

UNI COMMERCE DECLARATION FOR FOOD RETAIL WORKERS

We, the food retail workers, have been playing a key role during the global pandemic. Even under lock-down and other Covid-19 restrictions, we have kept working to make sure that people have access to their vital needs.

We have been on the frontline of this crisis and we have never stepped back! We have worked hard so our communities are supplied with food.

We have been appreciated. We have been applauded. We have been recognized as essential workers. We have been even called heroes.

To be honest, it felt good to be recognized for the work we have always been doing. Indeed, we were always there. The shelves do not fill themselves; we were the ones who are placing food on shelves very early each and every morning.

We were behind the tills, scanning items and processing the payment. We were cleaning the stores, we were securing the stores; we were helping people to shop at stores; we were working hard in the warehouses; and we were distributing and delivering products day and night.

Indeed, we were already doing an essential work. Sadly, we were almost invisible until Covid-19 crisis. We were barely appreciated for the important work we do. More importantly, visibility, recognition and appreciation do not necessarily come with better protection, rights and pay.

A considerable number of food retail workers have been infected with Covid-19 and we have lost some fellow workers due to the lack of proper protection from pandemic. Some employers were so focused on their profits, they had little attention to pay for our protection. It took months for many governments to make mask-wearing mandatory at stores and some governments did not even bother to take any steps to protect us.

And a deadly pandemic is not the single risk we face. Violence, abuse, and harassment targeting retail workers have increased and even doubled in some countries during the Covid-19 crisis. We have been spat at, coughed on, threatened, and even attacked by the customers for whom we have been doing our best.



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Some companies introduced additional payment or bonus but many of them have already withdrawn these extra payments although the pandemic is not over yet. And some companies used Covid-19 as an excuse to engage in massive dismissals, to attack on our rights, to get rid of trade unions and to undermine collective agreements and bargaining. As if Covid-19 was not enough, now we are facing a re-structuring pandemic in many companies and countries which may kill jobs and spread precarious employment on inferior terms.

We are food retail workers from all around the world. We are commerce unions representing food retail workers across the globe. We are UNI Commerce Global Union, the global federation of three million of retail workers and their unions.

And we:

- 1) Demand proper and adequate protection from Covid-19 which is far from being over.
- 2) Call all retailers to follow UNI Commerce Guidelines for the protection of food retail workers and engage with commerce unions and UNI Commerce to make sure that workers have access to the protection they deserve.
- 3) Urge governments to take all necessary actions to protect food retail workers from Covid-19 and third-party abuse, violence, and harassment.
- 4) Invite all relevant parties to collaborate in order to protect jobs and employment in food retail and stop all initiatives that will cut jobs under the disguise of restructuring.

While we all hear calls for “going back to normal” we deny the so-called standards or normalities of our sector which are identified around low wages, high precarity, intense workload, violence, and underrepresentation. Hereby we demand what we deserve:

- 1) We demand Covid-19 payments and bonuses to be re-instated and made permanent. We demand a fair pay; we demand a living wage for the essential work we do.
- 2) We demand secure and stable employment. We demand decent working conditions, acceptable workload and responsible restructuring that protects and promotes the quantity and quality of employment.
- 3) We demand proper occupational health and safety. We demand equality and necessary action to avoid any kind of discrimination.
- 4) And most importantly we demand removal of all obstacles to union organizing and collective bargaining. We demand respect for union rights!

And hereby, we declare once again that:

We are essential workers and we deserve essential rights.

Fully supporting UNI Global Union's “Essential Workers” campaign; we will fight in shoulder to shoulder to get what we demand and what we all deserve!

And in solidarity, we will win!