

CONCLUSIONS AND PLAN OF ACTION

This High-Level Tripartite Seminar on Labour Administration and Public Employment Services took place in Larnaca-Cyprus on October 17-18 2005, hosted by the ILO and Cypriot Government with the assistance of the Cypriot Social Partners.

The invited participants came from Central Asian and Caucasus countries and from the International Organization of Employers and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The seminar offered an opportunity to exchange information and strengthen cooperation among the tripartite constituents and the participating countries.

With regard to the fact that these countries undergo different economic and social development paths it was stressed that each country has its own model within the international context, which cannot be fully applied to another country due to existing differences in size, population, status of development and cultures of the countries.

The tripartite participants highlighted the following:

1. Growth is fundamental for employment creation and poverty reduction. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, followed by the transformation crisis and in some countries by armed conflicts, the countries finally embarked on a positive process of recovery associated with the launch of economic and social reforms.

Economic reforms showed a positive impact, for example in Azerbaijan by creating new working places and increasing average wages and pensions.

In Kazakhstan, an important part of the budget goes to social policy, social reform started there in 1998 with the gradual introduction of the pension reform of the Social welfare scheme and finally in 2002, an active employment policy was introduced including measures for vulnerable groups.

In Tajikistan, the economic reform helps to develop social policy and create new jobs with the support of international partners.

2. As economic growth has not yet resulted in high levels of productive employment in all countries it is important to increase its employment intensity. In addition, income inequalities deepened since the start of the transformation process, Therefore, the goal of Decent Work for all is a central objective for policy makers and Social Partners.

For that reason, deeper reforms of social security systems are inevitable. The ILO Declaration and ILO conventions concerning employment and social protection form the basis for these reforms.

3. Regarding employment promotion it is of utmost importance to increase the labour force participation and employment participation rates of women and men in all age groups. Particular attention has to be paid to employment promotion of special vulnerable groups like the disabled and to the phenomenon of massive trans-border migration. The ILO conventions C88, C122, C144, C150, C181 and the corresponding recommendations concerning employment promotion and strengthening labour administration and Public Employment Services provide the countries with valuable guidance. These conventions have been ratified or are in the process of ratification. Participants stressed their interest in speeding up the ratification as well as in the assistance provided by the ILO in the process of amending national legislation according to the ratified standards and its proper enforcement.

4. Social dialogue is of paramount importance for the integration of economic and social policies. Transaction costs of Social dialogue are substantial but Social dialogue can make the difference between good and bad impacts of governance on labour market and social development of the countries concerned. Therefore, the participants agreed on considering Social dialogue as an efficient instrument for social and economic reforms.

5. Constituents in each country have to find their own way to tackle their national problems within the context of globalization. Employment and social policy issues are still home grown, but are increasingly influenced by international markets and international financial institutions. Labour ministries play a leading role in organizing integrated economic and social policies within that context. The quality of Labour Administration and Public Employment Services is crucial for good governance. Social Partners contribute through steering and advisory committees.

6. Several opportunities of cooperation between Social Partners and Labour Ministries have been highlighted:

- Further building of capacities and strengthening relations of social partners taking into consideration the role of the state,
- Tackling new questions such as migration and the responsibility for its governance,
- Exchanging information on social protection (different forms of targeted social assistance and insurance schemes, pension schemes etc.),
- Integrating economic and social development under conditions of market economy (liberalized and globalized trade) and developing social policy as a productive factor,
- Ratifying and implementing ILO core conventions and conventions concerning employment and social policy,
- Making reforms subject to tripartite consultation, making best use of social partners' experience and settling emerging conflicts,
- Evaluating effects of reforms and making proposals for improved governance
- Mobilizing the international organizations for joint action to boost employment and reduce poverty,
- Strengthening education, vocational training and life long learning,
- Transforming informal work into decent employment.

7. There are still challenges to overcome as the transition to a market economy and changing political situation often weaken labour administrations. Labour ministries often lack institutional capacity as well as technical expertise and resources. Adequate equipment and new technologies are needed for the communication with the external world. Concerning human resources ministries need highly skilled, motivated and committed staff what can be achieved via training and improvement of language skills.

The enforcement of labour legislation is often rather poor and needs to be much improved.

There is a need of adequate structure of labour administration and employment services and proper coordination of their activities with other governmental departments.

8. A stable social system is based on democracy and good governance. It requires strong, independent employers' and workers' organizations.

9. An appropriate legislative and administrative framework is needed for sound and sustainable employment and social development. Such a framework should be based on ILO's fundamental and other conventions and recommendations.

10. Participants requested further follow up through Technical Cooperation between the constituents and the ILO aimed at strengthening government and Social Partners' capacities and the reinforcement of Labour Administrations and Public Employment Services. The ILO is preparing a new Technical Cooperation project for Caucasus and Central Asian Countries, which will be submitted to the donor community.