



## EIGHTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Developments in the United Nations  
in 1999-2000****Contents**

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## Introduction

1. A general discussion is foreseen once a year in the Governing Body on developments in the United Nations system. Like previous such papers submitted to the Governing Body since its 259th Session, the present paper gives a concise overview of activities in the UN system that have a direct bearing on the ILO's involvement in the system. As in previous years, the focus is on the ILO's own active participation in the system-wide programmes and activities of the United Nations and its agencies. The paper is in three parts, concerning major issues and events in the General Assembly; activities of the Economic and Social Council; and ILO contributions to regular sessions of UN bodies.

### I. Major issues and events in the General Assembly

2. The 54th Session of the General Assembly opened on 14 September 1999. In his annual report to the Assembly – *Preventing war and disaster: A growing global challenge* – the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, focused on human security and the role of the United Nations in the pursuit of peace and security globally. In this regard, the Secretary-General stressed the need for better intervention and prevention strategies by the United Nations to address the root causes, and not merely symptoms, of war and poverty. He observed that globalization was impinging on state sovereignty as well as on individual rights and fundamental freedoms, and that the UN system needed to adapt to “a world of new actors, new responsibilities and new possibilities” if it were to succeed in responding adequately to political and humanitarian crises. As part of the UN's commitment to intervention, the Secretary-General emphasized the importance of “preventive diplomacy” – including capacities for early warning, deployment and disarmament – as effective action in human rights and humanitarian issues.
3. In this context, the ILO has identified its comparative advantage in the area of employment promotion as the basis of intervention in crisis situations, including armed conflict, natural disasters and economic downturns. The ILO's InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, aimed at strengthening the ILO's capacity to respond in a timely and effective manner to different crises is now being implemented by the Office, and it is planned to collaborate with other UN agencies active in this area and the international community when necessary.<sup>1</sup>
4. During the general debate at the start of the General Assembly – which preceded detailed discussions on agenda items in the committees – statements by various delegations covered mainly economic and social issues. Many heads of delegation used the opportunity to reflect on the state of world development in the past half-century and to identify challenges for the new millennium within the framework of the United Nations. Unlike the previous year's general debate, which involved substantial new analyses of global socio-economic issues as well as proposals for major new initiatives, the discussion in 1999 was in general considerably more muted, but nevertheless focused on the impact and policy implications of globalization.

<sup>1</sup> See “ILO strategy and activities on employment and social concerns in crisis situations”, GB.277/ESP/2.

5. The majority of speakers, particularly those from developing countries, expressed concern and apprehension with regard to the consequences of globalization. There was a clear consensus on the need to ensure that the benefits of globalization – in terms of resources, markets, technologies and jobs – are shared equitably among nations and peoples. For this to happen, many speakers agreed that the multilateral system should be strengthened. A new and more integrated approach, reflecting the idea proposed by the Secretary-General in his report that “global problems need global solutions” and similarly by the Director-General, was called for in UN programmes by several speakers.
6. Poverty was identified by many delegations as an underlying factor in political conflicts, humanitarian crises, insecurity and environmental degradation. Poverty eradication was hence seen as one of the major challenges facing the United Nations in the new millennium, and in this respect delegations agreed that the fight against poverty would require genuine international solidarity and mutually beneficial cooperation between developed and developing nations. Specific measures pertaining to the reform of the international financial system, debt relief and improved market access for developing countries were highlighted. The G-77, on behalf of the developing countries, reiterated the great importance it attached to the decision taken by the General Assembly to organize a “high-level international intergovernmental event on financing for development” in 2001. From an ILO perspective, a number of delegations from both developing and industrialized countries singled out employment and income-generating activities as an important condition for reducing poverty.
7. The General Assembly in 1999 commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is the most widely ratified UN treaty. Virtually all delegations addressed the plight of children, and expressed a growing commitment to protect the rights of children, including outlawing the use of children in armed conflict and as child labourers. The discussion on this issue included several positive references to the ILO’s new Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), which calls for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and the IPEC programme. The Director-General joined the panel set up for the opening dialogue of the Third Committee’s discussion on the rights of children, and urged the ratification of the new ILO Convention as a matter of urgency.
8. Many delegations expressed grave concern about the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its social and economic implications, underscoring the importance of enhanced global cooperation to combat the disease. It was recognized in this context that action against HIV/AIDS should also include initiatives linked to the world of work.
9. During the general debate, several heads of delegation expressed their general appreciation for the work of the ILO, including France, the United States, Egypt, Chile, Belize, Madagascar and the European Union. This reflected increasing recognition of the ILO’s role within the UN system in addressing pressing social issues such as unemployment; international labour standards and global trade; the impact of globalization on jobs; social protection; women’s rights in the workplace; and the effective elimination of child labour.
10. Overall, delegations agreed on the need for the United Nations to adapt to the challenges of the twenty-first century – political, economic and social – and to strengthen the UN’s capacities in these key areas. The decision of the General Assembly to hold a “Millennium Assembly” during the 55th session of the General Assembly was identified as a unique opportunity to review the work of the United Nations and its role in meeting these challenges. The ILO is strongly committed to the successful outcome of the Millennium General Assembly which, together with the Beijing+5 and Copenhagen+5 review processes in 2000, in the words of the Director-General, constitute “for the UN system an

extraordinary opportunity to define major problems of today properly and to agree on policies to address the social impact of globalization". The highlight of the Millennium Assembly will be the Millennium Summit, which will open at the United Nations on 6 September 2000 and probably last for three days. The Summit will provide an historic opportunity for world leaders to agree on a process to orient the United Nations to face the challenges of globalization and interdependence in the twenty-first century. Among the issues likely to be discussed during the Assembly that are of relevance to the ILO's mandate are human rights and sustainable development, including poverty reduction. As part of the preparations for the Millennium Assembly, civil society organizations in collaboration with the United Nations will hold a "Millennium Forum" at UN Headquarters from 22 to 26 May 2000.

11. The agenda of the Second Committee (economic and financial issues) during the 54th session of the General Assembly provided an opportunity for the ILO to make a number of substantive statements on the employment and social policy implications of macroeconomic policy questions such as finance, trade and external debt, and to highlight the social dimensions of globalization and interdependence. Among the issues on which the Committee specifically requested the ILO to provide technical information and clarification were those pertaining to the creation and distribution of employment among countries and people and the increasing trend in wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers in the context of globalization. The ILO was mentioned specifically in resolutions adopted by the Second Committee on questions of sustainable development and international economic cooperation; human resource development; and international migration.
12. As in previous years, the agenda items allocated to the Third Committee (social, humanitarian and cultural issues) addressed a range of issues of direct relevance to the social mandate of the ILO, including human rights; the advancement of women; the promotion and protection of the rights of children; and the elimination of discrimination. The main focus of the Committee's agenda was on policies to reduce inequalities and poverty, including questions relating to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family. A report by the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives was considered by the Committee, and this provided another opportunity for the ILO to contribute to the discussion on a subject on which it has competence and long experience. Statements were also made to the Third Committee by the ILO on the issues of indigenous peoples; youth and older persons; the advancement of women; and the rights of the child. In addition, as already stated, the Director-General personally participated in a high-level panel organized by the Committee to open the debate on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

## **II. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

13. The ILO's interaction with the United Nations takes place mainly within the framework of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which is the principal organ of the UN organization that is responsible for policy issues and operational activities of direct concern to the ILO and its tripartite constituency.

### **1. Substantive session, 1999**

14. The main thrust of ECOSOC's work programme in 1999 was on poverty reduction. This was reflected in the theme of the high-level segment of the Council in July, which brought together the important ILO objectives of employment creation and gender equality as major components in the fight against poverty. The theme adopted by the Council for the

high-level segment of its substantive session in 1999 was “the role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women”. The ILO was given the lead role in the preparation of the Secretary-General’s report on this theme. The Director-General was invited by the UN Secretary-General as a keynote speaker to present this report to the Council in Geneva in July 1999. A policy dialogue and discussions on important developments in the world economy followed, in which the panellists included the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, the President of the World Bank, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the Director-in-Charge of the World Trade Organization. The discussions which followed were rich and wide-ranging, with the participation for the first time of representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the work of the Council. The high-level segment culminated in the adoption of a ministerial communiqué, which highlighted the importance of productive employment and the empowerment of women in strategies to eradicate poverty.

15. The Director-General also moderated an ILO-sponsored high-level ECOSOC panel discussion in Geneva during the high-level segment on “national policies and international cooperation for employment-oriented growth: the impact on poverty reduction and gender equality”. In addition, the International Training Centre of the ILO, Turin, hosted another ECOSOC panel on skill development and employment prior to the start of the high-level segment, at which the Director-General was also present.
16. Other segments of ECOSOC’s substantive session in 1999 focused variously on national capacity-building for poverty eradication; African development; humanitarian crises; and post-conflict peace-building. The ILO’s active participation in the work of ECOSOC during 1999 helped promote an integrated and coherent UN system-wide approach to cross-cutting policy issues related to the global concerns of development and gender equality.

## 2. Collaboration between ECOSOC and the Bretton Woods institutions (BWI)<sup>2</sup>

17. Meetings involving high-level dialogue between ECOSOC and the BWI were again among the highlights of ECOSOC in 1999. As reported to the Governing Body in 1999,<sup>3</sup> it may be recalled that the first such special meeting took place at UN Headquarters in April 1998.
18. In 1999 there were three special meetings between ECOSOC and the BWI to which the ILO was invited as a specialized agency of ECOSOC. The first meeting was in early February, when ECOSOC ambassadors hosted the President and Board of Directors of the World Bank; this dialogue was dominated by two issues: (1) a proposal by the Bank’s President for a “Comprehensive Development Framework” (CDF), involving cooperation between the Bank and UN system agencies at both the policy and operations levels; and (2) financing for development, based on a report entitled *Towards a New International Financial Architecture*, prepared by the UN Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. The meeting produced frank and lively exchange of views on UN system-World Bank collaboration to address the challenges of poverty eradication and development in the face of globalization.

<sup>2</sup> See also “ILO relations with the Bretton Woods institutions”: GB.277/ESP/4 and GB.276/ESP/5.

<sup>3</sup> GB.274/7.

19. The second high-level meeting between ECOSOC and the BWI took place in New York on 29 April 1999, involving representatives of the Interim Committee and the Development Committee as policy-makers of the Bank and the Fund and ECOSOC ambassadors. The meeting took the form of a panel of finance ministers on the theme: “The functioning of international financial markets and stability in financing for development”. The topic was discussed within the framework of the globalization process and in particular addressed “ways and means on how to optimize the benefits and minimize the negative consequences of globalization and interdependence”. The meeting also considered the role of the BWI in the planning and organization of the proposed UN conference on financing for development in 2001.
20. The third dialogue between ECOSOC and the BWI in 1999 was a joint meeting of ECOSOC ambassadors and the Managing Director and Executive Directors of the IMF in New York on 28 October. Prior to this meeting, the IMF had hosted ECOSOC ambassadors in Washington in June. The New York dialogue focused in particular on poverty eradication and the HIPC Initiative in the context of current global economic conditions. Participants emphasized the importance of productive employment and accelerated and sustainable job creation with economic growth to reduce poverty. The meeting recognized the need to increase the participation of developing countries in the management of the world economy and the international financial system. In this regard, cooperation between the UN system and the IMF was considered essential, including on social programmes that fall under the mandate of the ILO.
21. In addition to the series of interactive sessions between ECOSOC and the BWI, the UN Secretary-General addressed a joint IMF/World Bank seminar during the annual meetings of the BWI in Washington in September 1999. On this occasion, the Secretary-General highlighted the global employment problem and its effect on the poor, and called on multilateral institutions to play a major role in creating an estimated 2 billion jobs as part of the process of globalization. The Secretary-General specifically recognized and commended “the expertise of the ILO” in assisting member States to implement the commitment adopted by the World Summit for Social Development concerning employment.

### **3. Coordinated and integrated implementation and follow-up on major UN conferences and summits**

22. Since its 1995 “Agreed Conclusions”, ECOSOC has promoted a coordinated and integrated approach within the UN system to implementing the conclusions of the major UN conferences and summits of the 1990s. During 1999, discussions in ECOSOC focused on the five-year reviews of major UN conferences. These gave a mixed outlook – ranging from doubts that the goals and targets set can be reached within the agreed time frames due to setbacks in certain areas, to varying degrees of optimism about progress in a number of areas based on concerted efforts by governments with international support. Of immediate concern to the ILO in this respect was progress in the fight against poverty and unemployment and the advancement of women and gender equality, which are major concerns in the context of the five-year reviews of both the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

23. Preparations for the special sessions of the General Assembly on Copenhagen+5 and Beijing+5<sup>4</sup> have provided an opportunity for the ILO to strengthen its relationship with the UN secretariat and other specialized agencies, as well as with the relevant functional commissions of ECOSOC, particularly the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women. Follow-up on Copenhagen and Beijing has also reinforced the growing partnership between ECOSOC and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). The Director-General, as a former president of ECOSOC and a current member of the ACC, played a key role in 1999 in guiding and coordinating the work of the Committee on follow-up on the Working Party on the World Summit for Social Development and other UN conferences and on improving the interaction between UN system agencies in the implementation of follow-up on conferences.
24. As reported to the Governing Body's Committee on Employment and Social Policy in November 1999 and at the present session,<sup>5</sup> the Office made significant contributions to the preparatory committee for Copenhagen+5 during its first substantive session in May 1999 and the subsequent intersessional consultations in 1999 and 2000. Similarly, the ILO has been active in preparations for the five-year review of the effect given to the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. For example, the Office contributed substantially to the 1999 *World Survey on the role of women in development: Globalization, gender and work*, the main document for *Women 2000*.
25. ECOSOC provided guidance on cross-cutting themes related to the forthcoming five-year reviews of the effect given to the recommendations of the two global conferences, and in this respect adopted the report prepared for the 1999 high-level segment of ECOSOC entitled *The role of employment and work in poverty eradication: The empowerment and advancement of women*, as input for the five-year reviews of both Beijing and Copenhagen. Furthermore, steps have been taken within the United Nations to improve the coordination of preparations for both the forthcoming year reviews; the bureaux of the two preparatory committees have been encouraged to consult with one another to avoid duplication and ensure cross-fertilization of ideas and initiatives. Within the ILO, preparations for the reviews of Beijing and Copenhagen are similarly being approached in an integrated and coordinated manner.
26. Finally, ECOSOC emphasized the need to mobilize new and additional resources from all sources to implement conference outcomes at the country level. While recognizing the crucial importance of domestic resources, the Council reaffirmed the commitment to fulfil as soon as possible the agreed UN target for official development assistance, noting that ODA had declined continuously over the last five years.

<sup>4</sup> Now entitled respectively *World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalized World* (Geneva, 26-30 June 2000) and *Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century* (New York, 5-9 June 2000). See also GB.277/ESP/3, GB.277/5/1 and GB.277/5/2.

<sup>5</sup> GB.277/ESP/3.

### III. ILO participation in major UN-sponsored sessions

#### 1. Commission for Social Development

27. The 38th session of the Commission for Social Development was held in New York from 8 to 17 February 2000. Issues covered by this functional commission of ECOSOC that are of interest to the ILO include employment promotion, social justice, social protection, equality and participation. This Commission has also been assigned responsibility for follow-up on the Working Party on the World Summit for Social Development, including reviewing the implementation of the outcome of the Summit. The outcome of the Commission's work is reported in a separate paper.<sup>6</sup> The ILO also made a statement to the Commission on its instruments and obligations concerning the integration of disabled persons into the productive workforce without discrimination. This was in response to the presentation of the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Disability.
28. During the session, the ILO also contributed to a dialogue with NGOs on their role in the Social Summit review and appraisal; provided briefings on its InFocus programme on economic and social security in the twenty-first century, the global programme on decent work, and preparations for *Geneva 2000*. Finally, with the involvement of the ILO, the Commission decided on "enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world" as the priority theme for its 39th session in February 2001.

#### 2. Commission on the Status of Women

29. The ILO was represented at the 43rd and 44th sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held in New York from 1 to 19 March 1999, and from 28 February to 17 March 2000 respectively. On both occasions the latter part of the Commission's meeting acted as a session of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly in 2000 entitled *Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century*. The ILO also participated in the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for *Women 2000*, which was also held in New York from 2 November to 3 December 1999. Given its commitment to promoting women workers' rights and gender equality, a high priority is attached by the Office to preparations for *Women 2000*. The ILO has provided significant technical input to the conclusions of the last two sessions of the CSW, as well as specific contributions to the materials for *Women 2000*.
30. The ILO participated regularly in the formal sessions and informal meetings of the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE) during 1999 and in 2000. Reports were submitted by the ILO to the IACWGE on good practice, gender impact analysis and gender training methods, and the ILO continued to collaborate actively with the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) on country and regional-based activities concerning mainly the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Participation in the CSW sessions and IACWGE meetings provide the ILO with a unique opportunity to inform an important and concerned constituent within the UN system and member States on action taken by the Office to promote women's rights and gender equality.

<sup>6</sup> GB.277/ESP/3(Add.1).

### **3. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

- 31.** The 21st session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was held in New York from 7 to 25 June 1999, and the Commission heard reports from Georgia, the United Kingdom, Belize, Nepal, Spain, Ireland and Chile. The ILO was represented at the session, and contributed to the discussions on the national reports by providing information and clarification based on ILO studies and reports of the ILO Committee of Experts.
- 32.** The ILO was represented at the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW (New York, 7 June 1999) to which a congratulatory message from the Director-General was conveyed. On 6 October the General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, after its approval by the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1999. By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a State recognizes the competence of CEDAW to receive and consider claims of violations of rights protected under the Convention from individuals and groups within its jurisdiction. The Committee has in the past relied on ILO input to obtain insights into situations involving the violation of women's rights, especially in the workplace.
- 33.** The 22nd session of CEDAW was held in New York from 17 January to 4 February 2000. The Committee considered reports by various States parties, including India, Jordan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, Luxembourg, Germany and Belarus. The ILO gave an oral presentation to a closed session of the Committee, summarizing ILO responses to the national reports, including the situation with regard to Myanmar. During the session questions were raised by the Committee's experts on a number of issues relating to employment, and these were answered by the ILO. In particular, questions were also raised by the Committee concerning maternity protection, to which the ILO responded with references to relevant Conventions and Recommendations, as well as the proposed revision of the maternity protection Convention and Recommendation, which will have its second discussion in June 2000 at the next session of the International Labour Conference. The ILO has been invited to make a statement to the 24th session of CEDAW in January 2001 on maternity protection.

### **4. UN Commission on Human Rights and relevant treaty bodies**

- 34.** In 1999 the ILO continued to work with the United Nations on questions of common concern relating to human rights. This has taken the form of coordination of the supervision of obligations under human rights instruments, while preparing an increase in joint activities for practical action. As in previous years, the ILO also took part in the work of the UN Commission on Human Rights, its Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, and their respective working groups. This serves in particular to ensure that these bodies take account of the ILO's work on the same questions, for example migrant workers, child labour, indigenous and tribal peoples and the right to development. In order to further this objective, the ILO convened a briefing session on human rights intended for missions in Geneva, shortly before the 1999 session of the Commission on Human Rights, to outline ILO concerns on questions before the Commission. This was attended by some 80 missions, and it is intended to repeat it periodically.
- 35.** The ILO also continued to work closely with the treaty bodies of the United Nations, that is, those created to supervise the application of a number of UN human rights instruments.

These cover the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and instruments on discrimination against women, the rights of the child, and racial discrimination. In each case, it indicates the concerns expressed by ILO supervisory bodies on the country report being examined, often resulting in the UN treaty body proposing that the government ratify ILO Conventions or have recourse to ILO technical assistance. In addition, the ILO continued to collaborate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasizing the important role of national institutions in the field of human rights. In this respect, the ILO is available to provide advice and technical assistance in establishing and strengthening national institutions that aim to translate international human rights norms into national laws, policies and practices.

## **5. Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)**

- 36.** During 1999 there was substantial progress towards more intensive and improved interaction between the ACC and ECOSOC (and its functional and regional commissions). As stated above, this was particularly visible in the follow-up on major UN conferences. As in 1998, the ACC addressed a number of cross-cutting themes deriving from global conferences. Of significance to the ILO were the themes of sustainable development, gender and poverty.
- 37.** Discussions within the ACC machinery in 1999 also covered the situation in Africa; basic indicators for measuring progress in implementation of follow-up on conferences; and the adoption of a statement on poverty reduction and gender equality.
- 38.** An important development within the ACC in 1999 is the agreement that the outcomes of its work, in particular that concerning follow-up on conferences, should not only support policy coordination by ECOSOC and UN bodies, but also serve to promote mutually supporting decisions by the governing bodies of the agencies in the system. In this respect, the ACC encouraged its members to involve their governing bodies in issues of system-wide concern and to acquaint them with common ACC positions and perspectives on cross-cutting issues such as development, poverty and gender.
- 39.** With the completion of the work of the three ACC task forces, the responsibility for coordinated conference follow-up has developed to specific ACC subsidiary bodies, in which the ILO actively participates, in particular, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ); the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE); and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD). For example, CCPOQ adopted an ACC report concerning follow-up on major UN conferences as the basis for a guidance note that was sent to all UN resident coordinators and the field representatives of the agencies. These three ACC subsidiary bodies have also been instrumental, together with the UN Development Group, in the preparation of guidelines for the implementation of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Common Country Assessment (CCA) framework at the country level.
- 40.** Following the April 1999 session of the ACC, the Director-General participated with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the heads of UN agencies in a retreat held at Mont Pélerin, near Geneva, at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland. The retreat focused on identifying the challenges that the international community faces in the next ten years, a set of objectives that need to be pursued by the system as a whole, limitations or constraints in addressing these challenges and action that the system as a whole should take in order to overcome the constraints and address the challenges ahead. The plenary discussion that concluded the retreat emphasized the importance of setting clear goals and

working towards them effectively. A strong appeal was made for the UN system to uphold a simple agenda based on the outcomes of the global conferences and for the Secretary-General to lead a campaign to meet that agenda. Achievable benchmarks should be established against which the UN system could measure itself, forcing the constituent parts to work together in a results-oriented manner. To the extent that the United Nations was successful in meeting these goals, its credibility would be enhanced.

41. In pursuing the review process in the ACC, the Secretary-General decided to appoint a review team to seek the views of individual ACC members. The team visited the Director-General in February 2000, and the results of the consultations will be presented at the forthcoming meeting of the ACC.

Geneva, 2 March 2000.