



1 INTERNATIONAL LABOUR DAY MAY 2026

PRESS STATEMENT

Theme: “Safeguarding Uganda’s Progress: Empowering the Workforce and Promoting Decent Work for Competitive Enterprises”

The Platform for Labour Action (PLA) joins workers across Uganda and the world at large in commemorating the International Labour Day 2026 and reflecting on the critical role of decent work in sustaining national development and enterprise competitiveness.

This year’s theme underscores a fundamental truth: **Uganda’s economic progress depends on the strength, protection, and productivity of its workforce.** Without decent work, the country risks undermining both social justice and sustainable economic growth.

Uganda’s labour market continues to face deep structural challenges. Over 80% of the workforce remains in the informal economy, characterized by low earnings, job insecurity, and limited legal protection (UBOS, 2024; ILO, 2023). 73% of employed persons do not enjoy their fundamental labour rights and benefits, while many experience various forms of workplace violence and exploitation. While unemployment figures remain relatively modest, underemployment and working poverty are widespread, especially among youth and women (World Bank, 2024). In addition, only 6.2% of the total population is covered with at least one form of social protection with 15.2% of the employed population covered by social security schemes, such as NSSF or PSPS while 16% of the employed population covered for work-related injuries. These conditions not only affect workers and expose the majority of them to economic shocks and vulnerability, they also constrain enterprise growth.

“Uganda cannot build competitive enterprises on the foundation of cheap and vulnerable labour. Investing in decent work, fair wages, social protection, and skills development, is not a luxury; it is the engine of sustainable economic growth. The time to act is now.” Executive Director-Platform for Labour Action (PLA)

PLA emphasizes that **decent work is not a cost to business, it is a foundation for competitive enterprises.** Economies that invest in fair wages, skills development, and worker protection are more productive, resilient, and inclusive.

PLA CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION

To the Government of Uganda:

1. Government must take decisive steps to enact and implement sectoral based minimum wages, grounded in evidence and linked to productivity and cost of living. In absence of a fair and predictable wage floor, many workers remain trapped in work-poverty despite being employed which undermines morale, productivity and overall economic resilience.

Voices from Workers

- a) *“I work every day, but my income is never enough to meet basic needs. Without a fair wage or social protection, even a small problem like sickness pushes my family into crisis. We are not asking for too much, just work that can sustain a decent life.”* Machine operator in , Mukono industrial area
 - b) *“In the factory, we work long hours to meet production targets, but wages remain low and job security is uncertain. When workers are not treated fairly, it affects our morale and ultimately the quality and productivity of what we produce.”* Factory worker, Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area
 - c) *“As a teacher, I carry the responsibility of shaping the next generation, yet the challenges of low pay and limited resources make it difficult to perform at my best. Investing in teachers is investing in the country’s future workforce.”* Public school teacher, Uganda
2. Strengthen labour administration and labour inspection systems with increased funding, staffing, and use of digital tools to ensure compliance and promotion of decent work.
 3. Expand inclusive social protection systems including developing a comprehensive and well-connected and coordinated Social Protection registry for the country, deliberate targeting of the hard to reach groups such as the informal workers, and vulnerable groups.

4. Invest in skills development and industrial policy alignment, ensuring that education and training systems respond to labour market demands as well as increased funding for the education sector to address the bottle necks for the vulnerable households.
5. Promote a care economy agenda, recognizing unpaid care work and investing in care services to unlock women’s full participation in the labour market.

To Employers and the Private Sector:

1. Employers are urged to prioritize fair wages, safe working conditions, and formal employment arrangements as drivers of productivity and competitiveness.
2. Respect for workers’ rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, is essential for stable and sustainable enterprises.

To Workers and Trade Unions:

Workers must continue to organize, build collective voice, and actively engage in social dialogue. At the same time, investment in skills upgrading and productivity will be critical in adapting to a changing labour market.

CONCLUSION

Uganda’s future will be determined by how effectively it transforms its growing labour force into a productive, protected, and empowered workforce. Safeguarding Uganda’s progress requires placing decent work at the center of economic policy. Empowered workers are the foundation of competitive enterprises and inclusive national development.

On this Labour Day, PLA calls on all stakeholders to act decisively and collectively to ensure that no worker is left behind.

Grace Mukwaya
Executive Director
Platform for Labour Action (PLA)