

International Labour Conference

Address by Mr. Josef Bugeja

Secretary General – General Workers Union (Malta)

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Mr Chairman & Vice-Chairs,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and privileged to take the floor of the 108th International Labour Conference as representative of all Maltese workers.

Imagine a world of work where the working day was endless, there was no week-ends, there was no labour rights and no freedom of association? That's the workplace you might have faced if the International Labour Organization did not exist. Through its standard setting functions the ILO provided and continues to provide a strong mandate as enshrined in its Constitution which states, "*Universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.*" As the only tripartite organisation in the UN multilateral system, the ILO played a central role in promoting tripartism and social dialogue.

This year's conference marks the 100th anniversary of its creation. It is not only an opportunity to celebrate its history and achievements, but also to look forward to the next centenary. It provides us with a unique opportunity to

reaffirm the relevance of its global social contract and by the adoption of the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.

This is a challenging time for workers and trade unions. Despite huge advances, income inequality continues to rise, and millions of people are forced into modern day slavery or work in appalling working conditions without any type of protection or rights.

The global 4th Industrial Revolution is fundamentally changing the organisation of work and production on an unprecedented scale. Digitalisation have led to large scale platform employment, making it increasingly difficult for trade unions to organise workers or to distinguish the employer to bargain with. These developments are threatening the traditional model of industrial relations and will be a challenge for trade unions.

The overall erosion of the formal employment relationship is an issue which poses a lot of questions regarding the governance of work. How do we enforce labour laws? How can we provide a basic level of social security and social protection regardless of their employment status? Social partners have an obligation that full human rights, human dignity and decent work must remain the central point of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Let us not forget that the promotion of a decent work through sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment is the heart of the Social Development Agenda.

These challenges and others are addressed in ILO Global Commission report on the Future of Work. The report undertake an in-depth examination of the future of work and provide us with an analytical basis for the delivery of social justice, decent work and basic human rights in the 21st century.

On the Maltese local scene, our impressive economic growth has led to a scenario of full employment. In addition, to sustain this economic growth, we now have an additional 55,000 registered foreign employees. I attribute this unprecedented economic growth to a strong social dialogue, dynamic collective bargaining and the implementation of several national policies that make work pays. All pensions have been constantly increased on yearly basis and now no employee remain on the minimum wage for more than one year. We have been ranked first in the European Union for civil liberties. We have also made huge steps to eradicate poverty. Of course, this unprecedented economic growth also brought new major challenges in the shape of traffic rents and housing prices. This success is the result of policies founded on our unwavering principles of social justice, social inclusion, and social mobility. We are also pleased with the idea of introducing a European minimum wage as this will see a fairer distribution of wealth and a more social Europe.

In our pursuit to attain better working conditions, the General Workers' Union as one of the main Maltese social partners, is constantly engaged in the development of collective agreements and national policies. On the issue of precarious employment while we acknowledge that a lot have been done, we have not yet reached our objective to widen the principal of equal pay for job of equal value to cover employees performing the same job in the same workplace but paid differently because one is directly employed and the other is employed by a sub-contractor.

In an additional effort to address precarious work, abuse and exploitation of employees by some employers, we put forward a proposal to introduce compulsory trade union membership. This proposal will address the plight of

the most vulnerable categories of workers especially those in the lower income brackets or in small enterprises. Many of these workers are not unionised not because they don't want to join forces collectively, but because they are afraid of losing their job.

Finally, this is the time to come together. It is our duty and obligation to create a world where everyone has equal access to education, basic human rights and decent well-paid jobs. We need a human centred agenda and a universal labour guarantee. All this can be achieved through a strong tripartite cooperation and social dialogue.

Thank you.

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