



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

### **1. Introduction**

The International Labour Conference is a global parliament of workers, employers and governments with an unrivalled knowledge of the world of work, united by the goal of decent work for all women and men. We started off with an ambitious agenda. We finished with a great sense of achievement. The Conference truly lived up to its role, providing guidance on making progress towards the goal of decent work for all, and as a centre of exchange and mutual learning. On all the items on the agenda the discussions have been remarkably constructive, and we can all be proud of the excellent results achieved at this 96th Session of the International Labour Conference.

This is in no small measure due to the President of the Conference, Mr Kastriot Sulka, Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Albania, and his Vice-Presidents, Mr Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos (Government) from Brazil, Mr Michel Barde (Employer) from Switzerland, and Mr Marc Blondel (Worker) from France. Their skill and efficiency have contributed greatly to the success of this Conference.

Equally important was the leadership and guidance provided by the Chairpersons of the Conference Committees, Mr Pablo Macedo, Mr Johnston Kavuludi, Mr Andrew Annakin, Mr Jean-Jacques Elmiger, Mr Sérgio Paixão Pardo, Mr Nigel Campbell, Mr Gylfi Kristinsson, and their Officers. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary aptitude of Mr Membathisi Mdladlana, not only in steering the work of the Governing Body over the past year, but also in handling, together with his Officers, the affairs of the Conference this year prior to the election of the President.

I cannot help but note with regret that all the names on the list in the previous paragraph start with a “Mr”. This is a sharp reminder of our objective of realizing gender equality, first and foremost at this tripartite global assembly. Women accounted for 24.3 per cent of all those accredited to the Conference – exactly the same figure as last year. I share the view of the Credentials Committee, which strongly deplores a far too low participation of women delegates.

It is nevertheless encouraging that 33 delegations comprised at least 40 per cent women, and I would like to name them: Austria, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Canada, Comoros, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Lithuania, Montenegro, Namibia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago and United States.

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This year the Conference was exceptionally honoured and inspired by the presence of seven world leaders from all corners of the globe who came here to express their full support for the ILO Decent Work Agenda. Three of them, the Presidents of Chile, Ghana and Senegal, had been jailed for their political ideas and emerged from prison stronger, with an even firmer commitment to democratic values and ideas. Two of them, the Prime Minister of Jamaica and the President of Sri Lanka, were former Ministers of Labour, who experienced a true homecoming to the ILO. We also had the honour to welcome the first women leaders of their countries.

In her address to the Conference, H.E. Ms Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, underscored that the world has reached the point where “decent work is becoming a vital obligation in every country, an ethical imperative for every nation”, at a time when it is necessary to “shape the social dimension of globalization”. As someone whose life has been marked by the struggle for social justice, it comes as no surprise that a distinctive element of her leadership has been the reform of social protection, including social security, health, quality education and the fight against poverty. As she told us, since 1990, with the return of democracy, Chile has been “building a new social model that combines growth with equality and progress with social justice”. President Bachelet illustrated how a fundamental truth – there is no sustainable economic growth without social justice – is shaped into concrete policy measures.

We were also privileged to listen to the address of H.E. Mr John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana and Chairman of the African Union. Recalling that the African Heads of State and Government participating in the African Union Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, held in Ouagadougou in September 2004, had fully endorsed the Decent Work Agenda, President Kufuor said that this Agenda can play a pivotal role in ensuring human dignity at a time when Africa is witnessing a renaissance. Highlighting “Africa’s resolve to engage positively on a win-win basis with the rest of the world”, he cited major recent political and economic signs of “Africa’s awakening”, including the election of H.E. Ms Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as Africa’s first female Head of State in Liberia, who herself was a guest of honour at last year’s session of the International Labour Conference.

Our third guest of honour, His Highness Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Bahrain and Chairman of that country’s Economic Development Board, urged us all to “work together towards fair globalization” and added, “we must address the four cornerstones of the Decent Work Agenda – creating employment first and foremost – but then also guaranteeing that there are rights associated with that work; that social protection is extended; and that opportunities for dialogue and conflict resolution are available to all”. He eloquently pointed out that “few things in life make as much difference to the human condition as a sense of dignity. It is this quality, and a quest to create more of it, that must drive the ILO”. His country was committed to social dialogue and “workable solutions” supported by the Government, the private sector, trade unions and non-governmental organizations. He called for a social dialogue summit covering the wider Asian region, including the Gulf countries.

The Conference welcomed Jamaica’s first woman Prime Minister and a former Minister of Labour, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, who stated that the Decent Work Agenda “begins with the clear conviction that people must be at the centre of national development” and described it as “a critical pathway to creating a world that serves every man, woman and child”. Drawing attention to the danger of “a human tsunami of frustration, rage and rebellion” if we did not address the issue of poverty in a meaningful way, she underscored the importance of the search for decent work, which she identified as “a global imperative”. Ms Simpson Miller also referred to the importance of job creation and the experience of Jamaica, noting that “we have placed economic growth

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with jobs at the heart of our economic plan. As a consequence, we are experiencing the lowest rate of unemployment in recent history”.

The President of the Republic of Senegal, H.E. Mr Abdoulaye Wade, honoured us with his presence and address during the Conference. Emphasizing the inextricable interdependence between economic and social development, he said that decent work was the only way to attain these twin objectives. President Wade also underlined, however, the need for “a responsible globalization respecting the rules imposed by equity and justice”, and that “Africa has the mandate and capacity to create the preconditions for its economic and social development and to face the realities of globalization optimistically”. He expressed his confidence in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and African unity to respond to the challenges of globalization, as did President Kufuor.

The Conference was honoured to host His Royal Highness Felipe de Borbón, Prince of Asturias, who underscored the need to “humanize” economic change and ensure that globalization offers “real advantages for all”. He gave his full support to the ILO’s agenda, emphasizing that “decent work is the best way to tackle underdevelopment, exclusion and marginalization”. He added that “if all of us are committed to decent work, it would be our best contribution to the eradication of poverty and the defence of human dignity”. Prince Felipe reassured us once again of the support and cooperation extended by Spain since the foundation of the ILO “to foster economic and social progress for all peoples”.

Our final guest of honour on the closing day of the Conference was the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mr Mahinda Rajapaksa, who described the Decent Work Agenda as “central to peoples’ lives”. Noting that “a worker, whether in the agricultural, industrial, commercial or any other sector, is the core of development”, he expressed his commitment to continuing “to look after and develop our democratic institutions and improve the life of the worker”. He also underscored the significance of “social dialogue based on the concept of tripartism”, which “can make a positive and substantial contribution to a country’s overall development”. As a former Minister of Labour and Minister of Fisheries, President Rajapaksa knew very well that “work is also at the heart of politics” and that “political objectives must be realized through negotiation and dialogue and through compromise”.

## **2. Decent work for sustainable development**

The overarching theme of the debates at this year’s Conference was the role of the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda in the pursuit of a development path for the world that is sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. For Mr Fong, Minister of Human Resources of Malaysia, “sustainable development should be based on three essential components: the creation of economic wealth, environmental improvement and social equity”. As Ms Blinkeviciute, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania, said: “We are strongly convinced that sustainable development could not be achieved without decent work.”

Many speakers expressed support for the proposal in my Report this year for an ILO green jobs initiative. This is an important challenge, which, as Mr Chen, Employers’ delegate from China, said, “requires us to change our concept of development, to create new modes of development, to enhance the quality of development, and to explore the road towards new industrialization characterized by technology, good economic profits, low consumption of resources, low pollution of the environment and full utilization of human resources”.

Mr Jennings, General Secretary of Union Network International, welcomed “the commitment of the ILO to undertake a major research and policy effort on green jobs.

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Green jobs and respect for core labour standards go hand in hand”. Ms Pillai, Government delegate of India, while warning of the risks of environmental measures being used to erect protectionist barriers to developing country exports, supported “the priority issues outlined in the Director-General’s Report on green jobs, and the transition initiative, with its focus on social protection, skill training and other measures to facilitate a fair transition”.

Many speakers welcomed the fact that the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda had been widely recognized as key to economic and social development and had received the highest levels of political support nationally, regionally and globally. Mr Sommer, Workers’ delegate from Germany, quoted from the G8 Summit Declaration adopted in Heiligendamm on 7 June 2007, in which Heads of State and Government committed themselves to “support the International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work Agenda, with its four pillars of equal importance: the effective implementation of labour standards, especially the ILO core labour standards, the creation of more productive employment, further development of inclusive social protection systems and the support of social dialogue between the different stakeholders.” Mr Matsuno, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, said that decent work is “a reaffirmation in an integrated manner of the ILO’s original mandate”. Mr Plaskitt, Parliamentary Undersecretary, Department for Work and Pensions, United Kingdom, stated that “the ILO [...] is as needed now as it was in 1919” but, just as the “labour issues have changed, [...] so have the expectations of financial accountability”.

Several delegates agreed that we have a responsibility to deliver on the expectations we have raised and referred to national action to implement the Decent Work Agenda. Ms Dyson, Minister of Labour of New Zealand, highlighted that “We had demonstrated our support of the Decent Work Agenda through the launch earlier this year of a tripartite decent work web site which charts New Zealand’s progress towards the decent work objectives.” Mr Francis, Government delegate from Trinidad and Tobago, described “the incorporation of the goal of decent work in its national planning framework [...] which seeks to achieve developed nation status for the country by the year 2020 and which has a focus on labour as a key element”. Many speakers also echoed the sentiments of Mr Funes de Rioja, Employers’ delegate of Argentina, speaking on behalf of the Employers’ group, to the effect that “We have a key tool, namely social dialogue and tripartism, and a major objective, which is to contribute to improving the world of work in the context of the globalization process.”

Many speakers drew the link between the Conference discussion on strengthening the ILO’s capacity to assist its Members’ efforts to reach its objectives in the context of globalization and the ILO contribution to UN reform. Ms Guarriello, Government delegate from Italy, highlighted “the invaluable role of the ILO and the unique contribution it can make to improving cooperation and coherence between the international organizations in developing and managing the different programmes, with a view to a better multilateral approach to managing global challenges”. In a demonstration of such collaboration, speaking on the World Day Against Child Labour, Mr Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), emphasized how the FAO’s contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, “depends also on the elimination of child labour in agriculture”.

For Mr Tabani, Employers’ delegate from Pakistan, the context of globalization as well as of United Nations reform required a strong and focused ILO that “can clearly articulate what it can do to strengthen tripartism”. As stated by Mr Trotman, Workers’ delegate from Barbados, speaking on behalf of the Workers’ group, the ILO should seek “a place of prominence at the UN family table”. Mr Basesgioglu, Minister for Labour and Social Security from Turkey, called for “continuation of the increased efforts to enhance coordination between international organizations”, including the United Nations, the

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World Bank and the IMF. The General Secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Mr Evans, suggested a new cooperation agreement between ILO and OECD “covering the progression of decent work through development assistance recommendations of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee”.

A number of speakers referred to the importance of better understanding the relationship between trade and employment. Ms Bitougat, Minister of Labour and Employment of Gabon, said, “It is an accepted fact that globalization has to go hand in hand with social justice. With this in mind, the joint WTO/ILO study throws light on the complex interlinkages between commercial and employment policies. We consider that our institution should continue to pursue this course.” Mr Sweeney, Workers’ delegate from the United States, also welcomed the Report, recalling that the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) had “been supporting the development of greater linkages between the growth of employment and expanding trade and respect for international labour standards for over two decades [...] We will continue to push for collaboration between the ILO, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the other multilateral organizations”. Mr Müntefering, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Germany, speaking of the importance of social rules for globalization, said that “A strategy for decent work, core standards, and minimum standards for social protection are central, global concerns”. He added that “international organizations such as the United Nations, the ILO, WTO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should further enhance their cooperation”. Mr Costa, Employers’ delegate from Brazil, also focused on the effect of heightened competition on employment as businesses sought to constantly raise productivity. “The crucial question that governments worldwide – and the ILO, among others – will have to address in the coming years is how to reconcile the irreversible demand for quality and productivity with the need to continue generating enough jobs to meet the needs of the millions of young jobseekers entering the labour market every year.”

The need to slow or reverse the trend towards wider social gaps within countries while further narrowing the gaps between countries was discussed by a number of speakers. Many of you shared the perception, as put by Mr Chibebe, Workers’ delegate from Zimbabwe, that “the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer”. Growing income disparities and what Mr Khan, Government delegate from Pakistan, termed the “uneven distribution of benefits and the cost of globalization” were identified by many as a threat to social stability and sustainable development. Ms Levitskaya, Government delegate from the Russian Federation, shared the “apprehensions concerning the fact that the inequality of income distribution between rich and poor countries, the unsatisfactory state of global employment inequalities, the unfair distribution of labour resources and the shortage of decent jobs together represent a serious threat to sustainable development”. Mr Baalakrishnan, Employers’ delegate from India, warned us that “Even in India, the magnificent growth of 9 per cent has failed to make a sizeable dent on unemployment. This disconnect between ‘growth’ and ‘employment generation’ is an issue of overriding concern.” Ms Chao, Secretary of Labor of the United States, pointed out that “successful economic strategies provide a ladder of opportunity through which the poorest members of our societies can progress and better themselves”. She suggested that the ILO do “more research devoted to upward mobility and identifying strategies that foster upward mobility”.

Mr Tomada, Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Security of Argentina, recalled the role of work as the “basic mechanism for social inclusion”. Ms Lukiana Mufwankolo, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stated that employment was “not only a priority in her Government’s programme, but *the* main priority”. Mr Lee, Minister of Labour of the Republic of Korea, explained his Government’s strategy as one of expanding growth and social integration in order to

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promote “employment and growth simultaneously and to strike a balance between growth and distribution”. Mr Kearney of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation established a direct link between sustainable development and the payment of a living wage, observing that in many countries “the legal minimum wage, is a fraction of what a worker needs to live decently”.

Many speakers pointed to the need for every society to have a social floor and to steps taken to that effect. Mr Hu, Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Security of China, detailed recent measures taken to expand social and medical insurance to people in rural and urban areas as part of his Government’s policies to meet “serious challenges, such as how to reduce unemployment, eliminate poverty and protect the fundamental rights and interest of workers to lead a harmonious economic and social development and a sound environment”. Mr Luksic Sandoval, Government delegate from Chile, recalled President Bachelet’s objective to “create a social protection system that would provide cradle-to-grave coverage”. Mr Baah-Duodu, Government delegate from Ghana, spoke of the recent adoption of a national social protection strategy that was “developed as a framework for government and civil society to support the extremely poor in attaining their fundamental human rights, as enshrined in the international human rights instruments, as well as attaining other international and national goals”.

The employment and social protection pillars of decent work are essential government policies. It is important to remind ourselves of the words of Ms Rounds Ganilau, Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations, Tourism and Environment of Fiji, who pointed out that “when the fundamental rights of equal remuneration and non-discrimination are observed, other equitable issues automatically fall into place”. As observed in the discussion on the Global Report, measures to ensure equality between women and men in employment and occupation and in social protection benefits facilitate the practical implementation of employment and social protection policies.

Mr Necas, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, reminded us of the “responsibility of governments to continuously evaluate not only their social and employment policies, but economic, in particular fiscal and tax policies, as well”.

It is appropriate here to refer to the role of the ILO. Several of you mentioned strengthening the technical capacity of the ILO in its research and policy advisory functions. Mr Funes de Rioja of the Employers’ group spoke of “evidenced-based research capacity” and Mr Trotman of the Workers’ group referred to a “centre of excellence” in research and analytical work. I note that several speakers also encouraged me, as I argued in my Report, to revisit our labour statistics and the way we measure trends in employment and unemployment and other dimensions of the labour market.

Many delegates spoke of the need to promote labour laws and social dialogue institutions, but also to adapt them to the changing patterns in the world of work. Mr Mogkothu, Government delegate from Botswana, echoed the sentiments of many by stating: “We have every reason to guard zealously the principle of tripartism.” At the same time, Mr Fazio, Workers’ delegate from Uruguay, aired a common view, stressing that: “we need to pursue the task of improving and modernizing relations in the world of work”. Mr Potter, Employers’ delegate from the United States, warned that “The surest sign that national frameworks are failing is the presence of large informal economies. One area that is not mentioned among the major themes of the Director-General’s Report is the urgent need to assist member States to better implement and enforce their national labour laws and regulations.”

Ms Tzotze-Lanara, Workers’ delegate from Greece, expressed the view, shared by many, that “tripartism and social dialogue can foster effective and balanced policies”.

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Indeed, many countries are looking for such a balance, as explained by Mr Bertrand, Minister of Labour, Labour Relations and Solidarity of France, who stated: “ways have to be found of offering a higher level of employment and social protection to a more flexible workforce”. This was the message conveyed by Mr Spidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, when he stated that “social dialogue is a cross-cutting element that provides a means of determining the forms of flexicurity that are most appropriate for each member State”.

Amongst the many who shared recent advances attesting to the progress of ILO values and principles, Mr Kika, Employers’ delegate from Albania, said that “partnership and dialogue are also in accordance with the principles of market economies because of their influence in the creation of a productive business and investment environment”. Mr Gryshchenko, Employers’ delegate from Ukraine, drew attention to the need to strengthen the role of social dialogue and emphasized that “only strong employers’ organizations that are politically neutral, independent and democratic can be responsible and reliable partners”. Mr Le, Vice-Minister for Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs of Viet Nam, mentioned the recent establishment of a national committee on labour relations to promote the role of the social partners. Mr Lekhak, Minister of State, Ministry of Labour and Transport Management of Nepal, explained the role played by social and labour issues in the peace process under way in his country, leading to formal recognition of the right to form trade unions in the new interim Constitution.

Despite such advances, we must not lose sight of the serious challenges Sir Roy Trotman so eloquently recalled as he shared his concerns about “labour’s role respected and welcomed in Geneva, where the benefits of social dialogue are so clearly seen, but resisted, vilified and even crushed at home”. Indeed, Mr Petriashvili, Workers’ delegate from Georgia, stated that although his country had ratified all eight fundamental Conventions, the provisions of the new 2006 Labour Code of his country do not meet the ILO’s minimum standards and infringe fundamental labour rights. Workers’ delegates from a number of countries also provided information on situations in which workers were unable to exercise the right to freedom of association, including a number of cases of trade unionists losing their lives.

I am pleased to note that several of you urged the ILO to continue to modernize its standard-setting mechanism. Mr Donner, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands, recommended “up to date Conventions laying down principles and rights, but leaving it to member States to apply them in the light of the social needs of their populations”. Mr Kulundu, Minister of Labour and Human Resource Development of Kenya, also urged us to “modernize and strengthen the standard-setting and supervisory system to keep pace with the changes in the world of work and become more effective”.

In another attempt to innovate the forms of dialogue, during a High-Level Panel on Tripartism and Social Dialogue, the Conference heard three critical and forward-looking contributions. Mr José María Cuevas, President of the Spanish Employers’ Confederation, reflected on his country’s experience with “frank, direct, free and responsible negotiation among social organizations that are voluntary and representative”. Mr Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, advocated the “essential values of tripartism and of social dialogue” finding “their place in any new arrangement of the United Nations”. He further explained the rationale for the “internationalization of social dialogue” because, in the context of globalization, “dialogue needs to take place at the level at which decisions are made”. Ms Fernández de Kirchner, member of Parliament, Argentina, made a fervent plea for the role of social dialogue in a context of democracy. Speaking of recent experience in Argentina, she compared a “casino economy” with an “accumulation model based on production and generation of jobs” including a role for the State and for the social partners.

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The commitment of the constituents to continue to modernize the body of ILO standards has been heartening. During this session of the Conference, three Governments (Brunei Darussalam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Montenegro) accepted the Instrument of Amendment to the ILO Constitution adopted in these halls in 1997. With 97 ratifications, we are coming closer to the goal of enabling the Conference to declare obsolete ILO Conventions that no longer serve a purpose. I encourage all Members which have not yet ratified this instrument to do so as soon as possible.

Many speakers referred to the alarming economic, social and human situation prevailing in the occupied Arab territories, as documented in my Report. Mr Luqman, Director-General of the Arab Labour Organization, pointed to the recent acceleration in the deterioration of an already fragile situation. The Minister of Manpower and Migration of Egypt, Ms Abdel Hady, echoed several speakers when she called on the ILO to increase its technical cooperation programme in order to assist in efforts to improve conditions for workers in the occupied territories. Ms Taylor, Workers' delegate from the United Kingdom, underscored the ability to "develop a functioning economy" without the limitations imposed by closures. Mr Funes de Rioja, Employers' delegate from Argentina, appropriately observed that "it is time to resume real efforts to effect a lasting peace, not simply for the benefit of those now living under such difficult circumstances in the region, but for all of us everywhere".

### **3. Sustainable enterprises**

I join the Chairperson of the Committee on Sustainable Enterprises, Mr Andrew Annakin of New Zealand, in emphasizing the centrality of enterprises in addressing the global challenges of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

As pointed out by Ms Antje Gerstein, Employer Vice-Chairperson, and the Worker Vice-Chairperson, Ms Cecilia Brighi, the conclusions of the Committee are balanced, comprehensive and useful. They provide detailed guidance on what constitutes a conducive environment for sustainable enterprises. This combines the legitimate quest for profit with respect for human dignity, environmental sustainability and decent work. They go on to identify 17 pillars of a conducive environment, and outline six enterprise-level characteristics of a sustainable enterprise. Guidance is also given to governments, the social partners and the ILO on their respective roles in promoting sustainable enterprises.

I would like to thank the Officers and indeed all the members of the Committee for their hard work, which produced this excellent result. We must now look toward using and applying the very useful conclusions adopted by the Conference.

### **4. Equality at work**

In your discussion of the Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work this year, you recalled again the importance of the Declaration in providing principles and rights that create a universal floor for decent work in a globalized economy. These principles and rights work together to help create better, more integrated societies. As emphasized by Daniel Funes de Rioja, speaking on behalf of the Employers: "We think that eliminating discrimination and creating equality at work are essential to fulfil other principles – the context of the principles interact – but there is no doubt whatsoever that, wherever there is lack of respect for the fundamental principles which allow human beings to express themselves, there will not be any freedom of association or negotiation and obviously it would just be deceptive to talk about eliminating forced labour or the worst forms of child labour."



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Many delegates echoed the words of Mr Saleh, Government delegate from Indonesia, who stated that he wished to see the ILO “give further support to the efforts that have been achieved by the Indonesian Government and the social partners”.

Discrimination at work is complex and challenging, multi-dimensional and embedded in cultural norms. ILO standards provide useful guidelines that need to be complemented by support to strengthen the capacity of governments, employers and workers to apply the standards. Many of you pointed out the importance of information and awareness-raising campaigns, at national as well as at regional and international levels.

The debate brought important insights on discrimination at work. Culture plays an overriding role. However, as Mr Jiang, Workers’ delegate from China, stressed, “an atmosphere of justice, equality, tolerance and harmony, as well as respect must be put in place. [...] We must promote cultural and educational programmes which will help to promote this spirit and this objective and also promote exchanges among different cultural groups to prevent discrimination from arising.” Regarding labour migration, Mr Roye, Workers’ delegate from India, pointed out that “It has been rightly said that the failure of globalization to create jobs where people live is a prime factor in increasing migration pressure, because when people cannot find work at home in their communities and societies, they look elsewhere. Migrant labour has become one of the major areas of inequality.”

Many of you found both heartening and sobering developments in the Report, as noted by Mr Hobby, Government delegate from New Zealand. Heartening on the progress achieved in certain areas, and sobering on the remaining challenges. Ms Barbara Byers, speaking on behalf of the Workers, reminded us of some harsh truths regarding persisting pay gaps between men and women, and discrimination based on race or disability. Regretting that the Report did not really discuss discrimination on the basis of membership of a trade union, Ms Byers pointed out that “this is deplorable because anti-union discrimination is the most rampant means used to violate trade union rights throughout the world”.

Many of you shared information on what worked and what still needed to be improved regarding national laws and institutions and women and the labour market. Mr Louh, Minister of Labour and Social Security of Algeria, admitted that “It is true that women in Algeria do not represent a very high percentage of the active population, but the number is increasing, and we have seen an increase from 933,000 in 2004 to 1,497,000 in 2006. That is an increase of more than 60.5 per cent over the three years, and is the result of the education policy that our country has been committed to since it gained independence.” Others pointed to persistent inequities in career paths, in contractual status and in working time. Mr Vandamme, Government delegate from Belgium, set a record by providing information concerning a national law that was to be changed the very next day! As he explained, “Since 1989, when Belgium set up its Constitutional Court, that respect for the constitutional rights of equality and non-discrimination has been at the heart of every parliamentary debate, be it on labour or almost any other subject. [...] The Constitutional Court has thus become a great asset for Belgium in attaining one of the strategic aims for the coming years as proposed by the Global Report, which is to integrate non-discrimination and equality into all policies.”

Most of you welcomed the quality and breadth of this Report. For example, Mr Razzouk, Government delegate from Lebanon, termed it a “universal declaration of labour rights”. Particular attention is required to continue to identify reliable and transparent sources of information in order to provide a fuller, more dynamic global picture relating to this complex and changing area of discrimination at work. This will be helped if, as requested by Mr Van Vuuren, Employers’ delegate from South Africa, “all participants from Governments, Employers and from the Workers [...] give information to the Office

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so that we can continually update the Report to a level that we can all learn from it". Representatives of Egypt, Senegal and Sudan questioned the accuracy of certain sources. The Office will review the information and its sources carefully and ensure that a complete and impartial dynamic picture – in line with the mandate of the follow-up to the Declaration – will be given on the various aspects of discrimination at work.

I have carefully noted the rich exchange of ideas that emerged from the discussion. This will help us in drafting a plan of action for the Governing Body next November. I am grateful for your support to focusing on gender equality, integrating work against discrimination within a Decent Work Country Programme approach and, perhaps above all, strengthening the capacity of all three constituents to tackle discrimination at work. Thank you for a very rich debate.

## **5. Strengthening the ILO's capacity**

The Committee on Strengthening the ILO's Capacity had a real challenge before it: to open the discussion on how the ILO can improve its capacity in the context of globalization and the rapidly changing international climate. Strengthening is necessary at all levels: at the level of the Office to enable it to better assist the ILO constituents in defending and promoting their interests; at the level of the governance structures of the Organization to enable them to integrate their efforts; as regards the role of the ILO within the international system; and, most prominently, strengthening the capacity of the ILO constituents to realize decent work within their countries. The Committee had an intense discussion that resulted in a decision to propose the subject for inclusion in the Conference agenda next year.

The issues are of fundamental importance for the ILO and its Members. I should mention that the debate was carried out in a constructive and serious manner, and commitments were made by all to work for an agreed result at the next session of the Conference in 2008. Everyone shared the view that a more integrated approach was required across sectors and subject lines within the ILO, as well as a positive approach to growing UN-system integration – the "Delivering as One" concept – that preserves the ILO's specificity, especially with regard to tripartism and standards. The Committee recognized the enormity of this challenge and the need for the ILO to make a clear statement on the subject, possibly in the form of a declaration.

There will be consultations before the next session of the Conference, both during and between the Governing Body sessions, to discuss these questions. Among other things, these should take us forward on two of the methodological questions that were raised: whether the ILO should begin to issue periodic reports on decent work that would cover all the strategic objectives, and whether the Conference should adopt a declaration or another document to encapsulate the emerging consensus. Whatever the specific results of the discussion, there is already agreement that we cannot afford to do nothing.

## **6. The application of standards**

I am pleased to note that the Committee on the Application of Standards conducted its discussion very efficiently.

The special sitting on the question of the observance by Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), reached solid conclusions. I should like to express my own thanks to the outgoing Liaison Officer a.i., Mr Richard Horsey, for the excellent work he carried out with the ILO and wish him the best for his future career.

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The discussion of the General Survey on the eradication of forced labour highlighted both the very wide ratification of the two instruments and the persistence of the intolerable practice of forced labour. I am encouraged by this discussion on the progress towards the universal goal of the elimination of forced labour. Concerning the status of teaching personnel, the Committee emphasized the importance and prestige of ILO cooperation with UNESCO.

The Committee dedicated a full week to the examination of 25 cases of application of ratified Conventions. These included a case of progress in the field of occupational safety and health. The majority of cases related to freedom of association. As is customary, the Committee carried out its oversight function through in-depth tripartite discussion. This year, the Committee proposed technical assistance of the Office in 13 cases. Three of the governments concerned have already accepted the Committee's proposal. We know from experience that the effective implementation of Conventions takes time and persuasion, together with the active involvement of the tripartite constituents.

I am grateful to the Committee for its high-quality and professional work.

## **7. The fishing sector**

As Mr Campbell, Chairperson of the Committee on the Fishing Sector, is fond of saying, "fishing is a way of life". It is a unique industry, activity and set of skills. In addition, the fishing sector has become globalized. A dedicated international labour standard for work in the fishing sector is entirely justified.

We started on this back in 2002. We weathered a few storms and had to reach deep into the ILO's true self to win the day. I join Mr van der Zwan, Employer member of the Committee, in emphasizing that "an effective working relationship had emerged between the social partners, and there was a shared will to create solutions for the remaining problems". Mr Mortensen, Worker Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, stressed the "constructive attitude" and the "willingness to accept compromises" by all parties, which enabled you to find common ground, and to bring this Convention and Recommendation to life. The adoption of the texts with massive majorities is testimony to the quality of the Committee's work.

Now we turn to another challenge: wide ratification of the Convention in all regions. Our common resolve is to improve the lives of the majority of the world's fishers. I know we can count on social dialogue to meet this challenge.

## **8. Programme and budget**

The adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2008–09 will enable the ILO to continue to advance the Decent Work Agenda in countries and regions and globally. This outcome is congruent with the discussions held in the Finance Committee of Government Representatives and in the Governing Body. Both highlighted continuing strong support for the work of the Organization, and in particular the Decent Work Country Programmes. I was especially pleased to see the strong consensus around the priorities identified in the Programme and Budget for 2008–09.

I wish to thank all delegations to the Conference who voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Programme and Budget for 2008–09. I am grateful for their support. I have also noted the vote explanations given by several countries.

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There was broad support for the new Regular Budget Supplementary Account, for which I have received active expressions of interest. I wish to thank those countries that are considering strengthening the ILO through this new account. A number of delegations mentioned the need for a comprehensive financing plan for the renovation of the headquarters building, and indeed for all ILO buildings. Let me assure the Conference that I am continuing to explore financing possibilities. I will report to the Governing Body on this matter in November 2007.

## **9. The way forward for a new development paradigm with decent work at its centre**

This Conference has tested new waters. We had a time for the committees and a time for the plenary debate. We will need to draw the lessons of this approach and decide whether this is a workable model for the future. I am nevertheless encouraged by initial positive comments.

We witnessed an inspiring ceremony in which a Decent Work Research Prize was awarded to two personalities. Professor Carmelo Mesa-Lago spoke of the benefits of social security and the need to expand its coverage. President Mandela movingly recalled the ILO's support to a new South Africa. He spoke of decent work as personal dignity, and of democracies that deliver for people. In those few words he reminded us of what we stand for.

I am grateful for the many delegates who spoke in favour of my appeal for development based on sustaining economic, social and environmental progress. We are talking here of a new development paradigm. Borrowing from Mr Tabani's words, we need to be able to show that our ideas actually work. Many of you came here to do precisely that. Decent work works! Let us continue to demonstrate that this is so, that decent work is a foundation of sustainable societies.

Allow me to warmly thank each and every Government, Employers' and Workers' delegate for your continued strong engagement with the ILO.