

ILO MARKS 90 YEARS OF WORK WITH EVENTS ACROSS ASIA PACIFIC HIGHLIGHTING DECENT WORK AND FAIR GLOBALIZATION

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BANGKOK (ILO News) – Amid the worst financial and jobs crisis since the Great Depression, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is marking its 90th anniversary with a series of high level events across Asia and the Pacific, and around the world.

From 21 April to the end of the month, about 20 countries in the Asia and Pacific region have scheduled celebrations – from Pakistan to the Philippines and further out into the Pacific.

The events focus on the theme of social dialogue on decent work for a fair globalization. Worldwide, more than 100 countries will join, launching a global initiative aimed at fostering hope and action for an embattled world of work.

The anniversary events in Asia and Pacific were launched in Bangkok today, with an event co-sponsored by the ILO and the Ministry of Labour, Royal Thai Government. Thailand has been the host of the ILO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for more than 40 years.

Approximately 300 Thai and international participants joined representatives from Government, Workers' and Employers' organizations in the discussions. Participants heard video-messages from the ILO's Director General, Mr. Juan Somavia and H.E. Mr Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of Thailand. Ms Sachiko Yamamoto, Regional Director for the ILO Regional Office for Asia, and Mr. Phaithoon Kaeothong, Thailand's Minister of Labour made speeches.

Mr. Somavia told participants that the ILO's 90th anniversary came against "a backdrop of rising unemployment and underemployment, business closures, deteriorating conditions of work and the undermining of respect for rights at work, along with growing inequality, poverty and insecurity".

Mr. Somavia proposed that, as a concrete and practical initiative, the annual International Labour Conference (to be held in Geneva in June) agree on a Global Jobs Pact that would boost economic recovery and the construction of a new pattern of fairer and more inclusive globalization, focusing on the Decent Work Agenda.

"I would like to congratulate and commend the ILO for its longstanding commitments to social justice in general and incessant efforts to promote labour rights, in particular", Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva told participants. "In the world today, many countries are facing a serious economic downturn. Many workers are affected by lay-offs. Such economic and job crises are hitting hard particularly the Asian countries whose incomes depends on the labour of their workers. In this situation, the role of the ILO is even more important."

Ms Sachiko Yamamoto said, "the crisis we face today shows that the ILO's mandate is as fresh, relevant and universal today as it has ever been".

"The greening of the economy, and the emergence of a political will to drive that forward, is an opportunity to rebuild jobs and lives in a more sustainable way. Employment in Asia and the Pacific should not only meet our basic needs today but it should offer some hope of social and economic progress to individuals and societies. This is what we mean by decent work," she told those attending the Bangkok event.

The ILO was founded in 1919 the aftermath of World War I, on the principle that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice”, In the nine decades since this principle was expressed in its Constitution the ILO has responded to many crises through the world of work with consistent policy messages and practical action aimed at the pursuit of social justice. The concept of decent work is the contemporary expression of the ILO’s historic mission and is defined as opportunities for all women and men to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

The instruments developed within the ILO - through its three-part dialogue with Governments, workers and employers - have formed the basis for much of the world’s labour legislation and have guided key developments in the world of work. They cover conditions of work, occupational safety and health, social security, employment promotion, human resource development and the fundamental goals of freedom of association and collective bargaining, abolition of forced and child labour and non discrimination. They have also focused on specific groups, including indigenous peoples, migrant workers and disabled workers.

Noting that the celebration was an opportunity to reaffirm the ILO’s fundamental values and take action to confront the uncertainties working families and enterprises are facing today, Mr. Somavia added, “Together, let us make the policy choices that sustain the goal of decent work; and together, let us advance the cause of decent work for social justice and a fair globalization. That’s our mission, our mandate and our responsibility.”

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