

May Day 2026

A Message from **Shoya Yoshida**, ITUC-Asia Pacific General Secretary

Peace, Democracy, and Decent Work Workers' Demands in Times of Crisis

A world under strain

As we mark May Day 2026, we reaffirm, together with workers across the Asia Pacific and around the world, our unwavering commitment to decent work, social justice, and peace. May Day is not only a commemoration of past struggles, but a call to defend and advance the rights, dignity, and aspirations of working people in an increasingly uncertain world.

Today, peace and democracy are under growing strain. Escalating geopolitical tensions, ongoing wars, and the increasing use of military force across regions are undermining the foundations of international cooperation and the rule of law. These developments are taking place alongside weakening multilateralism and shrinking democratic space, where decision-making processes are becoming less transparent and less inclusive. At the same time, economic instability, intensified by conflict and crisis, is deepening inequality and insecurity across societies, including in Asia and the Pacific region.

Workers bearing the burden

Amidst this reality, workers are always among the first to suffer and the last to recover. Wars and conflict destroy livelihoods, displace communities, and place workers, particularly migrant workers, in situations of heightened vulnerability. Many are left without protection, representation, or access to basic support in times of crisis.

The effects of war also reverberate far beyond the battlefield. Disruptions to energy supply and high cost of energy contribute to rising costs of living, unstable employment, and deteriorating working conditions. Across our region, workers are facing rising living costs, job insecurity, incomes far below living wages, and deteriorating working conditions. Informal workers, migrant workers, and those in precarious forms of employment are especially exposed.

These pressures are particularly visible in sectors such as the platform economy. Ride-hailing drivers and delivery riders, whose work is directly dependent on fuel and transport costs, are seeing their earnings eroded as fuel prices surge. At a time when rising costs are eroding workers' incomes, platform companies continue to take the usual significant commissions from each transaction, with little effort to share the burden. As a result, workers are left to absorb the impact of the crisis almost entirely on their own.

At the same time, these impacts are unfolding alongside deeper structural changes in the world of work. Digitalisation, automation, and new business models are transforming employment relationships, often in ways that shift risks onto workers. A key feature of this transformation is the widespread misclassification of workers as independent contractors, denying them recognition as workers and excluding them from labour rights and protections.

Workers bearing the burden

Addressing these interconnected challenges requires urgent and coordinated action.

First, there is an urgent need to uphold peace, strengthen multilateralism, and ensure respect for international law. The escalation of conflicts carries profound human and economic costs, which are ultimately borne by workers and their communities.

Second, governments must act decisively to protect workers from the economic impacts of crisis. Measures to stabilise the cost of living, including rising energy and fuel costs, and to safeguard jobs are critical. Ensuring that all workers earn living wages is central to this effort. Living wages are a fundamental form of protection, enabling workers to withstand rising costs and economic shocks and to live in dignity, not merely to survive. Moreover, those most affected, particularly informal workers, migrant workers, and those in precarious employment, must have access to adequate and universal social protection.

Third, structural changes in the world of work must deliver decent work for all. New forms of work, particularly in the platform economy, are increasingly characterised by misclassification, algorithmic management, and weakened protections. These issues must be addressed to ensure that all workers are recognised as workers and able to exercise their rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining. In this context, the adoption of a new international labour standard on platform work at the International Labour Conference this year is both timely and necessary. A Convention, supported by a Recommendation, must guarantee fair remuneration, access to social protection, and effective representation.



Photo: Trade Union Congress of the Philippines

