



Reply by the Director-General to the discussion of his Report

1. Introduction

In my Report to this Conference, I stated that “to make decent work a reality we must continue to move forward on the basis of a strong and cohesive tripartism”. This Conference has been a powerful example of just that. On a number of very different issues, governments, employers and workers have looked beyond their immediate concerns towards the building of strategies and solutions to which all can subscribe. It is the living expression of our shared values and vision, and a further success for our belief in dialogue and building consensus.

Some of the issues we had to deal with are highly controversial, with deeply held and divergent views. We are in a process of modernization of our instruments which is sometimes painful and difficult. Social security is a complex subject where there are competing views about the best solutions. Progress in safety and health in agriculture is a challenging task. To advance on forced labour often means confronting vested interests. But we have strengthened our dialogue and expanded our consultation process as an essential preparation for our work in the Conference. This preparation, which permits many concerns to be identified and resolved early on, paid off in the Committees of the Conference, which carried on their work in an atmosphere of trust and of cordial relations. In each case, the Chair of the Committee played an essential and supportive role. So did the spokespersons of the Workers’ and Employers’ groups as well as the many Government delegates. Through these means and through high quality exchange, and because you all worked so hard to make the Conference a success, I can today say that we have taken a significant step forward in the consolidation of the Decent Work Agenda.

We all owe a debt to our President, Patricia A. Sto. Tomas. She was firm and effective, and led our discussions with common sense and sensitivity. She used a striking phrase when she said in her Presidential address, “Globalization, like golf, requires a handicapping system that allows the new players to catch up”.

This year there were 410 speakers in the Plenary Sessions of the Conference, the highest on record. It is a testimony to the commitment and participation of you all. But I must, like last year, say a word about gender equality. Less than 12 per cent of speakers were women. Even more worrying, the trend is downwards, from 15 per cent last year. Among Conference delegates too there is a slight decline, from 21 per cent in 2000 to 20 per cent this year. I would like to reflect with all of you about how we can work to improve this situation. On gender equality, it is vital for us to practise what we preach.

The staff of the Office put in sustained intensive efforts to make the Conference a success. Beyond our debt of gratitude, we need to consider that the demands on them are

increasing, and in some respects they are stretched to the limit. To avoid excessive demands in the future we may need to review some aspects of the organization and operation of the Conference.

In this year's Conference we were honoured by the visit of His Excellency President Benjamin Mkapa of the United Republic of Tanzania, who addressed the Conference and spoke to us on the launch of the Time-Bound Programmes to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the United Republic of Tanzania, Nepal and El Salvador. President Mkapa brought us a powerful message, one which underlined the importance of political commitment combined with a real understanding of the lives and aspirations of people. "Child labour", he said, "is a negation of our common humanity". But he also reminded us of the impact on child labour of the forces of poverty, the stresses of economic reform, and the intolerable effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. His empathy with his people and his determination for change were a lesson for us all. In that same session we heard strong statements of commitment from countries who are partners with the ILO in this endeavour, and major donors to its International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Mr. Walter Riester, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, pointed to the need to "offer a helping hand instead of wagging your finger". Mr. Cameron Findlay, Deputy Secretary of Labour of the United States, told us of President Bush's promise "to leave no child behind".

The Time-Bound Programme is a bold new initiative, a major step to implement ILO Convention No. 182 – which was adopted unanimously by the International Labour Conference in 1999 – to ban the worst forms of child labour, and to make it real within a definite time horizon. This is a compelling approach, one which mobilizes and gives purpose and energy. Several other countries are expected to join the initiative soon, and I call on all of you to consider how to move in that direction with speed and determination.

Convention No. 182 has been ratified by 82 countries (as of 19 June) in only two years, the fastest pace of ratification for any Convention in the 82-year history of the ILO. The numbers keep on going up, demonstrating that this is truly a global commitment. Our goal is to make it universal.

To further build public support for action against child labour, I invited delegates to consider establishing an annual "World Day Against Child Labour" on 12 June. All reactions to this proposal that I have heard are positive, and we will work further on this idea over the coming months.

I deeply believe that we can eliminate the worst forms of child labour from the face of the earth, thus opening the way for the progressive reduction of all forms of child labour. To make it happen the ILO as an organization, and its tripartite constituency as a whole, must be the catalyst of initiatives in each of our countries to sustain a powerful global movement.

2. Reducing the decent work deficit

The discussion this year in plenary was particularly significant in the evolution of our Organization. I am encouraged by the extent to which the concept of decent work has taken root. The goal we have set in 1999 clearly resonates with you as an aspiration which is universal. Indeed this Conference marks the transition from conviction to action.

Many of you spoke of challenges in making all work decent: of tangible deficits in health and safety; of workers without representation or social security, without rights or even work. These are all deficits and we can set measurable objectives as to how we wish

to reduce them and track progress toward those goals. Any shortfall is a deficit, which societies pay for through social exclusion and unrest, inequality and socially unsustainable development. Mr. Kearney, representative of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, in describing the torture and physical intimidation of workers, commented that "Decent work deficit is too weak a term for this brutality". I agree that sometimes the gaps between the goals of dignity and family well-being that people have and the reality they face in all parts of the world are so vast that they are not only deficits, they represent a moral challenge to all of us.

The Decent Work Agenda has also given the Organization a unique identity in international debates. Many of you commented to me that it provides an alternative approach to the basically macroeconomic and top-down perspective promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions for a good part of the last 20 years and that you considered it key to the success of their present emphasis on poverty reduction and national ownership. As such it is part of a move toward greater consensus and integrated thinking at a global level. In encouraging the Office to continue in dialogue with these institutions, you confirmed that the Decent Work Agenda not only provides a means to build work and employment into development programmes, but also provides a basis for your own dialogue with these institutions at a national level. Mr. Khan, Workers' delegate of Bangladesh, said his country was "sandwiched" between pressure from donors and the Bretton Woods institutions, to accelerate the pace of economic reforms and the need to protect the interests of workers. The Decent Work Agenda provides a platform for dialogue so that these objectives can be simultaneously pursued. Mr. Zimba, Minister of Labour and Social Security of Zambia, asked the ILO "to use its influence on other international institutions to bring them to regard work as central in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and to build strategic alliances with other United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, so as to harmonize and integrate strategies for poverty reduction".

Developing a practical policy agenda

In order to reduce the decent work deficit, each country needs to build a practical national policy agenda. This means mapping the decent work objectives onto national priorities in a manner which takes an integrated view of society's interdependent economic and social objectives. It is clear from your statements that the Decent Work Agenda is already providing a sound integrated policy framework in many countries. I agree with Mr. Buchanan, Minister of Labour and Social Security, Jamaica, when he said that "the establishment of decent work at a national level must be regarded as a process of social learning, informed by contextual and comparative experiences". We will endeavour to build on the experience of the decent work pilot programmes to support your efforts. As Mr. Doshi, Employers' delegate, India, said, "The ILO has to benchmark these success stories to enhance its relevance and global visibility".

Countries at all levels of development spoke about decent work as a development goal. Mr. Fuller, Government delegate from the United Kingdom, noted that "every country has its own decent work deficit". He then went on to talk about the United Kingdom's efforts to reduce the skills gap, provide support to vulnerable workers and address deficits in their goal of ensuring fuller employment. Mr. De, Minister of Public Service, Employment and Labour, Senegal, said, "Reducing the decent work deficit has the aim of enabling the development of the individual, which can only be envisaged within the context of a global approach which includes all aspects of human life: health, education, agriculture and infrastructures". These sentiments were echoed by many other countries. Social dialogue was widely identified as a critical part of this process. Mr. Hamdi, Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, Indonesia, for example, spoke of

how the “Indonesian social partners have been assessing the best approach and strategy to adopt at the national level, in order to respond to and promote these four objectives”. For social dialogue to be effective, it needs strong and independent social partners. Mr. Owuor, Employers’ delegate of Kenya, spoke of the need to strengthen the institutional capacities of the social partners so as to enable them to “spearhead the social agenda at the national level”.

Many speakers addressed the central role that employment played in improving the living standards of workers. In this context many of you reiterated your support for the Global Employment Forum at the end of this year. As an objective, some speakers referred to employment as “first among equals”, “that without work there could be no decent work”. It is true that employment plays a key role in poverty reduction, yet as Ms. Coletti, the Workers’ delegate from Italy, noted, “work without rights is the best way into poverty, for individuals and for countries”. Mr. Parrot, Workers’ delegate, Canada, said, “Priority must be given to decent work so that job creation does not result in equal poverty and exploitation”. Employment creation, poverty reduction and fundamental principles and rights at work overlap and reinforce each other. It is important to advance simultaneously on all fronts of the Decent Work Agenda.

The social dimension of globalization

Many of you recognized the need to address the social dimension of globalization. Mr. Mdladlana, South African Minister of Labour, told us that “We should all recognize that, in this global village, no country can sustain itself as an island of wealth and opulence surrounded by a sea of poverty, hunger and disease”. The Mexican Minister of Labour, Mr. Abascal, said “an economic globalization which does not make decent work a universal right, in accordance with the dignity of the human person, would polarize humanity and would self-destruct. We must act now”. And as Mr. Boisson, representative of the French employers declared, “The opportunity is there for the taking. Let us have the initiative to support and influence globalization”. Mr. Sweeney, Workers’ delegate from the United States, said that, “We are challenged to act in a time of dramatic change. A new global economy is being forged and in response across the globe people are stirring; they are demanding a fair deal – basic dignity, basic rights, decent work”. Ms. Bradshaw, Minister of Labour of Canada, put it this way: “If globalization can motivate nations to work together to provide decent work for the millions of people who have little or none, then globalization should be welcomed. But the conflict surrounding globalization will only grow if ordinary people are left behind, and poverty, unemployment and a lack of basic labour rights are not addressed. The extent to which we achieve decent work, which means a ‘decent life’ for all our citizens, will be the true measure and decide the future of globalization.” She added that: “If the ILO does not put forward any new solutions, people will look for them elsewhere. They are already strongly tempted to submit their labour problems to other international organizations which they believe to be capable of dealing with them more quickly and effectively.”

The questions of policy integration which are so important at the national level are equally vital in the global economy. A number of you spoke to the need to provide global “market” conditions conducive to development, to work to a policy framework which tackles the linkages between the Decent Work Agenda and issues of market access, foreign investment, intellectual property rights and financing for development, for example.

There is now a new proposal under discussion on means of enhancing the action of the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization. Many speakers referred to that Working Party and supported its work. It can help us address a range of the specific concerns raised by delegates, and offers a unique forum in which the ILO methods of

dialogue and consensus-building can be applied to today's critical global issues. I believe this is a potent instrument for the Organization to embed our shared values in the path of globalization.

Mr. Moorhead, United States Employers' delegate, was concerned that "the proposal would make the Working Party the heart of the ILO and would gradually drain the life out of the Governing Body committees and this Conference". But the Working Party is not a decision-making body; rather, as I have described it elsewhere, an incubator of ideas. Once the ideas have matured to the point that they can be developed into proposals for action, they need to be taken up by other organs of the ILO. That is what happened with the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, for example. As such it can reinforce the capacity for action of the Organization. That is the goal.

Building a solid knowledge base

You asked that something be done to build our capabilities to implement this agenda nationally and globally. This means building our research capacity to assess the impact and interrelationships of different policies and programmes, and how they can be put into effect as part of a broad development agenda.

The concept of "decent work", like that of "sustainable development", does not need a dictionary definition and we should not seek to give it one. Its formulation captures a meaning utilized and understood in many different cultural and developmental contexts. Yet each of the four strategic objectives is clear and progress in their practical implementation can be measured. I agree with the speakers who said that we need to do more work on measuring the deficits and progress toward the objectives. I also agree with those speakers who stressed that this should not be a reason for inaction. As Mr. Matombo, Workers' delegate from Zimbabwe, pointed out, "while we may have to wait for information to ascertain the exact magnitude of the gap, workers the world over continue to die because of a lack of social protection".

I want to seek partnerships with other thought leaders in a collective endeavour to build our knowledge base: to work together on the frontiers of knowledge development; to engage ourselves in research networks and tap into the knowledge resources that already exist. As Mr. Nordmann, Government delegate of Switzerland, said, if the ILO takes leadership in this regard, "it will make an important contribution to ensuring that the destructive conflict between slogans and truncheons is replaced by pragmatic solutions-oriented discussions".

New private initiatives in the social sphere

I was encouraged to hear the report from the Brazilian Employers' representative, Mr. Donato, of the plethora of bipartite private social initiatives in his country. There can be little doubt that we have seen a shift in what society expects from firms. In many instances expectations are that firms manage and are accountable not only for activities within their sphere of control but also their sphere of influence.

Private initiatives and voluntary regulation in the social sphere are beginning to boom. You encouraged the ILO not to lose ground on these efforts. Mr. Lambert, Employers' delegate of the United Kingdom, called for greater ILO involvement in the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Compact and warned that: "We must avoid a situation where other bodies that do not have the expertise begin to interpret ILO principles. Otherwise we run the risk of a proliferation of initiatives, which at best duplicate each other and at worst contradict each other, and if this happens it will be harder

to sustain business enthusiasm and commitment.” In this regard, several speakers spoke of the need to develop benchmarks of competence for social auditors. Others stressed the need to ensure that these initiatives were based on solid tripartite dialogue and other ILO principles. It was generally considered that this was an important area for greater ILO involvement.

Outreach and alliances

In my Report I emphasized outreach and partnership, and a number of you picked this question up in your statements. There are two quite different concerns. One relates to our partnerships with groups and organizations in civil society beyond our constituency; the other, how we work with other organizations of the multilateral system.

Let me reiterate that I believe we can only gain from being open to society. We can gain by listening to ideas and debates beyond this assembly, and we can gain through partnership in tackling the objectives of the Decent Work Agenda with those that share our goals and methods. Many of you reported success in addressing the problems of society’s development through social dialogue and efforts or alliances with others. Mr. Imson, Government delegate of the Philippines, spoke of the need to “involve, as we now do in the Philippines, civil society and informal sector organizations in debates on development and in the pursuit of development objectives”.

Lord Brett, Workers’ delegate of the United Kingdom, reiterated this in his speech during the debate on the Global Report on Stopping Forced Labour when he said: “We know there are well-established, reputable non-government organizations doing tremendous work already. I may mention Anti-Slavery International, the oldest human rights organization in the world, in my own country.”

But I understand the concerns that are expressed, that we must not dilute our debates or change our decision-making processes. That is why I have been crystal clear that I believe that the tripartite decision-making structure of this Organization is one of our greatest strengths. Some fear that opening the door to other voices might interfere with our debates or change the balance of our Organization. I see no danger of that happening, and I will work with you to ensure that it does not.

The other partnership, with other organizations of the multilateral system, is important for different reasons. We must, in the international system, take advantage of each others’ capabilities and respect each other’s goals. You have called on me to work, especially with the international financial institutions to promote our objectives. That has always been a priority for me. Working together with the World Bank on bringing the Decent Work Agenda into the PRSPs is an example of what we are doing. It is a challenge for the constituents as well. For Secretariats to work together, the countries which govern each international organization should also strive to achieve global consistency.

3. Budgetary support for the Decent Work Agenda

Putting this agenda into practice places new demands on our resources. Every two years, the Conference is called upon to adopt the programme and budget for the succeeding biennium. This is a critical event in the life of the Organization. Each budget tests our capacity to design effective responses to the needs and priorities of our constituents, and to do so with thorough attention to costs and efficiency. The proposals for 2002-03 provide, for the first time, transparent and integrated statements of the performance that can be expected for the resources provided.

Before proposing the programme and budget to the Conference, the Governing Body provided rich guidance on the substance of the proposals. It emphasized an aggressive approach to improvements in performance and rigorous discipline on expenditure. A tripartite compromise was reached on coverage of part of the cost increases we will face.

I fully recognize the difficulties that a number of governments faced with the level of the budget recommended by the Governing Body as well as with the scale of assessments that very substantially increased the rate of contribution of certain member States as from next year. I greatly appreciate the constructive and harmonious manner in which the discussions took place in the Finance Committee in order to reach a consensus. It is a testimony to the seriousness with which this question was addressed, and a recognition of the specificity of the ILO. I would like to thank all the delegates who participated in the discussions and who agreed to compromises in order to arrive at a consensus.

This result will enable us to go forward with confidence. I am conscious of the responsibility placed on me to strengthen management, increase impacts and reduce costs. At the same time, I am well aware of the disparity between our resources and the scope of our mandate. It will be important, if we are to respond to your calls for action, for us to further increase extra-budgetary resources which can be managed according to the programme priorities established by the budget.

4. Safety and health in agriculture

I am pleased that the Committee on Safety and Health in Agriculture concluded its work very successfully and that our Organization will, following their adoption by the Conference, have sound standards in an area where they were badly needed.

This is an important step in addressing the major challenge facing us in improving the safety, health and working conditions of agricultural workers. Thanks to both the efforts of the Officers and those of the other Committee members, we now have for the first time legal instruments for this important and large group of workers. They reflect a compromise which was reached through dialogue and a shared commitment to reach a broad-based agreement.

The principle that protection should cover all workers, including self-employed farmers, was fully endorsed by the Committee. These standards address ways and means to improve the safety, health and working conditions of all agricultural workers, including the overwhelming majority in developing countries where they account for a major part of the informal economy.

It is my sincere hope that the Convention will be rapidly and widely ratified and, above all, be applied. The Office will be working with all of you to promote these objectives. We should be working together in reducing the decent work deficit in agriculture and should not forget that, by and large, agricultural workers remain in many countries a forgotten group. Let us all make sure that safety and health in agriculture are essential elements in national decent work agendas and in national SafeWork programmes.

5. The promotion of cooperatives

The work of the Committee provides a clear example of the scope for overall policy integration in support of the Decent Work Agenda. Its discussions stressed the tremendous potential of cooperatives to create decent jobs and alleviate poverty.

I said in my Report to the Conference that everybody seeks a fair chance in life to prosper through their own endeavours. As the Committee recognized, cooperatives can play a key role in making this a reality. The discussions also reflected the conviction that cooperatives are powerful vehicles for upgrading marginal work in the informal economy and integrating it into mainstream economic life. As such they have the potential of building a bridge between the informal and the formal economy.

The last discussion on cooperatives in the Conference took place in 1966, and led to the adoption of Recommendation No. 127. I am convinced that cooperatives are even more relevant today than they were then. The work of the Committee represents a solid step towards the preparation of a new Recommendation.

6. Social security

The Committee on Social Security had before it a number of highly controversial and potentially divisive issues. As in other Committees, special efforts were made to prepare the discussions carefully through wide consultation prior to the Conference. This paid off handsomely, as there was close cooperation, both in the Committee and in the Drafting Group, between the social partners and key governmental spokespersons. As a result, the Committee was able to reach rapid agreement on a set of conclusions which reflects a consensus on many of the key issues and priorities. In particular:

- highest priority should go to policies and initiatives to extend social security to those who have none;
- not only is social security very important for the well-being of workers, their families and the community as a whole, but – if properly managed – it also enhances productivity and supports economic development;
- the ageing of the population affects both funded and pay-as-you-go pension systems: solutions are to be sought above all through measures to increase employment rates;
- the social partners have a strong role to play in the management of social security.

The Committee expressed very high expectations for future ILO action on social security. It did not make any recommendation about future standards-related activities, but stated that ILO activities on social security should be based on the relevant ILO social security standards, the decent work goal and the Declaration of Philadelphia. It recommended a number of areas on which future ILO research and technical cooperation should focus. And it called for a major campaign on the extension of social security and for the ILO to urge governments to give higher priority to social security.

I believe that this is a major step forward towards an ILO vision of social security which is in accordance with the needs of our times. Security is an essential element of the Decent Work Agenda, social security a major instrument to achieve it. We must continue to build our capabilities, with universality our aim, and can now do so on the foundations of a very successful tripartite consensus.

7. Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories

The discussion in the special sitting showed how seriously the situation has deteriorated in the occupied Arab territories. At the time of the last discussion in the

Conference, relatively favourable conditions of economic and social development gave reason to hope for sustainable improvement on the road to lasting peace. Instead, the tragic reversal has resulted in many lives lost on both sides, enormous economic losses and damage to public and private assets and agricultural land. This is an evolving humanitarian crisis.

Large numbers of Palestinian workers have lost their jobs in the domestic and Israeli labour markets: one in every four workers is now jobless. The majority of all households in the West Bank and Gaza now live below the poverty line. The gravity of the situation of workers was vividly portrayed by Mr. El-Netsheh, Palestinian Minister of Labour, and he stressed that “there is no looking back, whatever the cost, from the peace process”.

In my Report I noted that the economic and social costs of the conflict, while devastating for the Palestinian people, had not spared Israeli workers and employers either. Mr. Peretz, Workers’ delegate from Israel, highlighted this when he said that assuring the rights of Palestinians is in Israel’s interest and that there was no alternative to peace. He called for joint cooperation between his own organization and its Palestinian counterpart.

The debate echoed the findings of the Report in support from both sides for ILO technical assistance. I have already taken a number of initiatives to give a new impetus to our technical cooperation programme in the Palestinian territories, including earmarking a significant amount of funding from the regular budget. I have also set up a task force to develop an emergency employment generation programme. It is a beginning, and I am gratified to learn from Mr. El-Netsheh, the Palestinian Minister of Labour, that he believes it has been a step in the right direction. We shall continue our efforts and seek the support of donor countries and other organizations in doing so.

The Labour Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Ms. Al-Qudsi, said that the ILO must continue to play an active role in the region in promoting employment and respect of workers’ rights. We can play this role in many ways and through many specific interventions. None, however, is more important than to assist in the renewal of a dialogue. Discussions between the parties concerned on the economic and social issues mentioned in my Report is essential. It could well play a role in re-establishing some kind of understanding between the parties. I call upon our constituents to participate in this dialogue on fundamental economic and social issues and to assist us in implementing income and employment generation programmes in the region.

8. Committee on the Application of Standards

The Committee on the Application of Standards paid tribute to the memory of André Zenger, who died shortly before the Conference began. I join them in paying tribute to a man who guided this Committee through many difficult moments.

A spirit of dialogue and cohesive tripartism was particularly evident in this Committee.

A special sitting of the Committee on the application by Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), was held, as decided by the Conference last year. It was charged with following up measures taken on the basis of article 33 of the ILO Constitution. The Committee discussed developments since the Committee’s last session. I join the Committee in welcoming the Government of Myanmar’s decision to resume cooperation with the ILO. It is indeed a matter of some satisfaction to me to see that one year after the adoption by the Conference of its resolution, and through the patient efforts of the Office and other actors, an objective assessment mission will take place, the results

of which will be brought before the Governing Body at its November 2001 session. But this is only a first step. A High-Level Team will visit Myanmar shortly to conduct this objective assessment. Many speakers highlighted the need to ensure full security for people in Myanmar who come into contact with the mission. I agree with this preoccupation and we will work to ensure this result.

The issue of conditions of work in privatized prisons and in other situations of privatization with reference to Convention No. 29 were raised in the general discussion. This is a difficult and important subject, and one which will require continuing reflection by the ILO's supervisory bodies and the Office.

As part of an ongoing process within the ILO, this year the Conventions on night work for women were the subject of the General Survey by the Committee of Experts. There was widespread support in the plenary sitting for the modernization of the ILO's supervisory system and I believe that an integrated approach to standards will provide us with an effective tool for the future.

This year, 26 other "individual cases" were taken up by the Committee, including cases covering freedom of association, forced labour, discrimination, child labour, employment policy, social security, labour inspection – the range of concerns addressed in ILO standards. While welcoming the positive measures that had been taken in many of these cases, the Committee unfortunately also had to consider the tragedy which workers and their representatives continue to face in the sad and ongoing situation in Colombia

The Committee on the Application of Standards had a tremendous workload this year, and the Committee will need to consider how to reduce this volume of work while maintaining its essential supervisory function.

This year the Committee celebrated the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), one of the ILO's fundamental Conventions, and one of the most widely ratified of all international Conventions (152 as of 14 June 2001). This gives us the opportunity to reiterate the importance of gender equality as a central part of the Decent Work Agenda.

9. The Global Report on Stopping Forced Labour

I am sure you agree with me that the discussion of this report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work marked a milestone. It showed that the Declaration follow-up is on course and beginning to deliver the results expected. Delegates found the report both objective and alarming. The discussion moved from universal condemnation of this totally unacceptable but still widespread practice, to a call for redoubled efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labour in all its forms as part of sound and sustainable development strategies.

There is a strong consensus that the world economic system is harmed by forced labour. So what can we do about it? The discussion has made it clear that there is a need for a sizeable technical assistance programme covering many countries. Indeed, the Workers' group outlined a follow-up plan which was endorsed by the Employers' group and by a number of governments, including those of the IMEC group.

So I welcome the proposal to consider at the November session of the Governing Body an outline on an International Programme for the Elimination of Forced Labour. Such a programme would need to focus on areas where the ILO could provide technical assistance to address serious policy failures, such as the trafficking of persons for forced

labour purposes and bonded labour, where Mr. Kitt, the Irish Minister for Trade, Labour and Consumer Affairs, called for special measures. A sound technical cooperation component based on solid research and analysis would be a major element. We should make sure that such a programme would concentrate on where the ILO can add value, working within its mandate and together with partners.

Since many delegates welcomed the update on technical cooperation on freedom of association and collective bargaining within the framework of the Declaration (*Provisional Record No. 2*), we will prepare a similar document on forced labour for next year's Conference, taking on board your suggestions for improvements. This information should also help all of us to set priorities and find a match between hopes and possibilities.

There is widespread feeling, which I share, that the way in which the Global Report is discussed should change. Mr. Potter, the Employers' delegate from the United States, put forward some innovative suggestions to make future debates on global reports more interactive. With Lord Brett endorsing this appeal on behalf of the Workers and a number of Governments echoing the need for higher level political resonance around the Declaration as a whole, I will be consulting on how next year's debate on the Global Report on the Effective Abolition of Child Labour can be more effective and more interactive.

The President of the Conference in her closing remarks called on us to make sure that there is greater awareness of forced labour and that we mobilize support for the fight against it. I would reiterate her call and urge all of us to do what it takes to fight forced labour in whatever form.

In response to several speakers who wanted to know more about how the Office is promoting the Declaration, I would assure them that this is high on our agenda. The basic instrument is to engage governments who wish to move forward in this field. As an example, I wish to highlight advances made toward the realization of freedom of association in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and close cooperation with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The many new ratifications of the core Conventions are another example of these efforts. I have already replied with respect to our work on child labour. Two videos, one on freedom of association and one on forced labour, have been produced and widely shown. Progress is being made on a broad communications campaign to highlight public awareness on how the ILO principles and rights can make a difference in people's lives.

10. Conclusion

If this Conference has a single message, it is that all of us together must now move the Decent Work Agenda from aspiration to action, from design to implementation, from a vision to a policy. My Report aims to take up that challenge. You have been generous with your comments of support and have given guidance for practical implementation. Many of you have also requested ILO's policy support in making the four strategic decent work objectives part of your development plans. The Office is prepared to respond to your needs.

Several of you in the plenary debates said that it would have been desirable to have had time to hold prior national debates around the themes of the Report, to prepare the debate in the Conference itself.

I acknowledge this fact, and in accepting it would like to suggest a way forward: that over the coming months we together launch a process of tripartite debate and discussion

around the themes of this Report at regional and national levels, building on not only the Report itself but also on the richness of our discussions in this Conference. We need to highlight the different ways in which decent work is part of the development agenda; how all can benefit from its economic dividend; how partnerships can be constructed to move forward towards this goal and on many other issues covered in my Report. In the Office we stand ready to look at these issues with you, in formal events or informal presentations, in all regions. One opportunity arises soon, in the XIIIth Asian Regional Meeting in August.

We have, together, mapped out an agenda to which all subscribe, and which offers a guide for the first decade of the new century. Let us now move forward to make it a reality.
