stability. Fascist ideologies – both then and now –glorify the use of military force, authoritarian control, and the subordination of individual rights to the state. Militarism under fascism serves as both a tool for internal repression and a means to achieve external conquest, reinforcing the idea that violence and war are necessary to secure national strength and unity.

5. World War II exposed the failure of the League of Nations to preserve peace and the need for multilateral reform. The international community decided to outlaw war by establishing an international prohibition on the use of force among states, except in cases of self-defence. The founding of the United Nations in 1945, with a strong focus on peace, human rights, and social justice, was welcomed by trade unions as a platform to advocate for workers' rights on a global scale. The ILO's constitution was updated through the Philadelphia Declaration to clarify that peace can only be lasting when 'all human beings, irrespective of race, creed, or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity'. During the Cold War, trade unions throughout the world continued to champion both peace and workers' rights, often working in tandem with peace organisations to protest against nuclear proliferation and the arms race. Trade unions have supported the 'Common Security' approach that played a major role in ending the Cold War. The Common Security approach, introduced in the 1982 Palme Commission report, shifted Cold War thinking by emphasising that no nation could achieve lasting security through military dominance, but only through mutual cooperation, diplomacy, and disarmament. This approach promoted dialogue, trust-building, and shared responsibility for global peace, helping to de-escalate tensions and pave the way for more constructive East-West relations.

6. Trade unions and social movements in the Global South have made significant contributions to world peace and the international order after World War II. Their efforts in anti-colonial struggles and in promoting peace through various platforms, including the United Nations, have shaped global politics and fostered a more equitable world order. A case in point was the wave of independence and anti-colonialism in Africa, which began in the late 1950s and continued through the 1960s and 1970s. In Asia, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Sukarno championed non-violent resistance and self-determination. Finally, many newly independent nations from Africa and Asia played a key role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement

(NAM), which promoted peace at the global level. By aligning themselves with liberation movements and advocating for justice, the labour movement played an active role in the wave of decolonisation following World War II.

7. As the world entered the late 20th and early 21st centuries, globalisation and the rise of neoliberal economic policies posed new challenges to trade unions, as they grappled with issues such as job insecurity, wage stagnation, and the erosion of social protection. These economic pressures were linked to global conflicts, as competition for resources and market dominance continued to fuel tensions between nations. In response, trade unions increasingly adopted a global perspective, recognising that the fight for workers' rights was inextricably linked to the broader struggle for peace. The ITUC has been a vocal advocate for both labour rights and peace, emphasising the need for fair trade, social justice, and conflict prevention in its global campaigns since its foundation in 2006. The preamble of the ITUC's Constitution calls it to 'uphold […] fervently the maintenance and strengthening of peace and commits itself to a world free of weapons of mass destruction and to general disarmament. It proclaims the right of all peoples to self-determination and to live free from aggression and totalitarianism under a government of their own choosing. It rejects recourse to war to resolve conflict, and condemns terrorism, colonialism and militarism, as well as racism and sexism.' Since their inception, trade unions have protested against institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which perpetuate economic policies that lead to inequality, exploitation, and conflict. Economic justice and peace are inseparable.

8. In 2017, the effects of climate change became increasingly evident with intensified flooding, earthquakes and wildfires across the world. That year, the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted a new international labour standard, the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205). It updated the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71), with a view to broadening its scope and providing up-to-date guidance on the role of employment and decent work in prevention, recovery, peace and resilience in response to crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters. It also expanded the focus of the guidance on reconstruction and recovery to include prevention and preparedness. The Recommendation on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience provides a unique normative framework focusing on world of work-related measures to prevent and respond to the devastating effects of conflicts and disasters on economies and societies. The instrument underlines the importance of rights at work, labour administration, public services, social protection, as well as corporate due diligence and international cooperation, while paying special attention to children, young people, minority groups, women, migrants, refugees, and other displaced people.

9. Trade unions promote the peaceful resolution of disputes over scarce resources through collective bargaining. Their inclusivity reduces tensions between different communities. By advocating for economic equality, fair labour practices, and inclusive policies, trade unions help address the root causes of conflict, thereby contributing to more durable and just peace settlements. As such, throughout history, trade union involvement has often been crucial in conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction. Trade unions have contributed to peace processes by opposing war,

facilitating dialogue, supporting democratic movements, participating in post-conflict reconstruction, exerting international pressure, promoting social dialogue, educating workers, and directly participating in peace negotiations.

10. In 2022, the ITUC, in partnership with the Olof Palme Centre and the International Peace Bureau, launched the Common Security 2022 report, developed by a high-level global commission formed to tackle contemporary security risks in the world. The commission used the framework of 'common security' to develop a blueprint for survival in the face of extreme threats to human safety: climate change, unbalanced globalisation, inequality, economic insecurity, crumbling disarmament treaties, military aggression, pandemics and the decline of democracy.

Contemporary security risks

11. In 2023, **a record number of 59 ongoing armed conflicts** were recorded globally, the highest number of state-based conflicts since 1946. The past three years have been the most violent since the end of the Cold War. The United Nations alone documented over 33,000 civilian deaths in armed conflicts in 2023. This is a 72 per cent increase compared to the previous year. In recent years, there has been a surge in military coups and political instability, further contributing to violent unrest and the militarisation of internal conflicts. By the end of 2023, an estimated 117.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations. With world military expenditure increasing for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, it has reached a total of US$2,443 billion – the highest level ever recorded. The international rules prohibiting the use of force by States are crumbling. International agreements curbing conventional arms trade and proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are not respected and governments continue to prepare for war. This escalation of conflict is part of a broader multifaceted existential crisis. Recent pandemics, climate disasters and the global economic impact of escalating conflict have brutally exposed that the world is more interdependent than ever and that the risks to common human security are not merely military.

12. **A multipolar world and failing multilateralism:** Since the end of the Cold War, new powers have emerged on the world's stage with differentiated interests and alliances. Global governance, represented by the UN system, is under attack and rapidly losing its ability to tackle global challenges precisely at a critical moment when common human security requires trust and trust-building processes between nations.

13. **Global warming and the climate crisis:** In addition to nuclear weapons, the world is facing a new, truly imminent existential risk. If unaddressed, climate change will end our civilisation. Common human security requires urgent climate action.

14. **Inequality:** Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has grown to become the dominant economic model, leading to unbalanced globalisation. Four decades of individualism and profit maximisation through minimising investment in jobs, wages and social security have left the world with a ticking time bomb of critical economic divergence and poverty. Common human security requires a New Social Contract recognised by all.

15. **Weak democracies and shrinking democratic space:** Trust in governments is at a historic low. Populism and right-wing extremism are on the rise. History teaches that they inevitably lead to strongmen in power, aggression and competitive rivalry, rather than cooperation for collective progress. Common human security requires trust between people and between people and their government.

16. **New unmanned weapons of mass destruction:** Conventional weapons are the most common type of armament globally and historically the most commonly used in conflict. Despite international regulation, we observe continued breaches of the prohibition on the export of conventional weapons to active conflict zones or violations of arms embargoes. However, until recent years, nuclear weapons were clearly the most powerful lethal force. Unfortunately, that existential threat to humankind and the false ideology of military deterrence used by nuclear weapons powers to rule the world are still present. In addition, technological development has created a new arms race in cutting-edge military capabilities – such as Artificial Intelligence technology, cyber warfare, space-based systems and hypersonic missiles – that have the potential to be even more dangerous and devastating to humanity than the arms built up during the original Cold War. Furthermore, we observe a growing threat of the development and use of chemical and biological weapons, despite clear prohibitions in international law Common human security and trust between nations and people cannot be achieved through confrontation, re-building arsenals, and shows of force. A massive global-scale disarmament and the total prohibition of nuclear weapons are the only options to bring back humanity from the brink.

A vision for common human security in the 21st century

17. As the world's largest democratic and representative social movement, the ITUC and its affiliates share a commitment to **a global future grounded in peace, disarmament, and common human security**. In a world increasingly characterised by militarisation, inequality, and conflict, lasting peace and human security can only be achieved **through justice, solidarity, and the responsible governance of resources**.

18. The ITUC calls on all nations and multilateral organisations to place peace at the heart of their policies and international relations, rejecting the notion that military force or armed conflict can sustainably resolve global disputes. Instead, the ITUC advocates for **diplomacy, cooperation, and multilateralism** as the cornerstones of peaceful conflict resolution. At the heart of this vision is the concept of **common security**. Common security is based on the idea that peace and safety for one are dependent on peace and safety for all. No nation or individual can achieve true security in isolation. It requires global solidarity, respect for international law, and a commitment to resolving conflicts through dialogue and cooperation rather than force and domination.

19. The ITUC stands for **democracy** as a critical requirement for peace and vice versa. Democratic governance systems should uphold accountability, transparency, and public participation, which help prevent conflict and foster stability. In democracies, leaders are accountable to their people, making it harder to pursue aggressive or unpopular wars, as the costs of conflict are directly felt by the electorate that wants a

decent job and a decent life. Democratic institutions, such as free trade unions, a free press, an independent judiciary, and regular elections, encourage peaceful conflict resolution and negotiation, both domestically and internationally. Strong democracies will pressure their leaders to deliver the required New Social Contract. They are more likely to respect human rights and provide spaces for dissent, reducing the likelihood of internal violence or unrest. Open dialogue, institutional checks and balances, and public oversight make democracies more conducive to maintaining peace, both within their borders and in their relations with other states.

20. **True security comes from meeting the basic needs of all people**. Human security is about protecting individuals from violence, hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation. It requires creating conditions where people can live with dignity, free from fear and want. The ITUC commits to working for a world where social justice, decent work, and equal opportunity for all are the foundation of peace and security, and it stands in solidarity with workers in conflict zones, calling for their rights and safety to be protected. The ITUC calls for a fundamental rethinking of security policies – moving away from military solutions and towards **human-centred security and resilience strategies that prioritise economic justice, social protection, and environmental sustainability**.

21. Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the active presence of **justice, equality, and respect for human and labour rights**. The ITUC believes that the protection of workers, the promotion of decent work (especially collective bargaining as the best means to resolve disputes), and the equitable distribution of wealth are essential to building societies where peace is sustainable, and conflict can be prevented. The ITUC calls attention to **ILO Recommendation No. 205**, adopted in 2017, as the first international labour standard applicable to both post-conflict situations as well as to the prevention of conflicts. In line with the Recommendation, national and international cooperation plans and measures should ensure labour-rights-based prevention and preparedness. Accordingly, we call for international coordination of recovery from conflicts that does not worsen or deteriorate international human and labour rights, but instead improves them. We emphasise paragraph 46 of the Recommendation, which indicates that 'the ILO should play a leading role in assisting Members to provide crisis responses based on employment and decent work".

22. The ITUC envisions a world where **disarmament** is a global priority, and the arms race is a relic of the past, calling on governments to **slash military spending**, commit to the prohibition of the arms trade, the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and the reallocation of resources toward critical sectors that benefit humanity – such as healthcare, education, social welfare and a Just Transition to a sustainable world. Disarmament is not only about reducing the tools of war but also about fostering trust among nations. In a world free from the looming threat of armed conflict, societies can flourish, and nations can invest in the well-being of their people. Disarmament agreements should be reinforced and expanded, ensuring that the dangerous proliferation of weapons does not undermine collective security and peace. The **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** should play a leading role, while similar legal tools should be developed or reinforced in relation to other weapons of mass destruction as well as conventional weapons.

23. While there are jobs and often decent jobs in the military-industrial complex, there are better alternatives for investment in jobs that would lead to more sustainable growth, human security and resilience. Under international coordination, **fair conversion plans** should be developed to channel investment from the military-industrial complex to social and environmentally sound initiatives.

24. Women, men, boys, and girls are differently affected by security crises. **Women** and children are often the first signifiers of a humanitarian crisis. Statistics show that when women are at the negotiating table, peace agreements are more likely to last 15 years or longer. Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, only 13 per cent of negotiators and just 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes around the world. Peace processes should, in line with UNGA Res. 1325, be inclusive and actively engage women, young people, and marginalised communities. Workers, women, youth, and marginalised communities must have a central role in shaping these policies, as they are often the most affected.

A Framework for Action

25. Our vision for peace, disarmament, and common human security can only be realised through collective action. The ITUC and its affiliates are committed to working with governments, international organisations, and civil society to advance this cause. Together, we must dismantle the structures that perpetuate violence and conflict and replace them with institutions that promote justice, equity, and cooperation.

26. The ITUC will **build peace awareness and education** for its members and the public and strengthen its members' capacities to engage in peacebuilding and peacekeeping discussions and processes.

27. Building on the ITUC Melbourne Congress statement and the recommendations of the Global Commission for Common Security 2022, the ITUC will continue to assert its role in the global peace movement, **strengthen its strategic alliances with key organisations in the peace movement**, such as the International Peace Bureau (IPB), and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) among others, and will work towards:

   - **Promoting the peaceful resolution of conflict and the respect of international law**, rejecting the recourse to war except in certain circumstances recognised under international law, condemning terrorism, colonialism and militarism and advocating for universal and equal accountability under international law, and respect for the authority of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to hold states and individuals accountable for all violations of international law..

   - **Defending democracy and freedom of association and collective bargaining rights**, including by expanding the international network of anti-fascist trade unions to fight against authoritarianism, autocracies, and extreme right-wing movements that aim to annihilate free trade unions and pluralism; continuing to monitor human and trade union rights and coordinating international trade unions solidarity support to trade unions under attack.

- **The ITUC will call to convene a special UN General Assembly meeting for disarmament to set a global commitment to reduce military expenditure by two per cent per year,** establishing a UN 'fair conversion' institution and aiming to create 575 million new jobs by 2030 through converting jobs and technology in the weapons industry into environmental and health innovation, vaccines, treatments, including for victims of violence and war and creating civil service options as an alternative to military service; and using the reduction in military spending, currently a staggering US$2,443 billion annually, to generate a 'global peace dividend' to fund the UN Sustainable Development Goals, UN peacebuilding, and a Just Transition to climate-friendly jobs. Exposing the private profits of companies benefiting from the military-industrial complex, as well as their lobby strategies, to highlight corporate capture of governments, wherever it occurs. Disarmament would free-up billions of US dollars to invest in the New Social Contract.

- **Reimagining the global architecture for peace**, confirming our commitment to multilateralism, and advocating for a revitalisation of the global multilateral system to be more inclusive, democratic, transparent, and accountable, including through UN reform with more power to the General Assembly to overcome the Security Council's minority veto power, and a central role for trade unions and the ILO in the global peace architecture. The goal is to reach 50 per cent women leaders' participation at all levels in the UN's New Agenda for Peace, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and a focus on promotion of ILO Recommendation 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience. UN reform should go hand in hand with reform of the global trade and financial system to build in labour safeguards to protect human dignity from global economic competition.

- **Revitalising nuclear arms control and disarmament** using the opportunity of the 80th anniversary of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings in 2025, in particular by encouraging countries to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), as well as reinstating nuclear arms control treaties, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), with an urgent moratorium on the deployment of INF land-based systems in Europe. This includes concrete, time-bound, and transparent nuclear disarmament plans for Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT); a firm 'no first use' policy for all nuclear-weapon states; the establishment of nuclear weapon-free zones, particularly in the Middle East/West Asia, Northeast Asia, and in Europe and the reinstatement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) needs to be able to carry out inspections in all countries, and States that carried out nuclear testing need to provide immediate victim assistance and environmental remediation, particularly to Indigenous communities. The ITUC will continue to bring trade union delegations to the TPNW Meetings of States Parties and the NPT Review conferences.

- **Regulation and prohibition of the arms trade and new military technologies and outer space weapons**. Obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty should be

strictly observed by all 130 ratifying Member States, particularly by the main conventional arms producers. The international community should take immediate steps to develop a more progressive international agreement that goes beyond regulation of conventional arms trade and obligates States to curb the trade of conventional arms, with a view supporting global disarmament. In addition to promoting the ratification and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, and its progressive revision, there is a need for a ban of cyberattacks on nuclear command and control systems, accompanied by the disentanglement of conventional and nuclear weapon command and control systems; a prohibition of autonomous weapons systems, to ensure that humans maintain control over weapons and armed conflict; a prohibition of automated nuclear weapons command and control systems; a prohibition of attacks on space-based early warning satellites and early warning communications systems; the strengthening of the Outer Space Treaty and the establishment of a new culture of responsible space governance to prevent further militarisation of space. This should reinforce international space law to safeguard its use for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all humanity, limiting hypersonic missiles, and creating a time frame for banning these weapons.

28. The future of humanity depends on our ability to reject militarism and embrace peace. We call on all nations to act now, redirecting resources away from war and toward building a world where security is shared, peace is lasting, and dignity is universal.

29. **The General Council is requested to comment on the vision statement and comment on, or endorse the framework for action.**