

## “Safe Return to Work”



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Everyone wants to go to work and go back home safely. But the outbreak of COVID-19 has made the day-to-day living conditions of people around the world miserable. An escalation of the infection by COVID-19 has been compelling policymakers and task forces to take immediate and necessary measures to curb the transmission of this fast-spreading disease and to deter the subsequent increase in the death rate. The safe return of workers means saving society by preventing the spread of the disease.

Eritrea acted early on when a handful of cases were confirmed before the disease could pose a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of the people. The country twice announced strict lockdowns. Although the manufacturing sector, agriculture, commercial enterprises, industrial activities, and other production activities were allowed to operate fully. Some service rendering organizations have been reopened and this month schools and public transport have resumed their operations. A gradual relaxation of the strict lockdown seems to be underway. However, as the threat has not yet been eliminated, an ongoing campaign against COVID- 19 is still needed.

Considering the considerable socio-economic problems and the severe impact of the infectious disease on public health, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) has, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization (ILO), held a virtual workshop on communication strategies that should be applied in launching awareness-raising campaign against COVID-19.

Mr. Tekeste Baire, NCEW General Secretary, and Wafaa Abdelkader, ILO Workers Activities Specialist, gave welcoming remarks for the three-day virtual workshop.

Mr. Tekeste affirmed that the efforts to combat COVID-19 will be redoubled in line with the reopening of various services and the relaxation of the lockdown. “NCEW will stay committed to increasing awareness of workers on the prevention measures they need to take while they are at their work places,” he said.



“The virtual workshop would be a venue for sharing of experience among ILO specialists, representatives from the Ministry of Information as well as the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS), the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) and other organizations,” Mr. Tekeste added.

Ms. Wafaa, on her part, said that the workshop would be centered on strategies on safe return to work. She also informed the participants that the webinar would be launching a successful joint awareness-raising campaign against

COVID-19 in which every participant of the workshop would play a role to ensure a safe return to work.

Representatives from the Ministry of Information, NCEW, Eritel, NUEYS, and NUEW took part in the virtual workshop held from 19 to 21 April at the Conference Hall of the NCEW. The participants extensively discussed ways and means of carrying out an effective awareness-raising campaign against COVID-19 in connection with the upcoming commemoration of International Workers Day, 1st May.

Taking into account that various service rendering institutions have reopened and resumed activities, the participants identified target audiences for the awareness-raising campaign based on their vulnerability to COVID-19. Thus, most of the topics for a discussion focused on service providers who have frequent contact with people. They include health workers, public transport drivers, vendors, and catering service providers.

The reopening of various service rendering institutions is a step forward towards normalizing some socio-economic activities that were hampered by the outbreak of the disease. And the virtual workshop was quite essential in reminding the representatives from different ministries and organizations to plan and work on awareness-raising campaigns in an enhanced manner. The workshop called on the participants to take Workers Day as a starting point for making a commitment to prevent the further spread of the disease by making service rendering workers more aware of the prevention mechanisms of COVID-19.

Besides sharing experiences with the ILO specialists, the participants of the webinar made deliberations on various communication assets that would be utilized during the awareness-raising campaign, which is expected to be launched on May

1. Some of the communication tools considered to be effective in carrying out the campaign include programs to be broadcast on radio and television, articles to be published in newspapers, posters, and leaflets.

The participants further recommended that working from home and working in shifts should be encouraged whenever possible and necessary, while unnecessary travels and a large concentration of people in public transport should be avoided.



Mr. Mamadou Souare, ILO Communications and Publications Specialist, presented various helpful topics on Effective Advocacy and Campaign, Best Practice for website and Social Media as well as on Effective Communication Strategies and skills in campaigning against COVID-19.

Mr. Mamadou stressed that exponential death rates have not been registered in Eritrea owing to the strict policies, directives, and other measures the Government of Eritrea has taken to combat the spread of the disease.

Eritrea so far has confirmed infection cases of about 3500 and 10 deaths. The participants of the virtual workshop agreed that this figure should not fool anybody and underlined that COVID-19 is still a worrisome threat and everybody should seriously consider it as a killer disease. Let us ensure a safe return to work through collective efforts of waging awareness-raising campaigns against COVID-19. That was the primary concern of the virtual workshop.

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