



Fifteenth (special) sitting

Wednesday, 13 June 2007, 11.30 a.m.

President: Mr. Sulka

ADDRESS BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, FELIPE DE BORBÓN, PRINCE OF ASTURIAS

The PRESIDENT

The fifteenth (special) sitting of the International Labour Conference is called to order.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference to welcome His Royal Highness, Felipe de Borbón, Prince of Asturias.

Original Spanish: The SECRETARY-GENERAL

For the International Labour Organization, it is a great honour today to welcome His Royal Highness, the Prince of Asturias. The relations between our Organization and the Spanish Royal House have been very close since the birth of the ILO. Spain was a founding Member during the reign of the Prince's great-grandfather, King Alfonso XIII.

On 21 June 1979, on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the ILO, a young King of Spain addressed the International Labour Conference. He faced the enormous challenge of ensuring Spain's peaceful transition to democracy and modernity. King Juan Carlos I told us that day that experience had shown the truth of the statement contained in our Constitution, that "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice". Twenty-six years later, with a Spain that is now flourishing, developed, living in peace and fully democratic, their Majesties the King and Queen of Spain came again to visit us to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the participation of Spain as a member of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. Today, the close relationship between the Spanish Crown and the ILO continues, and we have the honour of receiving His Royal Highness, the Prince of Asturias.

Three years ago Prime Minister Zapatero, who had recently taken up his office, brought us his message of support. We were the first of the United Nations organizations that he visited.

Your Highness, your presence here today confirms the continuity of this close relationship between the Kingdom of Spain and the ILO. All the values and objectives that we share with Spain are reflected in the programme of technical cooperation between Spain and the ILO, a programme which has expanded continuously over the last few years and is now the ILO's fifth largest contributor of extra-budgetary funds. This has had an enormous impact on reducing child labour in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 16.1 per cent to 5 per cent in very few years.

Another shared objective concerns young people. Last year a major programme was approved to promote youth employment in Latin America. The programme is to be financed by the Government of Spain and a group of Spanish enterprises, coordinated by the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations, whose outgoing President, Don José María Cuevas, a great friend of ours, is here today. And we continue to work under the agreement between the ILO and the UNDP with support from the Kingdom of Spain.

With all the visits of the Spanish Royal Family to our Organization, it has always been clear to us that we share common values and objectives. Your Highness said at the end of the International Year of Volunteers that, in the face of materialism and competition, it is essential to move towards ethical commitment, respect for "otherness" and a personal relationship with the values of the spirit as the basis on which we must build the fairer, more egalitarian and peaceful future that we all wish to see.

The transition which took place in Spain, and in which the ILO had a part, has meant defending these shared values, and the Spanish people have showed an invaluable capacity for meeting the many challenges that have arisen out of the globalized society. One of the greatest challenges is to achieve a fairer and more balanced globalization with economic growth and employment for all.

Spain is an example. Through a commitment to social dialogue, your country has dramatically lowered unemployment and combined competitiveness with social cohesion. You yourself said that this is not the result of improvisation or chance. It is the result of admirable work that has been done with a determined and sustained willingness to live peacefully together.

Your Highness, you are a man who is committed to social values, not just in Spain but throughout the world. As the honorary president of the CODESPA Foundation, you are actively helping to create employment and access to education and enterprise. Every year, you give the Prince of Asturias awards, with special emphasis on the social impact of development activities. When, in 2003, you decided to honour Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Peruvian theologian, you spoke of his work as an effort to defend the weakest and to tell their story. As you said at the time, someone has to speak for the poor.

You have supported the cause of indigenous peoples in Latin America, giving recognition to bodies defending them by awarding the Bartolomé de las Casas Prize. We must not forget the programme of

scholarships for young Ibero-Americans through the Carolina Foundation, and the support for programmes to help the disabled.

In all this, as in many other activities, you have shown a strong concern for human dignity and solidarity as values of central importance in your objectives and activities.

May I say that the ILO, the Kingdom of Spain and you yourself, all speak the same language: the language of values, the language according to which decent work is the source of personal dignity, family stability and peace in the community, the language which states that a community that works is a community at peace, a source of credibility, of democratic institutions, and the clearest way out of exclusion and poverty.

May I once again welcome you most warmly to this house, which is your house. We receive you as a friend in the pursuit of these shared values. I conclude by recalling what you have said on previous occasions: that we must have an audacious trust in liberty, and humanity needs utopia so as not to give in to things as they are.

The PRESIDENT

It is now my honour to invite His Royal Highness to take the floor.

Original Spanish: HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS FELIPE DE BORBON, PRINCE OF ASTURIAS

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity to address a forum of such unique relevance as a plenary of the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, for his kind invitation and his generous words of welcome.

Addressing this Conference today, I cannot fail to recall, as the Director-General has already done, with a great deal of emotion that it was in 1919, during the reign of my great-grandfather His Majesty King Alfonso XIII, that Spain became a founding Member of this Organization. Sixty years later my father, already King of Spain at the time, addressed this Conference for the first time to praise the untiring endeavours of this Organization as it strived to bring some humanity into the international system.

Therefore, I would like my first words to you today on my first visit to headquarters of the ILO to be an expression of my admiration and gratitude for the incontestable success achieved through the colossal efforts of this Organization since inception. Its success has been obvious and real, because it has improved the living and working conditions of millions of men and women in many countries with different levels of development and diverse national cultures.

Spain has spared no effort to actively support the universal approach, the shared endeavour and the ultimate objective of the ILO, which is to achieve social justice for all.

The ILO – the oldest of the United Nations specialized agencies, and the only one with a tripartite structure in the multilateral system – was born of the conviction of its founders that it was necessary to promote social justice in order to achieve lasting and universal peace. Impelled by this noble objective, this Organization has been able to draw inspiration from universal values and principles based on human dignity, embodied in the preamble to its

Constitution. Built on this unique foundation, tripartite social dialogue between workers, employers and governments has always been not only a successful working method but also a clear expression of those values and principles which can promote understanding and solidarity in national societies and between the peoples of the world.

Thus the ILO has been able to mobilize efforts and garner enormous experience, leading to success in a wide range of areas from the defence of workers' rights, the improvement of working conditions or the promotion of social protection to the development of freedom of association and the promotion of international legality.

Personally, because of my frequent contacts with unions and employers' organizations in Spain, I have been able to understand, and gauge the complexity, the scope and the tremendous value of the work or the ILO for social justice and solidarity. Allow me also to emphasize the decisive contribution made by trade unions and employers' organizations to democracy in Spain and to the country's economic and social well-being.

Since its inception in 1919, this Organization has shown that it is capable of successfully meeting the challenges of a changing world of work with a response that is in the interest of human beings, their freedom, dignity, rights and well-being, in recognition of which it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The International Labour Conference is currently meeting at a crucial moment, when the need has made itself felt to give a social dimension or a human face to the major changes in the global economy, which have been under way for a number of years, but are still constantly accelerating. This human dimension of the work of the ILO is reflected in the full attention it gives to human beings in each phase of the life cycle – from infancy to old age, from child labour to the protection of the social entitlements of the elderly.

Yesterday we commemorated the World Day against Child Labour, which focused on agriculture: though not the only sector in which there is child labour, it is the one where most children work. As the ILO has pointed out, when children work long hours in the fields, their ability to attend school, or skills training is limited, preventing them from receiving an education that could help lift them out of poverty. Child Labour, which the ILO is contributing to reduce, is a scourge and an injustice, which robs people of a future and prevents social progress. The answer lies in eliminating poverty, which is not only the origin but also one of the worse consequences of child labour, through a vicious circle in which people become trapped at an early age, so crucial for their physical, mental and emotional development, and at a time when they need to obtain training and education that will open up opportunities for a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.

This is a situation which His Majesty the King of Spain mentioned here two years ago, as the Director-General has just recalled, at the special sitting commemorating the tenth anniversary of our participation in the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour. On that occasion, he pointed out what is at stake in the elimination of child labour is children's future integrity and well-being, and hence the future of society as a whole.

Allow me to quote someone else from much longer ago: more than 400 years ago, Miguel de

Cervantes wrote in *Don Quixote* that, in order to win the support of the people you must defeat hunger and deprivation, for there is nothing that wears the heart and the dignity of man more. Thus, the complete elimination of child labour is a key objective of the international community, and one which Spain shares and supports fully, through the necessary financial and technical assistance. As a Member of the ILO and of its Governing Body, Spain will continue to provide its assistance to ensure that schooling replaces child labour.

We must attack the roots of the problem, tapping the potential of economic globalization for development in order to transform the social environment that sends children to work.

As they grow up, young people find it difficult to obtain jobs, particularly in developing countries, where more than half of the population is under 25. By dint of repeating that youth are the future of humankind, we can easily overlook the fact that they are also our present.

We are aware that the commitment undertaken at the Economic and Social Council in 2006 was a response to the urgent need to create opportunities for decent and productive employment for youth throughout the world. This is a commitment which reaffirms the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Reducing extreme poverty by half before 2015, as the Millennium Development Goals set out to do, means giving confidence, hope and the necessary resources to those who are setting out on working life and aspire to progress.

We must not forget that it is women, and particularly young women, who are hit hardest by unemployment, as was recently reflected in the ILO report on global employment trends for women, published in 2007. At least 60 per cent of the world's working poor are women. They need economic independence and a better quality of life through decent work, which means non-discriminatory work.

In this regard, the Spanish Parliament has just adopted an Act on effective equality between men and women, providing for specific labour and social protection measures which are the outcome of a process of social dialogue.

The ILO's programmes for creating decent work are an excellent instrument which responds in the best way possible to current needs in the world of work. I am convinced that decent work is the best way to put an end to underdevelopment, exclusion and marginalization. Finding equitable work for everybody of working age is not a utopian concept. Far from it, it is a genuine possibility, if we are able to take opportunities which globalization offers us and turn them into real benefits for everybody. Spain reaffirms its commitment to paragraph 47 of the final document of the 2005 UN World Summit. This document, which Spain signed, promotes fair globalization and states that the objectives of full and productive employment and decent work for all, particularly for women and young people, will form "a central objective of our relevant national and international policies as well as our national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals". As the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said, "The best anti-poverty programme is employment and social well-being lies in decent work."

The changes that the world of work is seeing at the moment are being discussed here by you in the

Governing Body and in this important forum, the International Labour Conference. Its tripartite structure is the hallmark of this Organization, and is the best and most useful weapon for confronting the challenges of this changing world. Consensus, social dialogue and decent work are the best ways in which this Organization can achieve social justice in the world, an objective which was enshrined in the Organization's Constitution in 1919. This conviction has led Spain to participate in the ILO's initiatives to expand the influence of social partners, social dialogue and tripartism, building the capacities of trade unions, employers' organizations and governments.

That same priority which the ILO gives to employment, duly regulated by international labour standards which you approve, is now prompting it to turning its attention to the last phase of human life, which includes retirement and old age. The ILO's social security standards are also intended to protect and make provisions for this period of life. With progressive increases in life expectancy, the number of dependent individuals has also increased in recent years. We need to ensure that this sector of the population enjoys the necessary social protection and proper respect for their rights. To this end, the Spanish Parliament has recently adopted a law to promote personal autonomy, which makes specific provisions for elderly people with reduced physical or mental capacities aiming to safeguard the autonomy of more than 1 million Spaniards living in a state of dependency.

The International Labour Conference is an ideal forum for exchanging national experiences and taking on board what we may in order to extend social progress to all. The particular historic, political, social, economic, cultural and emotional relationship between Spain and the countries of Latin America enables us to share our experiences and efforts with them as members of the Ibero-American Community of Nations. We have succeeded in signing labour and social agreements at our annual summits, and these agreements could be transferred to other multilateral international forums, such as the International Labour Conference. Many of the proposals which we are working on and promoting within the Ibero-American conference community could be applied to other regions of the world, e.g. our initiative to ensure mutual recognition of social security entitlements in the countries of the Ibero-American area on the basis of contributions paid in any of these countries.

The countries of the Maghreb region, and indeed all of the countries of Africa, are also of great importance for Spain. Spain's Africa Plan 2006-2008 points out that the twenty-first century has opened up a period of progressive democratic consolidation for Africa, and provided opportunities for resolving long-standing conflicts in the region. The recent 11th African Regional Meeting of the ILO, which took place in Addis Ababa, revealed concerns but also possible solutions, such as those provided for in the programme on Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty (STEP). Against this background, nobody should be excluded from the opportunities and benefits of our international environment. I also believe that the vibrant situation in Asia at the moment, particularly the experience of emerging countries there, has shown us that private enterprise initiatives, if supported by a sufficiently skilled workforce and appropriate policies, can

overcome many different challenges, including problems resulting from adverse natural and geographic circumstances.

I have referred in my speech to some of the problems which the world suffers today, problems of unemployment, poverty and marginalization. In so doing I have tried to emphasize that, by pooling our efforts, we can contribute to finding a solution. You can rely on Spain for its support. You may be sure that only by continuing to work together can we eliminate what remains of child labour and forced labour and thus benefit humankind as a whole. You may also be certain that, if we all commit ourselves to decent work, we will make the best possible contribution to eradicating poverty and defending human dignity. In this context, economic growth reaches its full potential when we bind it inextricably with social well-being, guided by the principle of solidarity and stimulated through social dialogue.

Let me close by urging you to work ever more closely together on the basis of the principles we have followed since the ILO was founded, in order to promote the economic and social progress of all the peoples of the world. This is something which is well worth our efforts. I would like to express my gratitude and recognition for the efforts, initiatives and achievements which the ILO, in particular the

International Labour Conference, has made since its creation to give men and women a fairer future, based on solidarity. I would like once again to express my gratitude for your kind attention and for the invitation of the Director-General, which has given me the opportunity to speak to you here in the International Labour Conference.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDENT

Very many thanks, Your Royal Highness, for those words of support for the International Labour Organization.

Although it faces certain challenges, the economy of your country is growing and, more importantly, it is creating jobs. The fact that social dialogue functions so well in Spain shows how closely the country is bound to the values of the ILO and, moreover, demonstrates how the social partners may have their part to play in promoting good governance.

On behalf of my fellow Officers, all those present at the Conference, I should like to express profound gratitude to Your Royal Highness for coming to address us here today. Thank you very much.

(The Conference adjourned at 12.05 p.m.)

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