

Official Opening Speech by
Gerry Finnegan, ILO Representative for Malawi, Mozambique & Zambia
at the FFTUZ 2nd SUPREME CONGRESS,
Kabwe, Zambia. 18 February 2008

The FFTUZ President, Ms Joyce C. Nonde
Members of the Executive Board of FFTUZ
Acting National Executive Secretary, Lyson Mando
Members of the various Trade Unions federated to FFTUZ
Sisters and Brothers in the Zambian Trade Union movement
Distinguished invited guests
Representatives of the media
Ladies and Gentlemen

This morning, it is a rare honour and privilege for me to address the FFTUZ 2nd Supreme Labour Conference, and I wish to thank you for this invitation. As many of you will be aware, the International Labour Organization is one of the Specialized Agencies of the entire United Nations System globally – indeed we are the oldest, as we date back to 1919. The ILO has a unique tripartite structure, comprised of representatives of member States in the form of Workers and Employers as well as Governments (as represented by Ministries of Labour). Long before the term “civil society” became fashionable, the ILO has had core representation of workers’ and employers’ organizations at the heart of its very structures. In this way, and in the context of UN Reform and the UN “Delivering as One” in Zambia, the ILO has an important role in bringing workers’ and employers’ organizations – as key actors in “civil society” – closer to the entire UN family, both as potential partners and as beneficiaries from UN-wide support.

As the ILO, we have a strong mandate to strengthen REPRESENTATIVE, INDEPENDENT and DEMOCRATIC trade unions in all countries, to enable them to play their role effectively in protecting workers' rights, promoting workers' interests, and providing effective services to their members at all levels. This is spelt out in the ILO's Strategic Objectives for the current biennium 2008-09.

Trade unions as workers' organizations should be democratic, they should adhere to their constitutions, run their programmes in transparent and accountable manner, and elect their leaders in freedom so as to make them accountable to the membership. They should also be

accountable and transparent. The ILO has been made aware of weaknesses within workers' organizations, including their poor accountability of funds, leading to their inability to be able to conduct important activities such as in the field of workers' education.

The ILO believes that trade unions will only be able to play a strong role in the workplace and in the broader socio-economic arena if they are well organized in terms of membership, and competent to express the wishes of their members –and not the views of their individual leaders. There is the urgent need for trade unions to broaden their membership base to reach out and include vulnerable workers, such as casual workers and those working in the informal economy.

Although a significant percentage of trade union members are women, they are often under-represented in the decision-making structures of the unions. Madam President, it is pleasing to see a woman as the President of the FFTUZ. There is the need for trade unions to do much more to attract and retain women members, as well as to do more to encourage women to take up leadership positions in the individual trade unions and in the Executive Boards. To this end, the ILO has been actively promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming among trade unions, both in Zambia as well as globally. I bring to your attention, the just published second edition of the ILO's "ABC of Women Workers' Rights and Gender Equality". The ILO, within the One UN family in Zambia, is also working with the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MoWGID) to ensure that the rights of women workers, and the ILO's four "Equality Conventions" are given prominence within the Government's new Gender Support Programme.

Trade unions need to devise strategies on how to become attractive and relevant to young workers, who are often not attracted to join the unions. Next month sees the launch of Youth Day and Youth Week, and 2008 is the Africa Union's Year of the African Youth (YAY). What more can TUs do to reach out to young workers and to young women and men about to enter the labour market?

One of the key challenges facing organized labour today is how to develop effective strategies to influence national socio-economic policies in favour of workers. This raises the issue of trade unions' political links and how they could be used to advance the agenda of the working people. As the ILO, we want trade unions to be independent and not to be a wing of any political party. As independent trade unions, they will have the moral courage and authority to criticise constructively government policies and initiatives which are not in the interests of the working people. Being independent enables trade unions to engage with governments and employers without fear or favour, and thus be able to articulate the real interests and concerns of their membership. In this context of influencing national socio-economic policies, the ILO has been engaging with its constituents around what we refer to as the Policy Coherence Initiative, which assesses the impact of economic policies and growth on the quantity and quality of employment – i.e. on Decent Work. This process is also aimed at building the capacities of the social partners to lobby for employment-intensive growth, and I am pleased that to date FFTUZ has been an active partner in this process.

In the area of service provision, there is the need for trade unions to improve and build upon the “traditional services” they provide to members, and to come up with innovative services to meet the changing needs of their members. As well, they can provide specific services that can meet the needs of unrepresented and vulnerable target groups, such as young workers, casual workers, workers in the informal economy – many of whom are women. I am pleased to inform you of a new partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group around the theme of “Better Work”, particularly for rural workers.

We can see in countries such as Zambia that there are new pressures mounting on the labour movement, that the traditional employer-employee relations have become strained distorted, and that at times the “employment relationship” is unrecognizable. The ILO has developed the “Employment Relationship Recommendation” (R198) in order to assist Governments and the social partners to meet these new challenges. Furthermore, in a situation where 64 per cent of the population is living in poverty, we can see examples of unions easily giving up their fight to withhold and protect traditional workers' rights to the detriment of workers'

conditions of service. It is for these reasons that greater emphasis must be given to the promotion of more and better jobs, and this is at the heart of the Zambia Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP).

The Zambia DWCP was adopted at the tripartite meeting in May 2007, and FFTUZ was active in this process. The DWCP for 2007-2011 was eventually launched by the Vice President on 4 December 2007. The DWCP focuses on applying the ILO's Decent Work Agenda to the benefit of Zambia, and it zeroes in on three priority areas: (I) Job creation for women, young people and people with disabilities; (II) Prevention and mitigation of the effects of HIV and AIDS in the workplace; and (III) Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In order for the DWCP to be successful and effectively contribute to national development in Zambia, it is essential that we mobilize tripartite constituents to focus on these priority areas. We have already seen the MLSS create a "DWCP Unit" within the Ministry; we have received proposals from ZCTU on various aspects of DWCP implementation, and we welcome further ideas from FFTUZ and indeed from the employers.

To be effective, we need to see commitment from all the tripartite constituents: we need to see a willingness and eagerness to work together to address these priority issues; and we need to be able to move forward together to mobilize resources to implement the objectives of the DWCP and together make Decent Work a reality in Zambia.

Madam President, Sisters and Brothers, there is a need for trade union unity at all levels. We all know that the trade union "vocabulary" is full of expressions such as "Unity is Strength". At the international level, the ICFTU and the WCL have merged to form the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). It would also be a good idea if trade union federations nationally were to think seriously about this. A multiplicity of trade unions is not a violation of trade unions' rights, but it does have the effect of fragmenting and weakening the labour movement. A united labour movement is the preferred option by workers everywhere. In South Africa, two federations, NACTU and FEDUSA, have merged to form one confederation called the South African Confederation of Trade Unions (SACOTU). If requested to do so by

the trade union movement in Zambia, the ILO would of course be willing and able to assist in the creation on a strong and unified trade union movement in this country.

The ILO will also gladly assist any trade union federation endeavouring to uphold the principles of being representative, democratic and independent, through the ILO's capacity building activities as well as the provision of advisory services.

Madam President, sisters and brothers, it is now my rare honour to declare the FFTUZ 2nd Supreme Conference officially open. I wish you every success in your deliberations and in the important process of electing a new Executive Board to serve you for the coming 4 years. I thank you all for your attention.