

Opening remarks by the Director-General

IILS Research Conference

29 November 2006

Good morning and welcome to this first Research Conference of the International Institute for Labour Studies. We have among us academics and researchers, ILO staff and ILO constituents from the worlds of business, labour and government.

What a potent force and what a stimulating agenda.

The ILO is a values-based knowledge organization. Our effectiveness requires us to understand and measure the trends of the world of work, and the real impact of policies and institutions.

Within that, the role of the Institute is to be an antenna for change, understanding ahead of the curve the sorts of issues that are coming upon the world of work.

But we can't do it alone.

Our knowledge base depends enormously on the work of a wider research community, and we must take full advantage of your creativity, your ideas, your intellectual rigour, your commitment to many of our goals at the ILO.

And so the idea of this conference was born.

We are providing a forum for debate and exchange with the research community--leading economists, jurists, political scientists, sociologists coming together to share ideas on research priorities and possibilities.

We intend to do this regularly because it is critical to responding to the enormous demand for policy solutions amidst changing patterns in the world of work.

Let me put this all in context.

When I was elected Director General of the ILO, I talked to many people, among the ILO's constituents, among policy makers and researchers, asking in which direction this institution should go.

What emerged was a marriage between the historical agenda of the ILO around workers' rights and social protection together with an agenda of job creation, enterprise development and social dialogue, and we called it the Decent Work Agenda.

Four strategic objectives – rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue – integrated in a common framework.

As we went outside the ILO to explain what we were doing, we connected.

Governments began to say, this is part of what we want to do. So enormous support developed for this agenda from Brazil to the Philippines, at the regional level, in the UN.

The World Commission on Social Dimension of Globalization argued that for a fair globalization you have to make decent work a global goal.

We have strong endorsement from summits and meetings both globally and in Latin America, Asia, Africa, from the European Commission. The last meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council in July mainstreams all of this, makes it part of the global policy agenda. So, what we have today as ILO is an unprecedented level of political support.

All the while, we have been building on our work on the ground—turning ideas into action. But now we need to step that up.

That's why we have developed what we call decent work country programmes.

The demand on ILO services at the national level has grown enormously.

If we are to respond to the demand we need a solid base of knowledge on how decent work can be achieved by different groups, in different social and economic circumstances. We need to be able to anticipate the problems and help develop responses.

When the ILO is able to make this link between ideas and politics, between research and action, it has made major contributions to thinking and practice on labour and social issues throughout its history.

You have a full agenda before you and I look forward to closely following the proceedings.

For instance, I know you are going to be taking a wide view of various social models in this conference. There is no one size fits all solution, but it is beneficial to see what has worked in different contexts and how they may be integrated into different realities.

You are also looking at global production networks and their role in job creation and decent work. This is another key issue.

We have, within this house, the key actors of those global networks, the employers and the workers. They have to be part of the answer when it comes to thinking about how to ensure that the global economy delivers on full employment and decent work.

I am looking forward to hearing your ideas, your knowledge.

I believe in independent research – after all, in one of my previous lives I directed a research institute – but I also believe that its value is greatly multiplied if there is an institution, a platform, ready to use it.

And on that we are ready in the ILO. We are all in this together

Thank you very much, and I wish you all the best for a successful conference.