



**Uganda Horticultural, Industrial, Service Providers
and Allied Workers' Union (UHISPAWU)**

Head Office Kawuku Entebbe Road.

General Chairman : Kayanja Ivan P.O Box 37287, Kampala Uganda

General Secretary : Nassali Janepher Tel: 0414698247

General Treasurer : AdongRebecca Email: ugandaflowerworkers@gmail.com

Affiliated to National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)

"For Love and Justice to all workers"

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**PRESS STATEMENT BY THE HORTICULTURE UNION ON THE EFFECTS OF COVID 19 TO
FLOWER FARM WORKERS AND THE WORKERS OF UGANDA AT LARGE**

Uganda Horticultural industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union (UHISPAWU) a Trade Union representing workers In the Horticultural Sector in Uganda still struggled to protect and promote the rights of workers amidst the covid 19 Crisis.

As the globe is struggling with the pandemic covid 19, the Flower sector has been hit hard locally, regionally and globally since the world is under lock down, no parties, no weddings, burials for those dying as a result of the virus or even visiting loved ones, these are the occasions when flowers are used most.

The Sector also benefits highly in days like Christmas, Easter, Valentines day, Mothers day, among others.

This year it has been the opposite since the lock downs started in Europe where most of Ugandan Flowers are exported to.

At the beginning of March, Flora Holland one of the biggest flower Auctions in the world (based in Netherlands) expressed their fear of not surviving the Crisis. "This scared me so much because in December 2019 through support from Mondaal FNV a Centre for Trade Unions in Netherlands, I visited the same auction in a bid to understand better the production chain of flowers and use the same in Negotiating better terms and conditions for workers in the Flower Farms in Uganda.

In the first week of March we decided to put on hold the then Negotiations because we had no idea what the future of our sector was.

In the Second week of March I wrote a letter to all flower farms requesting for an urgent visit for three reasons:

1. Discuss the Safety preventive measures that needed to be put in place in order to protect workers from getting this deadly virus or, Inspect the ones they had already put.
2. Discuss with Management immediate challenges that were likely to affect employees in the Sector.
3. Explain to Union Leaders why Negotiations were put on hold until Further Notice.

When I found out that Flower Farms in Kenya had laid off tens of thousands of employees, I realized that we needed to reach out to all farms faster than we had initially planned.

In doing all this, we were in good communication with the Executive Director of Uganda Flower Exporters Association(UFEA) because over the years, we have built such a good working relationship with the Association and the Managements of different Flower Farms.

The Farms accepted the untimely changes in the program which I was making with just phone calls.

Majority of the farms especially Rose growers, were struggling and indeed had planned already to lay off employees, some farms had not put preventive measures, but some had put.

During our visits we advised them not to lay off employees but consider alternatives so that all employees keep their jobs.

Below are the measures discussed and agreed:

1. Reduction of a percentage of staff Salaries depending on the salary structures.
2. Alternating days for staff so that they avoid having so many employees in the Farm
3. Having Lunch in shifts
4. Making water and soap available in as many corners of the farms as possible so that workers can wash their hands, we also provided some ethereal and liquid soap to different farms.
5. Provide Masks to all employees
6. Strongly advised Management to punish any employee who refuses to follow the new safety measures in prevention of the Virus

7. Put in place urgent inspectors in the Farm from the Union or Occupational Safety and Health Committee to ensure that the measures are followed at all times.

The Chairman General NOTU Brother Usher Wilson Owere together with Uganda Police, and the media helped us access the only Farm which had denied us access. During our visits flower farm workers requested us to raise their voices so that they can access part of their NSSF savings if they reached in a situation like they are in now.

By 28th March a little close to 8,000 employees were working in the different flower farms.

When the Lock down started, some farms have resorted to having a few employees sleep at the Farms so that work does not stop completely, others still walk to the farms.

As of today the employees working are a little close to 3,500

As a result of the Lock down and social distancing, a little close to over 4,000 employees are in their homes, and majority of these are on unpaid leave without any support.

Unfortunately, they are not to be considered for the Government food support since they are considered as salary earners.

As a Trade Union, we would wish to support our members with food or cash since we have all their contacts, but we also do not have the resources.

As long as the situation does not normalize in Europe and locally, the Flower sector still faces a very big challenge yet it employees so many Ugandans with dependants.

As a Union, we are still in constant online talks with the employers to ensure that workers are not laid off during this trying period and I thank them for their positivity so far opposed to other sectors.

I also thank the workers who decided to leave their families and sleep at the farms.

Requests

- 1. Since many Companies have closed recently leaving of workers jobless, and many have been laid off, let the Government food support go beyond daily income earners and People with closed businesses so that workers like flower farm workers especially on unpaid leave, teachers especially in private schools who are only paid when they work, Workers that have been laid off in different companies, can also get food.**
- 2. Parliament to pass the NSSF bill into law but with clear emphasis on accessibility. As in when to access the money meaning putting provisions for early access and times of crisis like these. This will help workers to access their savings instead of waiting for them to die and give the money to those who didn't contribute it or even not getting it at all.**
- 3. Managements of Flower Farms, not to lay off employees, let us continue with social dialogue so that we survive together.**
- 4. All employers in the Country not to lay off their workers, let them have a human face and heart, let them try to borrow the above measures so that we survive together as Human beings**

Lessons Learnt as far as workers' representation is concerned

As a Union we have learnt mainly two lessons from this crisis;

- 1. It is important for all workers of this country to belong to Trade or Labour Union so that they have a bargaining power because the strength of a Trade Union is in numbers**
- 2. Very Important for Trade unions to create a good working relationship which can always enable good faith Negotiations and social dialogue even in a crisis like this one.**

United we stand, Divided we fall.

We shall over come.

For God and my Country

Nassali Janepher

General secretary

Horticulture Union

ugandaflowerworkers@gmail.com

Together with

Usher Wilson Owere Chairman General NOTU