

**Sixteenth sitting**

Tuesday, 14 June 2005, 10.10 a.m.

*Presidents: Mr. Alsalim, Ms. Anderson***REPORTS OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE GOVERNING BODY AND OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL: DISCUSSION  
(CONCL.)**

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*Original Arabic:* The PRESIDENT

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We shall now resume the discussion on the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.

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*Original Spanish:* Mr. CELI VEGAS (*representative, Exchange and Cooperation Centre for Latin America*)

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The Report of the Director-General, *A global alliance against forced labour*, has clearly demonstrated cooperation among the international players in order to reduce forced labour, which affects 12 million people.

According to the ILO's definition of forced labour it is work or a service which is extracted under the menace of a penalty and against the will of the individual; it can be imposed by the State or by private companies, in which case it is likely to be exploitation of an economic or sexual nature.

States are making attempts to concert their efforts to reduce poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and other major problems which have been worsened by globalization and lead to forced labour.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, the pact on globalization proposed by the Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, as well as other initiatives to attenuate the inequalities between and within countries, is very positive, yet its results, if they are achieved, will differ from one region to another and will not necessarily mean the elimination of poverty which affects so many people.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), indications show that countries in the region will attain the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 as regards education and access to drinking water.

These optimistic forecasts contrast with those relating to the goal of halving extreme poverty.

In the region, Chile is the only country to have succeeded in reducing extreme poverty by half. In the other countries, it would be difficult to obtain such results because of the structural imbalances which exist.

At the present time, it is estimated that 222 million Latin Americans are poor; this figure represents 44 per cent of the continent's population. Of those, 96 million, representing 18.6 per cent, live in poverty.

Government actions to attenuate forced labour are making progress in Latin America. The Report of the Director-General makes reference to the progress made in Brazil, which, since 2003, has provided in its Penal Code sanctions for all forms of slave labour. Also, the Report indicates the progress made by the Governments of Bolivia, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru as regards the question of debt bondage amongst the indigenous peoples, which is a form of forced labour, particularly used in agricultural sectors.

These initiatives are commendable, but to deal with the shortcomings of the labour market, it is necessary to consider preventive and punitive measures, which will tackle the real causes of forced labour. This means dealing with the informal economy, supervising the relocation of companies and strengthening the state institutions which provide the necessary mechanisms for social protection, such as unemployment benefits, pension systems, programmes for the disadvantaged, and so on.

In summary, it is a question of applying measures to correct the unequal distribution of revenue and to reduce the number of people in forced labour, which, according to the ILO, is 1,320,000 in the region.

The reduction or elimination of forced labour cannot be achieved by governments acting alone. States need to join forces. Globalization has completely changed social relations in the field of labour between States, international organizations, employers and civil society.

Confrontation between employers and workers of the past is now ceding ground to wilful coordination and cooperation as well as an understanding of co-responsibility for events played out on the international stage.

The human dimension of globalization and decent work, which we are all calling for, can only be obtained if the political will of all governments is demonstrated by the implementation of income-redistribution measures to reduce forced labour.

With the present forming of new economic blocs, obviously Latin America will be linked with the industrialized countries. This will contribute to the harmonization of legislation as the ILO minimum labour standards are transposed into national legislation. In this way, the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), which are included in a number of association agreements, can be pro-

moted in all forms of cooperation between the various country blocs.

Within the context of democracy and economic liberalism which is being experienced in Latin America, the active participation of civil society in order to defend the rights of those forgotten by globalization is a viable option which the international community cannot ignore. This correlation between the State and civil society is absolutely essential to reduce forced labour.

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Mr. EASTMOND (*Government, Barbados*)

In the last two decades, the political, social and economic climate of the world has changed dramatically. The ever-vigilant ILO has recognized this and sought to understand the impact of these changes on workers.

Nevertheless, the ILO has not restricted itself to understanding the impact. Since the adoption in 1998 of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, the ILO has been proactive in addressing the issues of freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced labour and discrimination in the workplace.

My Government wishes to commend the Director-General and the Governing Body for their tenacity in tackling the issue of forced labour. The Global Report for the year 2001, *Stopping Forced Labour*, opened the eyes of the world to existing but hidden realities. Today, he seeks to build on the success of that first Report.

As implied by the Director-General in his Report, this will be a mammoth undertaking. I therefore urge all Members to focus on the words in "global alliance", and to recognize that a united approach is essential for eradicating forced labour. Forced labour knows no bounds. It affects us all. Therefore, it is imperative that we obtain the political, economic and social commitment of all developed and developing countries, of workers, of employers and of governments, in the drive to achieve this goal.

My Government fully supports the International Labour Organization in its commitment to the elimination of this vile form of exploitation. We agree that forced labour in any form is a severe violation of basic human rights and freedoms.

Economic exploitation perpetuates forced labour. The strategies and programmes to reduce poverty, eliminate all forms of discrimination and to educate stakeholders on these issues must be constantly supported, monitored and evaluated, to ensure they reach their targeted constituents and goals.

In the Caribbean, and in much of Latin America, we are vulnerable to severe crises due to external economic shocks. Many small, vulnerable States lack the financial resources to implement effective programmes for removing existing human rights' violations and for identifying and stopping the development of new forms of exploitation. Financial and technical support for the development of such policies and programmes is, therefore, critical.

Building strategic international, intergovernmental, inter-ministerial and inter-agency linkages will establish the required institutional framework to support continuous collaboration and to develop appropriate strategies.

There is no better time than now to stamp out the inhumane practice of forced labour. Labour is too precious a resource to be sullied by such forms of vulgar exploitation. The noted philosopher, Sopho-

cles, put it well when he said, "without labour, nothing prospers".

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Mr. DUGASSE (*Government, Seychelles*)

I would like to convey to the Director-General the gratitude of the people of my country and to thank him for his stewardship of our Organization during the last six years. Since assuming office as head of the ILO he has initiated and presided over the publication of a library of thought-provoking documents. He has also made a number of stimulating and inspiring interventions with a view to improving the lives of his fellow workers across the world.

Reports, such as *Decent work, Working out of poverty, A fair globalization: The role of the ILO*, to name but a few, bear testimony to his unceasing efforts and determination to bring social justice and democracy to the workplace and beyond. They also bear testimony to the ILO's objectives of ensuring that those in public and private authority develop and implement policies that can give citizens of member States "a fair chance at a decent job".

Indeed, a fair chance at a decent job is one of the most widespread democratic and legitimate pursuits worldwide. However, this pursuit is a battle that we are all striving to win and we are fortunate to have the support and guidance of the Director-General and his team, who are leading the struggle from the front.

I wish to salute the fact that our Director-General has recognized the need for us to think ahead whilst keeping our feet on the ground and I support his call for a moment of active reflection on the many complex issues affecting the world of work today.

As we search deeper in our reflection we must, together, assess our progress and map out coherent and implementable strategies based on the ILO's four strategic objectives, taking into account national, regional and international realities, in order to make decent work our global goal.

Whilst there are many complex and conflicting issues to be addressed in the turbulent world of today, one of the most tantalizing issues is globalization. From the angle of labour and employment, this issue is contemporary, necessary and crucial, needing to be addressed realistically with urgency, zeal and determination.

The question of fairness and equity has been raised in the light of the persistent imbalances in the workings of the global economy. Fairness and equity in an area of globalization is possible, provided we are sincere and genuine in our attempts to bridge the gaps between rich and poor, the haves and have nots, the strong and the weak, the developed and developing countries.

I am of the view, and I would like to suggest that in our quest to achieve equity and fairness, developing countries need to join forces and push for the development and introduction of a vulnerability index which recognizes the disparities, vulnerabilities and specificities of countries. Such an index will, in my view, level out the playing field for more equitable participation in the world economy and distribution of benefits.

The need for a vulnerability index arose principally because of the extent to which the economy of a country is exposed to the vicissitude of factors outside its control. The stimulus for developing such an index comes mainly from small island developing States as some of them tend to register a relatively high GNP per capita, giving the impres-

sion of economic strength when, in reality, the economies are fragile and, in certain cases, extremely vulnerable to external shocks. My country, Seychelles, is a classic example.

It is indeed comforting to note the personal interest of the Director-General in engaging his colleagues of the Bretton Woods institutions in the quest for development policy coherence. I would like to implore the Director-General to ensure that the idea of a vulnerability index is kept on the agenda and that it be pursued with renewed vigour. The development and adoption of such an index would have tremendous positive effects for many ILO constituents, in particular small island developing member States.

Because of our human-centred development model, the people of Seychelles have, over the last 25 years, enjoyed significant improvements in the standard of living. In the UNDP Human Development Index for 2004, Seychelles ranks 35 amongst 177 countries and features amongst the high human development bracket. Furthermore, we have achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals.

However, in spite of our successes and achievements, we continue to be exposed to persistent threats. Seychelles is a small island State and its economy is susceptible to the effect of events that may happen in remote corners of the world – events like the war in Iraq, increases in the price of petroleum.

Another important area in which further progress is without doubt warranted is dialogue. Dialogue amongst those with a stake in the development of the country and dialogue within the ILO's tripartism approach needs to be promoted and sustained. In recognition of the importance of dialogue and to ensure that tripartism remains connected to the people – we the people – we have in Seychelles recently formulated and adopted a Charter for Dialogue, which sets out the basic rules of engagement between workers' and employers' organizations and Government. It provides a framework for consultation by all parties on all matters of labour and unemployment. There must be a commitment to be involved. The ultimate goal is to arrive at decisions where everybody is a winner.

Recognizing the merits of consultation and dialogue in addressing national issues, the President of Seychelles, Mr. James Michel, has, since assuming office last year, initiated and personally lead consultation sessions and meetings with all interest groups and citizens on issues of national concern. His intention is to connect with, involve and engage all national partners and stakeholders in the formulation, development, implementation and monitoring of national socio-economic policies, the final objective of which is a further improvement in the standards of living of our people.

In conclusion, achieving the noble goals of the ILO is, for me, not impossible, but nevertheless daunting and without doubt a major challenge for all member States. For small island States, like my own, with limited resources and, at the same time facing fierce competition in the global economy, success is far off.

I count on the Director-General for his continued intervention in making this world a better place for our fellow workers.

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Mr. MALABAG (*Worker, Papua New Guinea*)

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The call for an alliance against forced labour is virtuous. Throughout human history, men and women of all creeds have rallied against everything that has stood in the way of human progress. The human progress we speak of transcends technological advancement and embraces the inviolable domains of human expression. It speaks of the qualities of life to which we aspire and the ethical boundaries underpinning justifiable action to combat a repugnant phenomenon.

Because they called for the manifestation of justice in all human activity, countless ordinary people have paid the ultimate price with their lives. Their sacrifice has not been in vain for today, more than ever before, the upsurge of democracy and respect for human rights has left an indelible mark on the world and continues to gain global acceptance. Against the gains we have secured, however, active resistance still hampers human determination to extinguish the evils of society. These pockets of resistance which are trying to suppress justice represent the dregs of society, the pariahs who must be confronted, pacified and civilized.

Forced labour has been with us for far too long now for there to be any excuse for our failure to have it abolished. Sadly, if the truth were known in many instances, forced labour has been tolerated and bankrolled by some governments, business circles, powerful elites and individuals, many of whom may be present here today. Otherwise, how else could forced labour have survived this long?

It is our earnest hope that none of us present here are in any way involved in the circle of evil that continues to concoct excuses to justify the prevalence of injustice. Some of us who make a pilgrimage here every year, often echo the right words, but evade dealing with the injustices we speak of on our return home. We speak as one, but our actions are diametrically opposed to our words.

The often quoted phrase "short-term pain for long-term gain" has become the snappy marketing slogan for forced labour and the unbridled exploitation of the masses. In most cases, those who offer themselves as sacrificial lambs lose out on the deal and never live to enjoy the fruits of their labour. For them, the misery and pain of destitution is an added insult to the naked violation of their dignity and human rights. They are, in the end, the ones who will never experience the joy of raising a family. For them the precious gift of life has turned out to be their living tragedy – a condemnation for being born human. These are the heroes and heroines, the faceless martyrs.

Forced labour mirrors the diabolic traits of humankind. There are subtler forms of forced labour which often masquerade under the pretext of legislation and policy. The view that one has to be exposed to the barrel of a gun before the definition of forced labour fits, is obsolete. Like other countries, Papua New Guinea cannot continue to live in denial that some elements of forced labour do exist.

We commend the ILO for including minimum wages that cannot sustain the livelihood of workers and their families on the list of undesirable practices that constitute forced labour. For almost 15 years, the legal minimum wage has stood at K47 per fortnight in my country. At today's exchange rates it represents barely US\$15 for a family of five although in our society, most families comprise ten

members. We contend that the current minimum wage amounts to slavery. Despite GDP growth figures better than those of countries of comparable structure over this period, these people are forgotten and condemned to a life of misery and servitude for greedy companies and contemptuous governments, notwithstanding high profit margins and increased wages for those in top positions. In other words, forced labour affecting about 50 per cent of the workforce in the formal sector is alive and well in Papua New Guinea. It is a footnote to the sorry saga of hypocrisy and a want of conscience dictated by policies of economic rationalism.

We endorse both the set of actions advocated by the ILO and the working document.

Rhetoric must now be converted into pragmatism and reality must confront ideology and political adventurism. Problems are a product of human endeavour, which is itself a consequence of broader political, social and economic shifts. It is here that the search for answers must begin. For this reason, the ILO must continue to reach out to every home and government in order to find a way out of this quagmire. We must appeal to our conscience to free those shackled to all forms of forced labour, so that they, too, can share in the fruits of progress and the joys of humanity. We owe it to them.

Conscience and determination, however, on their own are not enough. Some of the countries represented here are more equal than others. We join the chorus of appeals to the advanced nations to take that extra step forward and to commit themselves to putting in place meaningful measures aimed at attaining the socio-economic equilibrium at the global level, the achievement of which will vastly enhance the efforts now being mooted to eradicate forced labour and all other forms of injustice.

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*Original Arabic: Mr. ALFARARGI (representative, League of Arab States)*

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I am happy to be participating in this Conference in order to express the views of the League of Arab States on the Director-General's Report, and in particular on the appendix entitled *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, and also to inform the Conference about the action taken last year in the Arab region in the areas being discussed by this session of the Conference. I would like to tell the Director-General, on behalf of the secretariat of the League of Arab States, how grateful we are for his tireless efforts to follow up the resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1974 and 1980 with regard to the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories. I would like to pay tribute to the high-level mission sent by the Director-General to examine the situation in the Palestinian territories.

However, we have to say that the Report has remained purely descriptive; it does not identify the causes of the suffering experienced by Arab workers in Palestine, embodied by Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, the establishment of settlements, the expropriation of land, the confiscation of water sources, the devastation of plantations and desertification of farmland, the destruction of homes, factories and workshops, the displacement of people, the construction of a wall of apartheid that has been condemned by the international community, by the International Commission of Jurists, and by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which has called for construction of the

wall to stop and for the sections of it that have already been built to be demolished. These are the things that have led inevitably to the economic and social consequences experienced in the occupied Arab territories, namely unemployment, extreme poverty, and the lack of any prospect of a better future.

We would have liked the Report to be clearer about its position and presented the ILO's views about the occupying forces' practices that contravene international labour standards. The Report made references to the embargo; the closure of territories; the sanctions; the establishment of military roadblocks; the exposure of workers to a variety of aggressions and humiliations; the hindering of the circulation of goods and persons, leading to the total paralysis of exports and imports; and the closure of industrial and commercial enterprises, thus causing extreme poverty. We therefore call on the Director-General to take the necessary measures to allow the social partners to strengthen their capacities and participate in the construction of the country until the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds as its capital. In light of this situation, which has been going on for four decades, as in the Syrian Golan and in the Shebaa farms in southern Lebanon, we believe that it is time for the supervisory bodies of the International Labour Organization to call the Israeli Government to account and take the necessary measures to set up a permanent committee responsible for monitoring the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories until the end of the Israeli occupation.

The Arab Summit, held in Tunisia last year, saw the updating of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, article 10 of which prohibits all forms of slavery, forced labour and trafficking in human beings. Furthermore, article 34 provides for sanctions against all those carrying out such activities. The Charter embodies the right to work of all citizens and guarantees fair and satisfactory working conditions. It also protects children, guaranteeing them living conditions that ensure protection against economic exploitation.

We share the Director-General's concern at the reach of globalization, which rides roughshod over any values and is governed solely by the rules of the market. We hope that the delegates at this Conference will take the measures necessary in order to preserve our world, threatened as it is by destabilization.

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*Original Spanish: Mr. DÍAZ (Worker, Venezuela)*

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At this 93rd Session of the International Labour Conference, we would also like to congratulate the Director-General for his Report, in which he talks in depth about the need to create decent work on all continents being essential to human dignity. This utopia must be implemented fully and governments, employers, workers and the people must do all that they can to ensure that we can build a better world, free of exploitation, forced child labour and slavery in the twenty-first century. For this reason, we support what the Director-General says in his Report.

We would like to make it clear that in Latin America the workers reject free trade agreements (FTAs) in all their forms, because they are the result of a savage new liberalism, where the best trade unions are the ones which do not exist and everything has to be privatized – health, education, housing. For this reason we must continue with our

struggle against globalization in each of our countries, in order to obtain clear rules of play and fair trade, so that earnings are not separated from the social and human aspect of work.

For that reason, we are against making concessions when it comes to the gains we have made through collective agreements and national legislation in our countries.

We have already had to struggle and take our proposals before the various congresses, national assemblies and ministers of labour in order to improve working conditions.

Latin America is a rich continent but, it is the poorest in terms of social justice. For that reason we would like to congratulate Mr. Ricardo Dorado, Deputy Minister of Labour of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. On behalf of the Government of Venezuela, he has undertaken to help the working class of Venezuela in trying to cancel the social debt that exists in our country. For that reason, we propose tripartite meetings, where employers, governments and workers can agree on steps aimed at obtaining worthy, fair and decent work for all: in order to obtain improvements in social, labour, health, education and housing conditions as well as environmental protection through democratic, participatory means.

When the Government is receptive, we have to congratulate and support it, but when we feel that things are not being done properly, we have to offer constructive criticism, so that it improves its performance. We all have to try to build a better world for the workers and the people.

We cannot overlook attempts by some Venezuelan employers to suggest that, thanks to the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), we have the right to organize. They are not being honest, because in reality, workers have to struggle hard to organize in Venezuela. When we try to introduce a collective agreement, workers are fired and any collective bargaining is prevented by using the companies' labour lawyers and by spending as much money as necessary to ensure the worker does not get a cent more. As the saying goes in Venezuela "You wouldn't leave a dog to guard your sausages." Employers are not the best people to ask when it comes to defending the right to organize. That is a job for trade union organization.

The struggle continues. You do not beg for your demands to be met, you fight and only the people can save the people.

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*Original Spanish: Mr. PARRA GAONA (Worker, Paraguay)*

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First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to all the ILO staff with whom, as a member of the Governing Body, I have always cooperated closely.

I welcome, in particular, the Report of the Director-General. On behalf of the workers in my country, I would like to congratulate him for setting out clearly the problems and challenges which we face in the world of work, particularly the problem of unemployment.

The concept of work and employment remains a lifestyle choice for all workers, especially in light of the neo-liberal policies and its globalization strategy which, according to management, is creating an economy without work and economic growth without employment.

Against this backdrop, we must strengthen the role of the ILO, support the World Employment Programme and think about the issues raised by the Director-General. Today's problems are everyone's problems. We can say, without hesitation, that the major and severe problems affecting the world are problems which concern and afflict us all.

Abject poverty, galloping unemployment, external debt, depreciation of human work, the growing gap between rich and poor, the shocking asymmetry and inequality between highly industrialized countries and impoverished and backward countries, as well as violence, corruption, impunity, drug trafficking, AIDS and the reappearance of tropical diseases, social injustice, the loss of the most basic notion of solidarity in the world, are profoundly challenging issues. No government, employer, worker or citizen can feign disinterest or fail to act.

This reality focuses us all to work for true social dialogue to formulate public policies based on consensus at the international and national levels. As the Nobel Prize winner in Economics, Joseph Stiglitz says, we need a change in direction of globalization in its current form. We deeply believe in the message conveyed by the World Social Forum; another world is indeed possible.

The world crisis is reflected in crises in our countries. The reality in Latin America and the Caribbean is desperate. Our region is marked by an inequitable distribution of wealth without par and an increase in social conflict and political instability, which translates into uncertainty.

In Paraguay, as in other countries, we are seeing rising levels of unemployment and abject poverty. The concurrent privatization policies and systematic repression intensify social conflict and breed violence. In Paraguay, the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), and the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), are systematically violated.

In other countries of our region, including Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and Honduras, these Conventions are also being violated, as are the most basic human rights. We are concerned over the detention of several trade union leaders in Cuba for exercising their internationally recognized rights of freedom to association and freedom to organize and request their prompt release.

Smallholder farmers and indigenous communities are driven off their land, leaving them landless, to make room for big transnational companies that use chemical fertilizers and pesticides and engage in extensive agricultural practices and unfair trade. These communities have their fundamental rights violated in every possible way and smallholder farmers who organize are violently repressed. This is illustrated by the drama of Puerto Casado, where La Victoria, S.A., a company belonging to the Moon sect, owns the lives and property of people living in the Alto Paraguay region, thus violating the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87). The transport sector also experiences continuing labour conflicts, because the owners of the company do not respect the Labour Code, requiring employees to work 14 to 16 hours per day. The textile and metal-

work sectors are facing a crisis, because of smuggling which poses a serious threat to the economy. The construction industry is also impacted negatively. Teachers and public sector workers are demanding wage increases and better working conditions. Domestic workers are marginalized and exploited; so are women workers and retail employees. They are unable to organize in trade unions for fear of retaliation from their employers, who illegally lay off trade union workers in flagrant violation of ILO Conventions. Migrant workers are subject to all kinds of violations and the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), is systematically infringed upon. The exploitation of child labour for the purpose of sexual exploitation, in agriculture and in drug trafficking is also cause for serious concern. Many people have lost their lives in union struggles, men and women who have paid a high price for defending Convention No. 87.

Our organization, the CNT, is working with the ILO to combat that scourge. The Workers' Council of the Southern Cone is cooperating closely with the central body for trade union coordination of the Southern Cone in an effort to achieve true integration of all the countries of the region, not only in economic terms, but also in political, cultural and social terms.

The Front for the Defence of Sovereignty and Life is drawing up strategies so smallholder farmers can access land and workers, employers and professionals can find dignified work and decent employment. We are also concerned over the issue of social security. We reject the privatization of public services, as well as the privatization of water, energy and communications and see a need for public banking and comprehensive agricultural reforms.

We are fighting for the rights of young persons to education and work and combat all forms of gender discrimination. We request the respect for the rights of women workers and denounce violations occurring in the textile industry and other workplaces. We also denounce the repression and violation of the autonomy of universities by the national police in response to the students' request for transparency and changes in the management of the national university.

We believe in solidarity, social justice, equality and cooperation, as well as freedom and real democracy. We have applied these principles in our call for eight-hour working days, which has claimed great sacrifices and made many martyrs, which is why we always remember the martyrs of Chicago on 1 May.

Mindful of the needs of families, we believe that workers must be given sufficient time to share with them. We must take account of economic needs, but give such considerations a human face. Failing that, we will violate human rights and, in particular the 1998 Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. We want working hours that are consistent with our right to dignified, decent work.

To conclude, I would like to draw your attention to the Congress of the World Federation of Industry Workers, to be held from 22 to 26 June in Senegal, which will address some of the major issues in the world of work.

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Mr. KALUAT (*Government, Vanuatu*)

My Minister, the Honourable George Wells, would have liked to join us in this important occa-

sion since this is the Republic of Vanuatu's first ever participation in the annual session of the International Labour Conference since joining the membership some two years ago. However, due to pressing parliamentary duties in the capital, he could not be with us but accords to you his utmost and unequivocal support.

I am deeply honoured and privileged to stand before you all on this very important occasion and, on behalf of my delegation, the Government and the people of Vanuatu, I extend to you all our very sincere and warm greetings and best wishes.

It gives me great pleasure to convey my Government's acknowledgement and support for the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General for 2004, which particularly called for *Organizing for social justice* and this year's theme which calls for *A global alliance against forced labour*. This theme is indeed a true reflection and a clear testimony to the great efforts made by the United Nations and the International Labour Organization in general in view of creating and promoting natural and equitable justice and participation at the workplace.

Since becoming a full member of the International Labour Organization in 2003, although my country attained its full political autonomy from the United Kingdom and France as early as July 1980, Vanuatu has always supported and recognized the role of the International Labour Organization as the most competent United Nations authority in settling international labour disputes and mediating over extreme labour issues and cases, which has naturally intensified and improved upon the International Labour Organization's mandate and objectives over the years.

Our first ever attendance and participation at this historical 93rd Session of the International Labour Conference no doubt further reaffirms my Government's continued commitment and support for the role of the ILO and the causes it stands, and has always stood for, since its inception some 93 years ago.

The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu is committed and pledges its support to the International Labour Organization in promoting decent work.

I am pleased to report to this important gathering that given our commitment and recognition to all ILO principles and objectives, the Vanuatu Government is now in the process, through the intervention of the tripartite body, of ratifying all core international labour Conventions as well as putting in place an adequate regulatory framework that should provide a catalyst to both the Government, the Employers and, of course, the Workers through a strong transparent tripartite mechanism that ideally provides an equitable basis for dialogue, debate and consultation on core labour and employment issues, as a way forward in both advancing labour issues, on the one hand, and ensuring that there is no discrimination in the workplace on, the other hand. This is the reason why my delegation to this important session of the Conference is adequately represented, constituting a representative from the Workers, a representative from the Employers and, of course, a competent representative from the State.

Ratification of fundamental human rights Conventions and equally, the adoption of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work have set the benchmark by which the country

is working to address all labour issues in the country.

The development of a national plan of action on decent work during the Melbourne meeting in April this year only reaffirms the Government's commitment in its pursuit to alleviate and eliminate all forms of human rights violations and abuses, which forced and compulsory labour are its cornerstone.

Vanuatu joins other member States to support the Governing Body's pursuit in advocating and promoting human dignity, equality and freedom in the place of work.

The challenges posed by the ILO to eliminate all forms of forced and compulsory labour are accepted unanimously by my Government through the new initiatives being undertaken in our labour law legislation review programme, where my country will deliver and try to fulfil its commitment to ensure that forced and compulsory labour is eliminated.

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Mr. BARAK (*Employer, Israel*)

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The world of work is changing rapidly, with new patterns emerging, which demand new responses.

It is clear that employment is an important element in fighting poverty and social exclusion. Based on our own experience in Israel, we believe that greater employment and productivity achievements can be gained by the promotion of technological advancement, mainly within the spectrum of information and communications technology. This could be the cornerstone for building or enlarging sustainable industries, especially for countries lacking in natural resources, and could open new avenues for investment opportunities, thus creating more possibilities for new employment and a higher standard of living.

One of the ILO's programmes designed to meet this challenge is the Global Employment Agenda, which is part of the broader goal of promoting decent work. We believe that, by so doing, the ILO is on the right track, especially as it is strengthened by its unique tripartite structure. However, at the end of the day, these broad concepts should be translated into action by the relevant constituents, taken at regional or national level. They should be connected with real people, workers and employers alike, who are awaiting practical solutions to their everyday problems.

Within the context of the Global Employment Agenda, special attention is given to the problem of youth employment. We share the concerns of young people, who are confronted with the task of seeking employment at the onset of their working life.

While it is true that employment opportunities are linked to the general situation of the economy, special efforts should be made to increase the employability of young persons by implementing, inter alia, a comprehensive policy of education and vocational training.

Another point to consider regarding the problem of youth employment is the need to promote entrepreneurship, starting with the educational system and followed by introducing young people to the business and commercial environment and regulation.

It is likewise important to ensure that the measures taken in this respect are practical and relevant to the real needs of young persons. Vocational training should be more responsive to the skills demanded by an updated labour market, and more at-

tion should be given to work experience and training.

In Israel, we give special attention to the preparation of young people who enter the world of work. There exists a vast network of vocational education, with high-level facilities for technological studies and training, together with vocational training courses in a variety of fields and subjects.

Every unemployed young person is entitled to a vocational training course as part of unemployment insurance benefits, together with professional counselling as to the best field of occupation for his or her future employment.

Economic planning in Israel is also taking into account that one of the pillars of any programme to reduce poverty is proper employment. In 2004, the employment situation in Israel did indeed improve. The number of employed workers increased by 3 per cent (an addition of approximately 71,000 employees) following an increase of 2 per cent in 2003.

All of the new additions to the workforce were absorbed by the business sector, while the public sector registered a slight decrease. Thus, the total number of employed persons in Israel in 2004 was 2.4 million.

In 2004, significant growth was registered in Israeli industry: a real increase of 7 per cent in production, mostly influenced by an impressive growth of production in the hi-tech industry – 15 per cent – followed by an increase of 24 per cent in export of hi-tech products.

Let me conclude by turning to another important topic on our agenda, that is the Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, *A global alliance against forced labour*. The Report outlines some very important and coherent plans and actions undertaken to combat the various forms of forced labour. Although we, as employers, have some concerns about certain points contained in the Report, mostly as regards questions related to the definition of forced labour, we would like to add the support of the employers of Israel to the global effort to eradicate forced labour, wherever it may exist, with the hope that our collective efforts shall bear fruit.

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Mr. SIRIWARDANE (*Worker, Sri Lanka*)

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On behalf of the trade unions of Sri Lanka, I wish to focus on a matter of an urgent need in most developing countries in the area of industry and the manufacturing trade in the context of globalization. On this subject, Sri Lanka is a case in point. Traditionally, we have been among those countries that depended upon a natural economy that included as major components both agriculture and fishing. The policy of open markets and the high cost of agricultural inputs have marginalized our agriculture in the face of competition from the rice-and wheat-growing developed countries, which add hidden subsidies to their agriculture. In fishing, technological advances and heavy investment by the developed countries that engage in fishing in our waters and areas adjacent to them have outstripped the capabilities and capacities of our fishermen with their antiquated and more traditional technologies. Both agriculture and fishing are subject to cycles of natural disasters. I may mention, in particular, the recent Tsunami, which has condemned 400,000 of the fishing sector workforce to living below the poverty line. Our tea industry, despite its high quality teas,

has maintained itself on the basis of low wages. The manufacturing sector, with its small- and medium-scale industry, has been the only area in which anything approximating fair remuneration has been forthcoming for its workers. But the open-market policies on which globalization rests have terrorized the sector. Policies advocated – or rather, conditionalities imposed – by the international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have contributed significantly to reducing us to this parlous situation. A further conditionality of these institutions is that the state sector should be rapidly privatized. This has led to large-scale retrenchment of workers and factory closures in what was formally the state sector. The result of all these policies is that today, out of a population of 20 million, well over 8 million are unemployed or underemployed as recorded by our official statistics. This growing unemployment is a challenge to the employed and has seriously affected the bargaining power of the trade unions and job security.

The rationale of the policies that have led to this situation is the unexamined assumption of the International Monetary Fund that endemic low wages are the single precondition for drawing in foreign direct investments, or FDI. Low wages – or “cheap labour”, as we call it – has certainly drawn in a considerable volume of notoriously footloose industry in the clothing and garments sector, but this does not add to long-term stable industrial development. In fact, the thousands of young females who are thrown out of employment by overnight closures in the sector are pushed into miserable conditions, in which they have been uprooted from their villages and are excluded from their traditional economic and social life patterns. Safety nets can be of little help – if they even exist at all.

Policy-induced low wages have the direct result of weakening our development effort, and are by no means a strategy for economic development. Half the population lives below the official poverty line. In that situation, it is only the wage earners who have had some degree of purchasing power. It is this purchasing power that has maintained our food production, small and medium-scale industry and the lower-level services sector. I say this because, under the condition of open markets, we have no advantage or opening for other sectors. The Central Bank Report for 2004 records that whilst there was an increase in wages in the public sector, “some employee categories in the organized private sector faced reduction in real minimum wages”. This fall in real wages has been in the manufacturing sector that I have mentioned. Under IMF policies, the state sector of employment is narrowing and it is private sector employment that plays a significant role in the local economy. My contention is that, for our economic development, it is absolutely necessary that real wages be maintained at a satisfactory level.

To maintain the real wage in the sectors I have mentioned is by no means a factor that will deny to us the comparative advantages in relation to wage conditions in the developed countries. Even with an immediate 50 per cent increase in our region’s real wages, we would still be in a position to benefit from this advantage.

It is in this situation that I call upon the ILO to set up the needed machinery to induce the payment of fair wages. I suggest that a Convention would go a long way in this regard.

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*Original Arabic: Mr. ASSADALLAH (Worker, Oman)*

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Two years ago in this room, I talked about the efforts made by the social partners in Oman and about the dialogue that had led to new legislation marking a number of advances in efforts to safeguard the rights of workers.

Now, it is my pleasure to announce the setting up of an elected workers’ committee. This committee is the union of Omani workers, and considerable efforts will be required to train its members. I had the honour to be elected president of this committee, and in that capacity I call on your Organization and its Regional Office in Lebanon to provide us with the technical support to carry out the objectives of the committee, and to ensure the full participation of its members with a view to protecting the interests of workers in our country and promoting constructive dialogue.

It is also my pleasure to call on this Organization and its Director-General to provide assistance to the Palestinian workers under Israeli occupation, in order to alleviate the dire conditions in which they work every day. We call on the world to express solidarity with the Palestinians, which is the very least we can demand at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

It is not enough to provide work: we have to try to eradicate poverty, find solutions to all the problems, and face the challenges that the world is currently facing.

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*Ms. BANG ONSENGDET (Employer, Lao People's Democratic Republic)*

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The Lao People’s Democratic Republic is developing its economy by transforming the agricultural-based economy, which in the past covered 85 per cent of the economy, into a market-oriented one. In the market-oriented economy, there is a great deal of competition in terms of the quality and quantity of production. Modern machinery and skilled labour are needed to ensure competitiveness. However, most labourers in the production sector are migrants from rural areas and have not gone through technical or vocational schools.

The population of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is about 5.6 million people, with a labour force of 1.5 million, 760,000 of whom are female. The labour force is made up of those in the age group between 15 and 55. There are 105,000 workers in the private sector, and other production sectors, 35,000 of whom are female. There are 15,000 people unemployed.

According to the National Development Plan 2004-05, the Government increased the share of the budget available for education to 14 per cent in the fiscal year 2004-05. With gradual economic liberalization and increasing foreign investment, the education system is still far from satisfying the emerging human resources requirements. The graduates from the local training and technical schools have not reached the technical and managerial requirements of the foreign companies, or even local private companies operating in Laos.

During the coming years, approximately 200,000 young people per annum will flood the labour market. Under the current conditions, they have very limited chances of obtaining formal professional qualifications, since only seven out of 18 provinces provide vocational educational training for school leavers aged between 14 and 24. Their training ca-

capacity can only accommodate approximately 3,500 school leavers per year.

In light of this, I am of the view that, in order to promote the employment of young people in rural and urban areas, as well as income generation so they can support their families, it is necessary for employers or investors to pay attention to training their employees periodically by providing financial support for capacity building and designing a strategic plan for skill development; it is necessary for educational institutions to survey the current demands of the labour force in a potential business sector, and develop appropriate curricula and training courses; and it is necessary for the Government to develop a national strategic plan on promoting and creating employment opportunities for young people, in collaboration with employers, educational institutions and social organizations. This plan will provide clear guidelines on this issue for local and foreign investors.

In addition, both local and foreign investors must understand the necessity of ensuring a safe and healthy workplace and the welfare of all workers. This will be a measure preventing work-related accidents, and help reduce occupational injuries and illnesses. However, in reality, many Lao employers and businessmen are not aware of the importance of this matter. Therefore, the organization of employers of the Lao People's Democratic Republic needs to have a strategic plan, which includes the following areas: coordinating with, and drawing lessons from, the International Organization of Employers, the ILO and other organizations of employers around the world on the issue of occupational safety and health; raising awareness among Lao employers of the importance of occupational safety and health in their business; encouraging and coordinating with government agencies, business people and relevant social organizations, to draft a national policy on occupational safety and health; developing training programmes on occupational safety and health for Lao employers.

I am very pleased to note that the Lao Government has informed the Conference of its ratification of the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). This is a significant step made by the Lao Government to build confidence for local and foreign investors, as well as the ILO, in assuring that through the development of the economy, industry, trade and other sectors, there will be no child labour.

We, representing the employers, request the Lao Government and Lao trade unions to cooperate fully with both Lao and international organizations of employers, as well as other social organizations, in planning and implementing practical measures and safety procedures. This is to improve quality of life and create safe and healthy workplaces for all workers, and job opportunities for young people. I believe that the ILO will provide further technical assistance to employers, and during this session of the Conference we will share experiences and best practices among the organizations of employers on this issue.

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*Original Spanish: Mr. CABEZAS BADILLA (Worker, Costa Rica)*

I would like to begin by congratulating the Director-General on his Report. I would like also, on behalf of the trade union movement in Costa Rica, to

make a few very general comments on the important ideas put forward in the Report.

I agree that we are facing times of change and far-reaching transformation. Nevertheless, in my country, and in Latin America in general, the concepts of change and transformation are being replaced by the negative concept of regulations imposed by the economic and political powers that be.

This means that the ILO should adopt a very determined position in strengthening the processes of social dialogue within the framework of genuine participatory democracy, without any exclusions. These processes can, at both local and national levels, serve to establish public policies to overcome the high levels of poverty, through creating jobs that are consistent with the concept of decent work promoted by the ILO.

Accordingly, the national plan should provide for a number of measures that are essential if we really intend for the process of social dialogue to yield the positive results expected.

First of all, it is crucial that freedom of association, especially with regard to workers in the private sector, be fully respected.

The situation in countries like my own, where trade union organization in private enterprises is repressed, cannot be allowed to continue. Social dialogue needs to have genuine and free trade unions.

Another absolutely essential measure is the strengthening of ministries of labour. These institutions should no longer be treated as the poor relations within governments, and should take their place at the forefront of national development policies.

All this is necessary for the design of public policies capable of addressing the high levels of poverty with clarity and determination, policies which embody the gender dimension, and include vulnerable groups such as young people and persons with disabilities. Decent work is the ideological centre point of such policies.

These actions at the national level will enable a more positive approach to trickle up to regional and world plans, contributing to the spread of globalization with a human face.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in my personal opinion, we should not reduce the duration of this assembly of the ILO; perhaps better use could be made of the time available to us. There is no technology that can replace direct personal contact. I would even say that tripartite regional meetings should be strengthened, and a strong message should be sent to certain governments, such as that of my country, to strengthen the representation of Workers and even of Employers.

*(Ms. Anderson takes the chair.)*

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*Original Spanish: Mr. GUTIÉRREZ MADUEÑO (Worker, Peru)*

I would like to extend to the President and the ILO international community warm greetings from Peruvian workers and, on behalf of the members of my organization, I would like to express support for the issues raised by the Director-General in the Global Report, *A global alliance against forced labour*.

I start my statement by saying that in 2004 the economy of Peru grew considerably, and this has been maintained in the current year. According to official data, GDP rose by 4.8 per cent, domestic

demand increased by 3.9 per cent, the trade balance had a surplus of more than US\$12,000 million, the fiscal deficit fell to 1.1 per cent, inflation was 3.5 per cent and the *nuevo sol* rose by 5.5 per cent vis-à-vis the dollar.

These figures, however, do not reflect the well-being of the workers and the population in general, neither as regards decent jobs, nor the reduction in poverty and extreme poverty. Of 28 million inhabitants, 54.3 per cent live in a situation of poverty and 23.9 per cent in extreme poverty. This is more than 6 million Peruvians.

Of an economically active population of more than 12 million Peruvians, 37 per cent are employed and 63 per cent, or more than 7 million, are unemployed or underemployed. Casual and informal work has increased considerably.

Workers represented by the General Confederation of Workers of Peru (CGTP) have maintained a position of promoting dialogue and fighting for our rights. We have a constructive attitude towards our participation in the National Labour Council, a tripartite body which for more than three years discussed the draft General Labour Law, reaching a consensus on 65 per cent of its 417 articles. Today the draft law is in Congress, awaiting promulgation. However, we are concerned that a fundamentalist sector of employee, and some employers of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, are promoting a campaign to avoid having this important law approved, a law which we hope will systematize labour legislation and re-establish the rights taken away from workers over the past decade, something which led to a complaint being submitted to the ILO.

We are also concerned at attempts to reduce the rights of state workers through the Public Employment Framework Law. This affects the State of Peru, and has led to protests across the country.

There are other sensitive aspects as well, namely the attempt to have the Act on Free Withdrawal from Private Financial Associations (AFPs) approved, as well as the Act against Privatization of Drinking Water Companies.

At the same time, the Government of Mr. Alejandro Toledo is negotiating mysteriously with the United States to establish a free trade agreement. The public has been misinformed about the supposed benefits of this. The CGTP has expressed firm opposition to signing a treaty which will undermine national sovereignty and development, and the rights of the workers. This treaty would mean the total surrender of Peru's economy to the United States.

Our organization is not against economic integration, but we feel that a truly democratic regime should promote wide-ranging national debates so that there can be a referendum. We workers will not tolerate further imposition and we call for non-signature of the free trade agreement.

According to independent researchers, a free trade agreement will not solve the job problem. According to a report from Professor Bruno Seminario of the University of the Pacific, this agreement would only provide around 18,000 jobs and Peruvians living far from the coast, particularly those working in agriculture, would be sacrificed.

Finally, I would also like to refer to other forms of exploitation in Peru which must be denounced. One of these is child labour, which affects some 2 million children and adolescents aged between 6 and

17 years. They carry out heavy and dangerous work, panning in rivers, working in brickworks, slaughterhouses, the building industry, mining and metallurgy, processing coca leaves, making fireworks, working in domestic service, at quarries and landfills and other places. Furthermore, workers in the sugar mills in the north of Peru work for more than 12 hours a day and have not even the most basic union rights. These temporary harvest-time workers are desperately over-exploited. In the mining sector, 90,000 workers, both those with permanent and those with temporary contracts work for more than 12 hours a day. Over periods of 21 days, they work 14 days and rest for seven. In other words, they work for 168 hours, which is the equivalent of a 56-hour working week, rather than 48 hours as the law requires. This new form of exploitation has been denounced by the CGTP to the ILO and the restoration of these workers' rights has been demanded.

Lastly, the CGTP is calling for substantial changes in economic policy, thereby increasing democracy – an institution whose moral values are deepening – and eliminating poverty by ensuring a fair distribution of wealth. The first steps to achieving this should be the promulgation of the General Labour Law, the waiving of the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Law, enacting of the Law of Free Disaffiliation from the PFAs, waiving of the Public Service Framework Law, the keeping of drinking water companies in public hands, and the restoration and application of labour rights.

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Mr. TROGEN (*Employer, Sweden*)

The International Labour Conference is the supreme body of the ILO and is without any doubt very important, not only in order to exercise constitutional obligations, but also to bring people together to share views and information related to the world of work. It provides labour and social policy-makers of the highest level with a unique occasion to gather under one roof, albeit quite a large roof!

The Conference entails a huge logistical effort, with thousands of delegates and foreign dignitaries and guests coming to Geneva every year from all parts of the world. That means in turn that the annual sessions of the Conference are very time-consuming and costly for the ILO, as well as for its constituents: governments, organizations and delegates. For many senior delegates, at least for the Employers' delegates whose daily work does not include ILO work, it is a huge effort to participate during the three weeks of each session.

This makes heavy demands on the content of the Conference, as well as on time management. Within the Employers' group, we consider reforms to be necessary in order to ensure a feeling of co-ownership of the Conference and also in order to keep up the long-term interest of the business community in the Conference.

I will forward for your consideration a selection of ideas discussed among the employers.

Reforms should aim to create a dynamic and shortened agenda, achieving interactive plenary sessions and accessible, highly political, cutting-edge discussions, capable of attracting the highest possible level of participation. Attempts have been made in this regard before but further thinking is needed.

Topics should be selected that are highly relevant at the time of the session of the Conference, not decided years in advance so that they are out of date when discussed.

Standard-setting activities, including the new integrated approach, should be limited to only one agenda item. Revision of outdated standards should be given priority; revised standards must recognize the realities of the modern world of work and be geared towards improving their chances of being accepted by a larger range of States.

Regarding the schedule, better use of Conference time should be sought, not only to avoid long wasteful periods of waiting, but also to use the available time in a more constructive manner.

Consideration should be given to the possibility of holding workshops or seminars on highly relevant and topical issues that can be of direct use to the delegates once they are back at home. Knowledge-based events of this kind are highly interesting for employers and will increase their interest in participating in the Conference. At the same time, the number of side events that there are today should be reduced, if not eliminated, to make space for events strictly relevant to the work of that particular session of the Conference.

The plenary sessions should be more interactive; high-level forums and panel-type discussions could take place and foreign dignitaries' visits should be channelled into discussions; the practice of giving speeches to empty halls (as this speech) should be stopped or limited, because it devalues the role of plenary – written interventions and comments on different reports could, instead, be compiled in a special report and published. Thought should be given to the possibility of having the Director-General's Report only in alternate years.

Further deliberations must also include the total duration of each session of the Conference. A new set-up should last only two weeks, and an audacious personal proposal – it is personal, I must say – would be to convene the Conference only every two years. Instead, a kind of forum or other event could take place in the intervening years.

We, the Employers, ask that the Governing Body be given a real opportunity to debate this issue, with specific proposals from the Office as to how to make the Conference more effective.

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Mr. PURI (*Government, India*)

Let me first compliment the Director-General on his Report on the ILO's role in the next decade. The Report is essentially a reaffirmation of the ILO's enduring values and mission, which seek to promote opportunities for productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity in an increasingly interdependent world.

We fully agree with the ILO that social vulnerability in contemporary societies can be addressed by concerted action at local, national, regional and global levels. At the national level, this means strengthening democratic institutions, a prerequisite for the effective participation of all interested groups and civil society institutions in decision-making.

India is a quintessentially democratic and open society. Freedom, equity, society and human dignity form the core of its Constitution. Real and effective participation of our people in decision-making is the hallmark of our political system. That is why our policies and programmes are always reflective of the needs and aspirations of our people. We have, in the course of many years, initiated a number of programmes for the economic and social emancipation of a large number of underprivileged workers, in-

cluding women and other vulnerable groups. However, the sheer enormity of the challenges requires massive mobilization of resources in terms of men, materials and attitudes.

This is where the role of the ILO in supplementing the national effort to improve decent work opportunities becomes important. This is possible only when the ILO's country programmes are developed through a process of dialogue, so that national concerns and priorities are given due place.

We would like to see the ILO in a developmental and supportive role. In this context, the ILO's budget constraints are a matter of serious concern, as they affect technical cooperation programmes. Extra-budgetary resources are not always an ideal substitute for core funding, as donor programmes are often designed to serve the interests and expectations of the donor agency.

To utilize the available resources judiciously and optimally, the ILO needs to prioritize the sectors where intervention would lead to the maximum benefit for the underprivileged. In this context, the Director-General's proposal for building an information base as the core of the ILO's core competencies is very relevant. This will lend focus and direction to the ILO's country programmes. However, the efficacy of the system will be contingent on the authenticity of the information and the reliability of resources.

At the international level, the ILO envisages a framework of global social governance to ensure that economic processes generate prosperity with social justice. While this objective is laudable, and in many ways the ideal approach to placing the fight against poverty, unemployment and underemployment at the centre of multilateral cooperation, it is also true that such frameworks for social governance need to be closely sanitized, as they are fraught with the dangers of misuse.

This apprehension is all the more real because of the basic difference in mandate between the constituencies of the ILO and other multilateral institutions. Moreover, we do not see any reason for the ILO to compromise its core positions and basic philosophy when it has a strong legislative capacity to translate international commitments into binding national action.

The ILO deserves praise for giving employment a central place in the agendas and programmes of the international organizations. The Millennium Declaration of the United Nations has recognized the importance of jobs in poverty reduction, as well as the empowerment of women and more vulnerable groups. However, getting a decent job that matches the skills of the worker has become rather difficult. Changes in the production system and a system of contract manufacturing have altered the very nature of employment. Employment policy now needs to be reviewed and reassessed, keeping in mind the undercurrents and complexities of the new economic order, so that workers can be equipped with the tools they need to handle the challenges of globalization.

Standard setting is one of the core functions of the ILO. We wish that the experts on this subject would take into account the socio-economic and cultural diversity of member States, and we believe that the conclusions adopted should reflect the views of the constituents. With regard to the recommendations of the Governing Body concerning possible improvements in the functioning of the International

Labour Conference, we would prefer a shorter Conference duration in Geneva only. Interactive sessions would certainly be more fruitful than long, dreary monologues.

Decent work, which explores new synergies between the social and economic aspects of development, is indeed crucial for lasting peace and prosperity; even if it cannot be defined in fixed terms of standards, it has a universal appeal in terms of the needs and aspirations of workers in relation to their own lives and society. We trust that the ILO will further the cause of labour without compromising its role in fostering development.

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*Original French: Mr. SALMON (representative, World Union of Professions)*

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The World Union of Professions (WUP), which I represent today at the ILO's 93rd annual session of the Conference, has already spoken out in previous years on child labour, decent work and forced labour and has always supported the action of your Organization on these serious issues. We cannot but subscribe to the principles and basic labour rights that he solemnly declared.

In his introduction to this session of the Conference, the Director-General urges us to consolidate progress and move ahead because conditions in the working world are changing rapidly.

We wish to recall that, although workers and large firms have the right to organize themselves and be represented in the International Labour Organization, professionals, technicians, micro-businesses and small firms should also have access to social dialogue and be able to help forge new basic labour standards taking into account the reality of a global economy in which jobs are becoming increasingly insecure, whether in the office, the factory or the field.

The Director-General himself says that to stimulate employment, especially youth employment, it is essential to promote entrepreneurship and the creation of new companies. This is a field in which knowledge and experience of the tripartite constituents can help define the best practices to be used to create an environment which favours the necessary investments. This may involve self-employment, as well as foreign investment.

So, why ignore the professionals in the private sector especially since one of the four pillars of the ILO's worldwide objective is to reinvigorate tripartism and reinforce the trade unions, employers' organizations and ministries of employment, labour and social affairs?

We reassert that the time has come for general mobilization of the professions, alongside Governments, to ensure a future for our societies without child or forced labour, and with decent work for all. Indeed, when entrusted with a genuine public service mission, the professions in the WUP are a key link in the social dialogue which they carry out every day in the secrecy of their offices, consulting rooms, in treating, advising and defending their fellow citizens.

Let us not forget the important position that professions have in emerging countries, especially the role they play in sustainable development in those regions. Moreover, on 24-28 October 2004 the WUP organized a forum in Lome, Togo, on the theme of the development of the professions in Africa, health, sustainable development and solidarity. Over 200 delegates from Benin, Burkina Faso,

Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Chad and Togo came to discuss their experiences. They looked at the impact of the professions in Africa in order to decide on new directions and, particularly, to develop an effective partnership between the public authorities and the professions. They asked for grants to help young professionals set up their practices, thus avoiding the unemployment of a large number of young graduates. They reiterated that the young professional is already a company director who is going to create jobs and wealth in this world. The professionals were urged to gather around the basic criteria which characterized them, namely a high level of skill and responsibility and the observance of a code of ethics and professional secrecy.

We are prepared to work to find common-sense ways of promoting dignity for workers and decent work, which has always been one of our human causes.

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*Mr. FUNES DE RIOJA (Employer, Argentina; speaking on behalf of the Employers' group)*

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Permit me to say a few words at the conclusion of this plenary discussion of the Director-General's Report.

Listening to the speeches made over the last few days it is clear that the demands and expectations we all have for this institution are increasing. This reality was also reflected in discussions of the programme and budget both in the Governing Body and in the Finance Committee. At a time of limited resources, it is important that we continue to try to help focus the ILO on those areas where it can have the most impact.

I spoke at the outset of our support for the decent work country programmes, as they provide a tool enabling constituents to address their real needs at the national level. A switching of efforts to those areas, where their impact could be felt, can only help secure the relevance of the Organization and would represent a response to the calls we have all made.

For employers, employment, enterprise creation and entrepreneurship lie at the heart of sustainable development and therefore at the heart of efforts by the ILO to achieve decent work. Specifically, we need to work to promote the ILO Global Employment Agenda at the national level as a tool for addressing employment realities, particularly in respect of training and skill development, youth and the small and medium enterprise sector. Similarly, the ILO needs to promote the macroeconomic environment necessary for creating and sustaining the productivity and competitiveness of business, as well as to promote good governance and the rule of law, these being the prerequisites for economic development.

Social protection and health and safety are issues of concern to employers. We will continue to support ILO-AIDS in its efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, just as we will continue to back health and safety. This year's work on a new promotional framework augurs well for its final discussion next year and I would hope that the ILO can take the lead in promoting a health and safety learning culture which might have a real impact where the need is the greatest, that is in the workplace.

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow-up remain a priority for employers. This year's debate has again identified a need to ensure that the Declaration re-

mains to the fore in ILO technical cooperation programmes for all constituents, although, like the Conference plenary itself, we need to think more deeply on how we can make debates in the group on the principles more participative and interactive.

The Employers' group remains committed to the modernization of the ILO standard-setting system. Whilst we can be encouraged that this year's Conference looked to advance this system, it is clear from the debates that more effort and innovation are needed if we are truly to make the ILO's normative response relevant to the needs of today's world of work.

Tripartism is the strength of this house but, like any house, tripartism needs a strong institutional foundation. ACT/EMP is our foundation. Its role in supporting the development of employers' organizations is, for our group, a vital one. Only strong partners can make tripartism work at home and ACT/EMP needs to be strengthened to meet the expectations and demands we have of it today.

Similarly, we need to continue to reflect on how to organize our own work, both here in the Confer-

ence and within the Governing Body, so that, by our own efforts, we can also help the Office achieve the expectations we have of it. Again, we trust that in November the Governing Body will be given the opportunity for a substantive debate on how we can ensure that the governance organs of this House can be effective, both in terms of output and also in terms of their working methods.

On behalf of the Employers' group, I would like to thank delegates for their contributions to this plenary debate. Whilst we may not all agree on the content of what we say, it is clear that we are all concerned to ensure that the ILO remains the relevant United Nations institution in the area of labour, social policy and the world of work. From this commitment, a consensus can be built that helps ensure that relevance in the future.

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*Original Spanish:* The PRESIDENT (Ms. ANDERSON)

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We have now concluded the discussion on the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.

*(The Conference adjourned at 12.05 p.m.)*

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