



Report of the Meeting

Introduction

1. The Fourteenth Asian Regional Meeting of the ILO was held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 29 August to 1 September 2006.
2. The Meeting set up a working party to consider conclusions for submission to the plenary, and it appointed a Credentials Committee, in accordance with the Rules for Regional Meetings.
3. Information regarding attendance at the Meeting is provided in the report of the Credentials Committee.

Opening ceremony

4. The Meeting unanimously elected as its Chairperson Mr. Lee Sang Soo, Minister of Labour of the Republic of Korea, and as its Vice-Chairpersons Mr. A. Hayat, Vice-Minister of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis (Government delegate, Pakistan), Mr. A. Dahlan (Employers' delegate, Saudi Arabia), and Mr. K. Ahmed (Workers' delegate, Pakistan). Prior to the opening of the discussion in plenary, the Meeting heard addresses by President Roh Moo-Hyun of the Republic of Korea, the Director-General of the ILO, Mr. Juan Somavia, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayaka, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and Dr. Marouf Bakhit, Prime Minister of Jordan.
5. In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the Meeting, Mr. Lee Sang Soo, congratulated the Director-General of the ILO on the Report, *Realizing decent work in Asia*. Employment issues were high on the agenda in the Asia-Pacific region. Globalization in the twenty-first century had provided countries in the region with both opportunities and challenges, and he looked forward to lively discussions of both success stories and failures. It was essential for Asia to march together to realize the shared goal of decent work in the region. Dialogue and regional cooperation would enable countries to learn from each other's experiences as they drew up their own national plans.
6. President Roh Moo-Hyun of the Republic of Korea said that globalization was benefiting many Asian countries in terms of wealth and economic growth. However, because the benefits of globalization were not evenly spread, the region had experienced significant economic polarization. Many countries were faced with deepening income gaps, high rates of unemployment among young people and large numbers of working poor. Such polarization could decrease productivity, slow wealth creation and potentially lead to social conflict. Realizing decent work in Asia was a very important step in reducing gaps between different groups and different countries.

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- 7.** The Republic of Korea had adopted a number of policy measures to promote decent work for all, such as promoting cooperation and innovation in small enterprises, encouraging the diversification of service industries and extending social security to vulnerable groups. However, the Government could not solve all problems on its own and needed the cooperation of employers and workers. Companies needed to have a long-term strategy for decent work and workers needed to be open to social dialogue. The President concluded by noting that as the impact of globalization grew stronger and as manpower and products moved more freely across countries, the Republic of Korea would need to strengthen cooperation with other countries in the Asian region.
 - 8.** The Director-General of the ILO, Mr. Juan Somavia, thanked the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting the Meeting and expressed his gratitude for the generous support provided for ILO activities. Since joining the ILO 15 years ago, the Republic of Korea had become a major player in the global economy. It had undergone rapid and significant social and political transformation, and had achieved remarkable economic success. Dialogue and knowledge-sharing with the ILO had progressively embraced such areas as labour law reform, job creation, skills development, youth employment and the vital issue of sound industrial relations based on freedom of association and social dialogue. The contribution of Ambassador Chung as Chairperson of the Governing Body and member of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization was greatly appreciated.
 - 9.** The Director-General pointed out that the Meeting had a very practical objective, that of realizing decent work in Asia. Growth in Asia had been more than double the global average since 1995 and labour productivity had risen rapidly, yet economic success had not provided enough jobs to lift people out of poverty. Unemployment and underemployment remained huge challenges in the Asian region. Growth alone therefore was not enough. In this context, the Director-General noted that the President of the Asian Development Bank, Mr. Haruhiko Kuroda, had recently warned that if the policy agenda of the region's economy were not geared to meeting the objectives of full, productive and decent employment, it would be easy to conceive of a region, which despite growth, would still harbour most of the world's poor 25 years from now.
 - 10.** At the previous Asian Regional Meeting in 2001, the region had pioneered decent work national action plans on a pilot basis. Now the Decent Work Agenda resonated throughout the world and had been adopted as a global goal at the highest levels. The Ministerial Declaration agreed at the recent high-level segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had singled out decent work country programmes (DWCPs) as a way to promote "a more coherent and pragmatic UN approach to development".
 - 11.** In dealing with decent work deficits in the Asian region, the Director-General highlighted four major policy areas. The first was to better connect economic growth, productivity, competitiveness, job creation and poverty reduction. Asia needed to create more jobs, upgrade the informal economy, improve agricultural productivity and promote micro and small enterprise development with a focus on local and community development as an engine for growth. Second, the region needed to offer young women and men the best possible start in their working lives. To this end, the ILO was leading a major drive to develop national action programmes under the Youth Employment Network (YEN). Third, the root causes of inequality needed to be tackled so that the productive base of the economy could be broadened and the benefits of growth more evenly shared. Deep-seated gender inequalities needed to be addressed. Fourth, there was an urgent need to build trust and social dialogue along with sound institutions of representation and negotiation in order to build cohesive, stable societies.

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- 12.** The Director-General added that the Meeting offered an opportunity to build a framework for solutions in these priority areas. DWCPs, grounded in tripartism and social dialogue, offered a tool for strategic cooperation at the national level and a contribution to national development frameworks. They provided practical follow-up to the recent decision to make decent work a global goal alongside the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A “Decent Work Decade”, dedicated to the progressive realization of decent work in Asia, could follow the same time frame. Strengthening regional cooperation frameworks was a major instrument for practical action. Possible new initiatives might include holding an Asian employment and decent work forum, setting up a systematic exchange of experiences on extending social protection to workers in the informal economy, implementing a regional framework for migration, carrying out regular tripartite analysis of security and flexibility issues, and developing coherent policies for SME development. The Director-General could see an emerging global movement, led by the energy, ideas and global policy leadership of Asia, to ensure that economic growth offered workers and their families security, hope and dignity, that is, that truly delivered “decent work for a decent life”.
 - 13.** Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayaka, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, thanked the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting the Meeting. He described one of the themes of the meeting as “The road towards decent work in the twenty-first century”, observing that decent work was a means to bring the poor into the process of economic development without exploiting their cheap labour and without abusing their human rights and human dignity. His vision for Asia was one where skilled labour provided the engine of growth for national development, whereas currently the bulk of Asian workers was involved in low-productivity employment. Two key factors for transforming Asia’s workforce and shifting away from labour-intensive towards more knowledge-intensive activities were new technologies and sound economic policies. Moving to a knowledge-based economy implied a social change, not merely an economic one. Knowledge repositories within society were needed to support the improved functioning of the primary, secondary and service sectors. The Prime Minister urged Asia to think about the potential for capitalizing on their human resources to build societies which encouraged greater participation from and benefit to all their members.
 - 14.** The Prime Minister described some of the ways in which Sri Lanka was approaching the challenge he had set. The Government’s new development strategy worked from the micro level to the macro, strengthening the family unit and the village to support local, regional and finally national development. The two main challenges of youth un- and underemployment were being addressed through a national action plan for youth employment which focused on employment creation, employability, equal opportunity and entrepreneurship. Of particular concern was the situation of women who, in Sri Lanka, as in many Asian countries, were concentrated in a few low-paid, labour-intensive sectors such as domestic work and the garment industry. Therefore, increasing the skill levels of women and ensuring greater opportunity were essential elements for promoting gender equality and economic development. Sri Lanka, as one of the first countries to establish a national plan of action for decent work, considered the plan as an operational policy and the Government was committed to seeing this reflected in the national budget.
 - 15.** In concluding, the Prime Minister called for a holistic and participatory approach to development, suggesting the phrase “decent work is an economic necessity for all”. He urged Members to strengthen the human resource base in their countries in order to tap the potential of emerging economic trends, to improve the quality of employment for youth and women so as to offer greater professional and personal satisfaction, and to incorporate national plans of action on decent work within their development programmes and national budgets.

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- 16.** Dr. Marouf Bakhet, Prime Minister of Jordan, acknowledged the role of the International Labour Organization and its Director-General in promoting global exchanges on the basis of partnership, cooperation and solidarity, to achieve the common goal of a better tomorrow. The twenty-first century had dawned with the promise of a better life for all, but after seven years, only some were benefiting from that promise while others had been left behind, demanding a swift, global and collective response to maintain hope for all in a future of decent lives and social justice.
 - 17.** The Prime Minister confirmed his country's long support for the ILO and its ongoing commitment to take action and realize the objectives set for 2015. He concurred with the statement that successful globalization depended on successful localization, and described the steps being taken in Jordan, under the vision of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, to create a successful local model for development that provided opportunities for all to live a free and dignified life. Concrete steps being taken in Jordan to realize decent work included labour law reform, improving social security coverage and initiating programmes for skills and enterprise development, particularly focusing on women and young people. The national youth action plan was one such response. In addition, steps were being taken to improve the institutional and legal frameworks necessary to ensure full participation of all in shaping such policies.
 - 18.** Jordan was located in a region heavily burdened by conflict, including the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the situation in Iraq and the recent war in Lebanon. Peace, not war, was needed in the Middle East. The Prime Minister added that the global struggle against terrorism could not be won with arms alone. It required moral, intellectual and social efforts to address the root causes. Jobs, social protection and the empowerment of women were essential. People had to be lifted out of poverty through economic growth and enhanced productivity. The speaker believed that a balance existed between decent jobs, poverty alleviation and economic growth and that the ILO's decent work country programme was a means to seek and find the right balance for Jordan.
 - 19.** Finally, the Prime Minister noted the importance of opportunities for regional discussions and exchange of views. He pointed to the role of migration in Jordan's economy with one-fourth of the GDP based on remittances from Jordanian workers abroad and 20 per cent of the domestic labour force being migrants, mainly from Asian countries. Clearly, issues of good management and protection of the workers concerned involved all the countries, and common frameworks such as that of the ILO, were important. Pointing to the Republic of Korea's investment in human capital and its resulting solid growth in jobs and labour productivity, the speaker noted that other countries offered lessons in growth and resilience. In conclusion, he noted the ongoing support of the ILO and its Regional Office even during the present difficulties.
 - 20.** The Chairperson of the Meeting thanked the President of the Republic of Korea and the Prime Ministers of Jordan and of Sri Lanka for their recognition of the challenges posed by the Decent Work Agenda, and for their optimism, which was firmly based on faith in the ingenuity and vitality of the peoples of Asia. Their words would illuminate the discussions over the following days.
 - 21.** The Director-General also conveyed his warmest thanks to the speakers for their clear and concrete support for the Decent Work Agenda and noted with pleasure the convergence of ideas in their inspiring visions. He affirmed that the ILO stood ready to do its part within its mandate to help build hope and peace throughout the Middle East and other parts of Asia that were confronting complex situations of conflict and tension, and expressed solidarity with ILO constituents and the people of Lebanon and Palestine. On behalf of the ILO, he expressed deep gratitude to the President of the Republic of Korea for his participation in the Meeting and for the generous hospitality provided by the Republic of Korea.

Discussion of the Reports of the Director-General

22. The general discussion was preceded by a briefing on the Reports of the Director-General by Mr. Ng Gek-Boo, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. Mr. Ng recalled that the Thirteenth Asian Regional Meeting (2001) had urged member States to establish national plans of action for decent work. Tripartite constituents in Asia had responded by making decent work a national policy objective. At the World Summit in 2005, some 150 world leaders had endorsed full and productive employment and decent work for all as a central objective of national and international policy and as a specific goal in itself to help realize the MDGs, particularly poverty reduction. Despite the great diversity in Asia, tripartite constituents had identified five common priority areas: to promote the productivity and competitiveness of economies and enterprises while ensuring the creation of decent employment and proper observance of labour standards, including occupational safety and health; to eliminate child labour and promote decent employment for young women and men within a life cycle perspective of decent work; to improve the management of labour migration so as to benefit both sending and receiving countries, and better protect migrant workers; to strengthen labour market governance, including through enhancing the capacity of the tripartite partners to participate effectively in governance structures; and to extend social protection, in particular to uncovered workers in the informal economy. Echoing the recent call by the high-level segment of ECOSOC for time-bound action plans to progressively achieve the goal of full and productive employment and decent work for all by 2015, he invited tripartite constituents in Asia to identify key decent work outcomes in priority areas; to make specific commitments at national and regional levels to achieve these outcomes, based on tripartism, social dialogue and regional partnerships; and to pledge commitment to a “Decent Work Decade”.
23. Mr. S. Evans (Government delegate, Australia) speaking on behalf of the Government group, noted the historical significance of the Government group statement, the first such group statement at a Regional Meeting. The Government group endorsed “Realizing decent work in Asia” as the theme of the Meeting, and said that the next priority of the ILO and its constituents would be to realize the goals of decent work for the region and in each country. Recognizing that the themes for discussion were important and the agenda broad, the group called on delegates to ensure that their deliberations delivered tangible outcomes and provided practical measures for their implementation. The group agreed that a decent job promoted self-worth and was central to family stability. Employment was the key to economic well-being and alleviating poverty. With increasing employment pressure facing some parts of the Asia-Pacific region, appropriate solutions to the challenges of globalization that fostered job creation and increased productivity should be developed. For some member States, the development of enforceable labour laws that provided security and decent work without limiting employment growth could create an environment for increased productivity. For others, responses such as appropriate macroeconomic policies, harmonious labour relations, skills development or lifelong learning were central to productivity growth. The Government group stressed that the ILO had a crucial role in developing country-specific solutions for the issues discussed at the Meeting, and urged the ILO to mobilize its limited resources for targeted technical cooperation programmes developed in consultation with constituents in the region. The Government group recognized that young people in the region faced multiple economic and social barriers to securing decent work. Without measures to improve decent work opportunities, they foresaw profound inter-generational consequences impacting the economic, health and social well-being of individuals and communities. Policies that allowed for sustainable economic growth and provided opportunities for young people were the most important of the many elements needed to address this issue. Economic growth should be supported by measures that encouraged labour market participation, such as social protection systems and active labour market programmes to improve

employability and skills transfer as well as incentives for all, including young people, to participate in the workforce. Active labour market policies to achieve productivity growth and workforce participation were not “one size fits all”, however. The Government group acknowledged the critical role played by the social partners. Effective labour market governance empowered employers and employees to participate in the development of policies that reflected best-practice industrial relations. The Government group also strongly affirmed the benefits of a well-managed and transparent labour migration programme, together with the implementation of international labour standards, as the best way to protect the rights of migrant workers and to ensure that the considerable economic, social and cultural benefits to the region were supported. They agreed that the ILO’s *Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration* provided ILO Members, especially governments, with a useful set of guidelines for the development of policies to manage labour migration. They urged the Office to develop targeted, country-specific technical assistance projects, and to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between sending and receiving countries. The Government group welcomed the information sessions on the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Health and Safety Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and encouraged the Office to continue to work with member States to enable them to comply with these instruments. Finally, as an issue of considerable interest to governments, although not on the agenda for the Meeting, they welcomed the work being done by the Office in relation to the review of the ILO’s field structure and the reform of the International Labour Conference.

24. Mr. T. Suzuki, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Employers’ group, observed that Asia’s position as a key economic driver in the global economy faced a number of important challenges: the need to sustain competitiveness and enterprise productivity; the creation of a regulatory environment, including labour law, that fostered entrepreneurship, investment and productive job opportunities for the millions of young jobseekers, while offering guarantees for proper governance (such as protection of property rights and the elimination of corruption) and for political stability; the need to manage migration in such a way that it met the employment needs of host and home countries and ensured the rights of migrant workers; and the need to develop and upgrade skills so that human work could bear greater fruit in Asia. For DWCPs to gain public support and ultimately be successful, employers and workers had to be involved. Structured regular meetings needed to be held at the country level. Representative organizations were key to ensuring that these programmes remained rooted in the real needs of the very diverse Asian world of work. The voice of other civil society actors should not be considered a valid substitute. Employers welcomed initiatives to extend social protection to those currently excluded, but cautioned that other actors also had to assume responsibility for bearing the cost. Additional key areas in which the ILO was expected to offer assistance included reliable labour market information; occupational safety and health; the fight against HIV/AIDS; bringing informal economy operators into the formal economy; and assisting countries in crisis to restore business and employment.
25. Ms. H. Yacob, Chairperson of the Workers’ group, affirmed that economic development should go hand in hand with human and trade union rights, democracy and peace. She pointed out that restrictions on the representation of workers by trade unions were a major obstacle to the realization of decent work in Asia, and expressed strong disappointment that the Report of the Director-General had only made scant reference to issues such as the low ratification rate of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98; bans on union activities in certain industries, jobs, the public sector and export processing zones; impediments to collective bargaining and criminalization of the trade union movement. She referred to the challenges that remained in eliminating discrimination and forced labour from Asian workplaces, and cited the case of Burma as a good example of the ILO taking concrete steps to implement fundamental Conventions. She called upon the ILO to promote its rights-based *Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration* and to provide technical assistance to

member States in the areas of labour administration, industrial relations and labour law, as well as the elimination of child labour and the promotion of youth employment. She also urged increased support to strengthen the technical capacity of workers' organizations to promote fundamental workers' rights and the Decent Work Agenda. The ILO's Global Employment Agenda was an appropriate checklist against which Asian governments could measure their policies. The ILO could assist by promoting tripartite forums to exchange experiences with regard to employment-related policies and practices. A major issue was that employment security in Asia had been eroded by drastic changes in the labour market and an upsurge in non-traditional forms of employment, resulting in a rising number of working poor. She called upon governments and the ILO to actively involve national trade centres in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of DWCPs. Trade unions should also be included in IPEC. She finally referred to the current difficulties in industrial relations in the Republic of Korea and strongly invited the Government to enter into positive dialogue with the unions for a successful outcome.

- 26.** The general discussion continued with contributions from 43 delegates representing Governments, Employers and Workers, and an intergovernmental organization.
- 27.** Building on the Director-General's reference to a new Asian century, many speakers referred to a new vision for Asia. The dynamism of Asian countries was illustrated in the descriptions of the progress that many countries had made in achieving impressive and sustained growth, in tackling poverty and unemployment, and in making progress towards decent work for all. But as Mr. N. Koga (Workers' delegate, Japan) described it, globalization and the impact of information and communication technologies had created both light and shadows in society and in work. The challenge now was to deal with the shadows. In the words of Mr. P. O'Reilly (Employers' delegate, New Zealand), "This new century must be supported and enhanced by new and relevant structures and approaches."
- 28.** Despite the tremendous diversity among nations in the region, many speakers expressed the sense of a common vision and purpose, anchored in decent work as the key to a decent life for individuals and an objective of national development. The need for greater cooperation among nations was mentioned many times. As Mr. K. Datt (Government delegate, Fiji) described it, "We need a regional and global vision based on robust values of fair play between the rich and the poor, between the strong and the weak, if we are to realize decent work across nations and across regions."
- 29.** The remarkable performance by many countries in terms of economic growth was tempered, in many speakers' comments, with concerns about the unequal distribution of benefits, of emerging inequities within and between countries, and of persistent and in some cases growing instances of un- and underemployment among particular groups. Young people's relatively high unemployment rate, even in countries with low overall unemployment, was a concern of a large number of speakers. As Mr. M.A. Hayat (Government delegate, Pakistan) noted, the new economic environment was creating an employment gap and a social protection gap. Not all economic growth created jobs, and not all people in a given country could access those jobs that were created. Lack of access to decent work for women, young people, people with disabilities, indigenous and tribal groups and others were noted by many speakers, who described the different approaches that they were taking, in their national programmes, to address these concerns. In general, the consensus was that all economic growth and development strategies had to have employment and job-creation goals. This was a common concern across the region.
- 30.** There were frequent references to the Thirteenth Asian Regional Meeting and in particular to the commitment made there to establish national plans of action for decent work in each country. Speakers from most countries noted the current state of their national programmes. In Bangladesh and the Philippines, these were initial pilot programmes and had subsequently been evaluated and renewed. In some cases, as in Sri Lanka, these

programmes were fully integrated into the national planning and budget process, while in other cases they were the result of negotiations and recent agreement, as in Viet Nam and in several Pacific Island nations. It was apparent that the innovative approach developed in Asia of having a national framework and plan for decent work had helped countries to define and focus their own efforts, to better determine their need for assistance, and to establish benchmarks against which they could measure progress. Both Employers' and Workers' delegates emphasized the importance of the country plan as a means to promote tripartite dialogue and the real involvement of the social partners in establishing decent work goals and determining how to achieve them.

- 31.** Just as each national plan of action for decent work and each ILO decent work country programme designed to respond to the national plan differed in their priorities, so, too, were there differences and complementarities among the issues facing countries in the region. As Mr. K.M. Sahni (Government delegate, India) described it, "Some countries in Asia are capital abundant and labour scarce, whereas others have an abundance of human resources. Some have strengths in hardware, others in software." These differences and complementarities offered participants the opportunity for fruitful collaboration, exchanges of views and learning from others.
- 32.** Migration was an area in which the interests of sending and receiving States could be seen as potentially complementary. As Mr. A.S. Dahlan (Employers' delegate, Saudi Arabia) noted, while mistakes had been made in the past in the way migrant workers had been managed, this was an area for productive collaboration. Speakers from both sending and receiving countries were equally supportive of positive bilateral agreements within a multilateral framework, such as that developed by the ILO, to better manage migration in a way that benefited the workers themselves and contributed to the economic development of both countries. Numerous examples of new legislation and policies were provided, ranging from Thailand's decision to provide equal rights and treatment under labour laws to migrant workers, to the work of countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council to ensure that migrant workers could organize representative groups, and to introduce laws to permit collective bargaining and the right to strike. Pacific Island countries were particularly concerned about the potential for well-managed migration to assist in national development. Mr. K. Datt (Government delegate, Fiji) called on ILO member States to develop a seasonal contract labour scheme, while Mr. B. Tongai (Government delegate, Kiribati) noted the great contribution overseas migrant work made to providing employment opportunities for young people. The Government group as a whole had affirmed the value of a well-managed and transparent labour migration programme together with the implementation of international labour standards as the best way to protect the rights of migrant workers and secure the economic, social and cultural benefits for the region.
- 33.** Another frequently raised issue was that of stability and harmonious growth. Employer representatives, in particular, spoke to the necessity of a stable and peaceful society as a condition for investment and the establishment and growth of job-creating enterprises. This was echoed by the views of Worker representatives, among them Ms. H. Malihi (Workers' delegate, Syrian Arab Republic) who commented that dialogue between government, employers and workers in her country was helping to bring about national unity, social stability and sustainable development. The need for harmonious development that brought benefits to all was noted in particular by speakers from China, among other countries. Others expressed concern that the wealth generated through the sale of a country's natural resources or through productivity increases was not being used to create more jobs and employment. Benefits needed to be shared more equitably throughout society.
- 34.** One reason for the ongoing concern with stability and harmonious growth was the persistence and even growth of poverty and the phenomenon of the working poor – those in employment but receiving less than US\$2 per day. As Mr. R. Lekhak (Government

delegate, Nepal) put it, “Asia’s success in reducing the number of people below the poverty line has been encouraging, yet for a great number of Asian men, women and young people getting decent work remains a distant dream. A large part of the informal economy remains invisible, non-unionized and rife with exploitative labour practices.” While most countries reported taking steps to address conditions for workers at the lowest end of the scale, from establishing minimum wages to extending social protection, all were agreed that this was a significant challenge.

- 35.** This challenge has become more apparent as the world has turned its attention to the MDGs, and more particularly to the recent Ministerial Declaration from the high-level segment of ECOSOC which had established employment and decent work as central to the struggle to eliminate poverty. Many speakers commented on the new prominence the Declaration had given to their own decent work plans, and as Mr. A. Tabani (Employers’ delegate, Pakistan) noted, the Declaration “places a tremendous responsibility on the ILO and its Director-General to work together with developing countries in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals”. Also on the world stage, some countries noted the impact of the World Trade Organization on trade and employment. Mr. S.M. Elahi (Employers’ delegate, Bangladesh) called on the ILO to proactively address the world trade body on issues of concern to developing countries, particularly those which negatively impacted on employment and on decent work. Labour market turmoil was among them. Mr. Sahni (Government delegate, India) raised the “tricky issue of flexibility” as a result of globalization, and observed that its implications on decent work needed to be thoroughly examined by the ILO and its constituents.
- 36.** While the Decent Work Agenda has received high-level attention, most speakers also stressed that achieving its goals was grounded in the most fundamental of ILO’s values: that of social dialogue. As Ms. C. Beaumont (Workers’ delegate, New Zealand) stated, “If we had a commitment from governments to work with unions and employer organizations and help build their capacity, then we might start making progress in achieving decent work for all.” Speakers gave many examples of how social dialogue was being used in practical ways to shape the economic and social development agendas in their countries. One area of particular concern was the persistence of restrictions on freedom of association and hence the lack of real social dialogue in export processing and free trade zones.
- 37.** The importance of social dialogue and the role of social partners was apparent throughout the discussion of ILO’s main programme areas. Effective labour market governance empowered employers and employees to participate in the development of policies that reflected best-practice industrial relations. Mr. L. Basnet (Workers’ delegate, Nepal) made the point most vividly by saying, “Restructuring society through violence has failed. Non-violent and peaceful means alone can create sustainable social relations and decent work.” Delegates pointed to many instances in which they had sought and received ILO assistance. Many were making progress in applying ILO Conventions and Recommendations and had success stories to share. The issues most often mentioned were productivity, skills development, occupational safety and health and labour inspection. Delegates also made some specific suggestions for areas where the ILO could provide services or technical assistance.
- 38.** Delegates indicated an emerging new understanding of the role of workers in improving productivity. As Mr. K.Y. Ong, Secretary-General of ASEAN, noted, workers were increasingly seen as sources of talent and skill, rather than simple labour. It is this value added that would provide the productivity gains most countries were seeking. However, at present, most speakers indicated a significant gap in their capacity to move to high value added production, because of the low skill levels of the majority of their workforce. Mr. K.M. Sahni (Government delegate, India) summed the problem up by stating that only 5 per cent of India’s workforce aged 20-24 had a qualification obtained through formal training, as compared with 90 per cent of those in the Republic of Korea. At the other end

of the spectrum, Ms. R. Dyson (Government delegate, New Zealand) also commented on her country's strategy to build a high-income, knowledge-based market economy through better skills.

- 39.** Virtually all speakers mentioned skills development as an important element of their decent work strategy. Many expressed appreciation for the ILO's initiative in creating the Regional Skills and Employability Programme for Asia-Pacific (SKILLS-AP). Mr. H. Okada (Government delegate, Japan) expressed his country's support for this important initiative. Whether specifically aimed at poor and disadvantaged groups, oriented towards improving productivity and competitiveness, or as a means to ease labour market transitions, investment in training and skills development had to be relevant to the current and future needs of the labour market and of the individuals. One interesting idea was the concept of lifelong employability, supported by continuing investment in skills upgrading, instead of a lifelong job. Many speakers noted the creation or improvement of tripartite bodies to inform and manage training systems, or, as in Pakistan, employer-led skill development councils to assess local labour market needs in a specific geographic area. Mechanisms to better link training with employment were noted. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, for example, had a special programme to provide young people with on-the-job work experience as part of their training. The Government group had summed up the views of many delegates by affirming that economic growth should also be supported by measures that promoted labour market participation, such as social protection systems and active labour market programmes that improved employability and skills transfer and provided incentives for workforce participation.
- 40.** Social protection was explicitly mentioned as a vital component of decent work by a number of speakers including the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups. Mr. A.R. Bakar (Government delegate, Malaysia) cited a passage from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which linked the right to work, the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to just and favourable conditions of work and the right to social protection. The need to roll out social security to workers and their families in the informal economy and to non-regular workers in the formal economy was also perceived as a major national social policy objective by a number of governments. New social security legislation had just been passed in Viet Nam and statutory benefit improvements were being implemented in Pakistan. The Minister of Labour of the Republic of Korea outlined the reform challenges that contemporary social security faced in the light of competitive pressures and an ageing society. At the same time, he acknowledged that the existence of a functional social security system had helped his country to weather the turbulence of the Asian financial crisis at the end of the 1990s. Mr. T. Suzuki, Chairperson of the Employers' group, indicated the need and readiness of his group to enter into a more intensive dialogue with respect to the design and the financing of national social security systems to equip them to cope with the new needs and challenges of a global economy. Ms. C. Beaumont (Workers' delegate, New Zealand) referred to an innovative project that sought to improve the competitive position of the country through productivity improvements via a combination of investments in skills, work processes, wage improvements and social protection.
- 41.** The importance of occupational safety and health (OSH) as an element of decent work was noted by a number of delegates. Mr. R. Singh (Workers' delegate, Fiji) noted a strong need to ensure a safe work environment. Mr. S. Thepsutin (Government delegate, Thailand) and Mr. B.H. Le (Government delegate, Viet Nam) both mentioned the recently adopted Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and called for assistance in promoting a safety culture, while other countries indicated that ratification of OSH Conventions, development of OSH legislation and new committees and management systems for OSH were all priority areas on which ILO assistance would be welcomed. Several speakers noted that ASEAN would be organizing a policy dialogue on OSH in the region in 2007.

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42. Labour inspection was mentioned as the key national mechanism for implementing and monitoring decent work in practice. However, most speakers also observed that inspection services were typically under-resourced in government budgets, and lacked the capacity to cover even the formal economy, much less the informal. Mr. N. Koga (Workers' delegate, Japan) suggested that the labour inspectorate should reflect the composition of the national workforce – for example, in Japan 44 per cent of regular and 52 per cent of non-regular workers were female, yet only 7 per cent of labour inspectors were women. Delegates were also concerned about the degree to which labour inspection regimes covered the workplaces of migrant workers (in either sending or receiving countries). Mr. S.M. Elahi (Employers' delegate, Bangladesh) called specifically for tripartite participation in inspection mechanisms, seeing this as critical to monitoring the progress of decent work.
43. Delegates put forward a number of proposals for technical cooperation and specific action by the ILO. The Government group urged participants to ensure that their deliberations led to tangible outcomes and practical measures for their implementation. The role of the ILO was crucial in developing and setting up country-specific solutions for the range of requirements and challenges identified and discussed during the Meeting. The ILO should mobilize its resources for targeted technical cooperation programmes developed in consultation with its constituent Members in the region. Delegates also suggested that a forum on productivity and competitiveness be held in India, that the next session of the Asian Regional Meeting be held in 2008, and that the ILO build a number of state-of-the-art training centres for transfer to the host country. The ILO should also carry out research on key issues. The most common requests were for the ILO to facilitate greater technical cooperation, particularly country-to-country assistance. A number of speakers called on more affluent countries in the region to provide support to less developed countries to enable them to realize their decent work plans.

Summary of parallel sessions

44. Four parallel sessions were held during the Meeting to address the principal themes of the Director-General's Report: (a) competitiveness, productivity and jobs in a globalizing context; (b) labour market governance for realizing decent work in Asia; (c) the millennium generation: decent jobs for young people; and (d) labour migration: regional strategy towards implementation of the ILO multilateral framework.

Competitiveness, productivity and jobs in a globalizing context

45. Ms. M. Ducci, Executive Director, Office of the Director-General, introduced the topic. Asian countries had reached an impressive record of labour productivity growth. Yet, raising productivity was still a major challenge for the region to keep competitive in highly sophisticated economic areas, and for lifting the quality of jobs in micro and small enterprises and for its almost 1 billion working poor. A fair and equitable distribution of productivity gains could generate a positive spiral of further productivity gains, as the "high road" to competitiveness and to sustainable and inclusive development. This win-win path had to be grounded on greater added value to production, based on a skilled workforce, respect for workers' rights, good working conditions, higher wages, and job satisfaction. Improved policies and workplace practices were required on several fronts: enhanced technical and management skills, access to credit and other key inputs, technology and innovation, good institutions and governance, property rights and access to markets, and a conducive policy and regulatory environment that encourages investment, enterprise development and job creation.

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46. Panellist Mr. K. Liu (Government delegate, China) focused on job creation and human resource development for China's sustainable economic growth. He noted that low-cost labour was not sufficient to secure long-term success of the products "made in China". The key was to improve the quality of the labour force, especially by enlarging the pool of highly skilled professionals. His country was pursuing a comprehensive policy package for a long-term strategy of employment and human resources development on a sustainable basis.
47. Mr. J. Buwalda (Government delegate, New Zealand) noted that his country had experienced record job creation together with high productivity growth, but this was mostly based on longer working hours. The time had come "to work smarter rather than harder", creating higher value products and moving up the productivity scale. He referred to the encouraging experience of productivity gains based on workplace practices focused on seven drivers: leadership and management; skills and knowledge; technology and innovation; work organization; workplace culture; networking and collaboration; and measurement. Social dialogue and partnership between government, employers and unions had been the key to improving the performance of workplaces, lifting the value of work and the rewards for both employers and workers, while achieving optimal labour participation and capital investment.
48. Panellist, Mr. S. Nakajima (Workers' delegate, Japan) began by emphasizing the importance of tripartite partnership and sound industrial relations as a basis for productivity growth. Productivity growth does not lead automatically to sufficient wage rises and improved working conditions. Therefore, fair distribution of wealth from productivity gains was essential. Transparency, continuous cooperation and trust building between employers and unions was a precondition for productivity to be increased. Respect for fundamental workers' rights, in particular the right to organize and to bargain collectively must be guaranteed. Workers required access to skills upgrading opportunities and education and training, which would allow them to contribute to productivity improvement. He referred to experiences of social dialogue on productivity improvement in various countries of the region and the lessons that could be drawn from such experiences.
49. Panellist, Mr. S. Goh (Employers' delegate, Singapore) emphasized that productivity growth was key to meeting the challenges posed by global competition and working out of poverty. But for realizing and maintaining productivity increases, it was necessary to have a business-friendly environment and policies to encourage domestic and foreign investment. Investment in human resources and infrastructure, property rights, labour law and labour inspection were critical in this regard. Economic diversity and flexibility were also required. Economic integration and open trade was an important incentive for increased productivity. In addressing issues of productivity, competitiveness and employment, the dynamic, diverse and complex aspects of these issues were important to keep in mind. No universal recipe could be applied and, given the diversity of the region, further inter-country sharing would be very valuable. In Singapore's experience, tripartism, founded on leadership, trust, and unity of purpose, was the key for success.
50. A rich debate among participants followed. Many Employer representatives lauded the inclusion of productivity and competitiveness in the Report of the Director-General. They emphasized that productivity was the key to increasing competitiveness and remaining in business. Only if enterprises thrived would more jobs be available. Skills development of the workforce was an urgent priority to enable them to take advantage of niche markets. The need for sound industrial relations was highlighted. Good tripartite and bipartite relations based on consensus building, trust and cooperation was important. Development of policies and institutional structures at national level to increase productivity was needed. The unit-level cost was often ignored in measuring productivity. Exchange rates were

important in this regard. The need for the ILO to assist in improving data and indicators on productivity was identified.

- 51.** A number of Worker representatives expressed their concern over efforts towards productivity improvements where these were undertaken without full consultation with and voluntary participation of workers. While accepting the importance of productivity increases, such programmes needed to be transparent, based on trust and information sharing. Productivity increases should not lead to job loss, and gains from productivity increases needed to be shared equitably between workers and employers. Globalization and privatization were having a negative impact on working conditions and wage levels. The need to develop skills of workers as well as the general education level of workers was also emphasized, as low levels of education were the main reasons for poverty, poor working conditions, gender disparity and child labour. Labour and trade union rights at the workplace should be secured and in line with international labour standards.
- 52.** Government representatives emphasized the importance of promoting more and better jobs while enhancing productivity. They noted the importance of vocational training and skills development for employability and productivity, especially for young people. Certification of skills was also required. National training centres and other institutions existed in most countries and could be upgraded and further developed. Building a knowledge economy was key to productivity enhancement. Increasing competitiveness needed to be accompanied by better social protection measures, including occupational safety and health. Particular attention was to be given to the informal sector. Increasing agricultural productivity required better skills, infrastructure and access to markets. National public policies and institutions for productivity enhancement were needed, including providing support and technical advice to enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. Capacity building and sharing of experiences were essential. In this connection, the Government representative from Pakistan proposed that to deepen knowledge and share experiences, an ILO regional event on growth, employment and decent work should be organized, and invited China to host it, in view of the rich experiences this country had to share. The panellist from China expressed his Government's agreement to the proposal and its offer to host the regional event.
- 53.** In summing up the discussion, Ms. Ducci noted the very vibrant and lively discussion which reflected a multidimensional approach to the challenge of productivity, competitiveness and job creation in a globalized world. There was a common understanding and tripartite consensus on a range of issues to promote dialogue as the means to increasing productivity and competitiveness, including the importance of: (a) building appropriate institutions to support tripartism at national level and appropriate consultation mechanisms at enterprise level to support sound industrial relations; (b) human resource and skills development based on worker and employer participation; (c) inclusiveness based on gender equality to allow more people to take advantage of globalization and alleviate poverty; (d) promotion and protection of fundamental workers' rights; (e) addressing risks to productivity increases through improvements to occupational safety and health; and (f) compiling and making available data and indicators on productivity.
- 54.** All tripartite partners had a role to play to fulfil the objective of productivity and competitiveness along with realizing decent work for all. The ILO is called upon to support the efforts of tripartite constituents in countries of the region in addressing the challenge of fostering productivity, competitiveness and job creation.

Labour market governance for realizing decent work in Asia

55. Mr. K. Tapiola, Executive Director, Standards and Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, introduced the topic. Following a video presentation on various aspects of labour market governance, four panellists set out their views and suggestions for improved labour market governance. This was followed by an interactive discussion.
56. Mr. S.K. Srivastava (Government delegate, India) felt that good labour market governance struck a balance between flexibility, stability and security, and required the patience to work through social dialogue. Striking such balance required interventions ranging from skills development, to women empowerment and encouraging workers' participation. India was aligning its labour policy with an overall economic policy geared towards labour-intensive economic growth. Having a job, including in the informal economy, was the best guarantee for social security.
57. Mr. S. Yasui (Government delegate, Japan) illustrated how voluntary initiatives to incorporate labour standards into management systems are increasingly complementing rule-based governance mechanisms. ASEAN governments, for example, are promoting the sharing of national experience with occupational safety and health management systems as models of governance for decent work.
58. Ms. A. Tate (Workers' delegate, Australia) observed that good labour market governance had to realize decent work in all its aspects, and to realize decent work for all. Governance frameworks in Asia were not necessarily producing decent work outcomes. Trade unions were natural partners in seeking solutions to raising productivity. She felt, however, that the reality in Asia today was marked by violations of trade union rights; labour market reforms with little regard for people's lives and livelihoods; and international and regional governance frameworks without a social floor to decent work. Hence, she stressed the importance of promoting and realizing in practice workers' rights, especially in the area of freedom of association and collective bargaining.
59. Mr. H.S. Lee (Employers' delegate, Republic of Korea) underlined that good labour market governance means that supply and demand can match without interference from rigid prescriptions. He suggested some guidelines, including respect for the diversity in Asian labour markets and economic growth, sustaining wage flexibility and recognition of various types of employment, an orientation towards lifetime employability, and a greater role for private employment agencies.
60. A number of Employers' delegates underlined that Asian labour markets should be shaped and governed from within countries, so that the balance struck between flexibility, security and stability could reflect the diversity of national situations. Frameworks should be assessed on their ability to produce concrete decent work outcomes.
61. Workers' delegates expressed concern that ever more categories of "atypical" workers, particularly women, were excluded from governance frameworks. Low ratification of international labour standards hampered good governance. Mechanisms for flexible governance that had proven their effectiveness, such as collective bargaining, were not sufficiently utilized in Asia, and in some cases their use was prevented.
62. Several Governments shared their experience with improving labour market governance through careful planning for decent work outcomes, better integration of social, economic and environmental policies, and social dialogue.

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63. Throughout the discussion, Employers' and Workers' delegates strongly emphasized the need to build their capacity for participation in governance frameworks facilitated by governments.
 64. Mr. S. Shahir (Workers' delegate, Malaysia) as spokesperson of the ASEAN Trade Union Council, welcomed ASEAN's willingness to work with trade unions as partners in regional governance.
 65. The moderator concluded by noting that however different the right mix of flexibility, security and stability in specific national contexts may be, flexibility is only meaningful within a framework of standards and social dialogue. This is the guarantee to maintain the social floor of the Decent Work Agenda.

The millennium generation: Decent jobs for young people

66. Introducing the topic, Mr. A. Boulton, ILO Country Director for Indonesia, noted that youth represented about 20 per cent of the Asia-Pacific labour force, but constituted nearly half the region's jobless. Asia had over 45 per cent of the world's young unemployed. Many more were underemployed or in poor-quality jobs, earning low wages with short-term or informal contracts and no social protection. Participants should focus on practical measures to tackle the youth employment problem.
67. The first panellist, Ms. M. Hanartani (Government delegate, Indonesia) said that her Government recognized the urgency of responding to the challenge of youth employment as a precondition for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Indonesia was a lead country in the YEN. The Government had programmes for the prevention of child labour, which ensured quality education and prevented premature entry into the workforce, provided entrepreneurship training, developed public employment services, carried out job fairs and strengthened career guidance at schools.
68. Mr. J.M. Humaidan (Government delegate, Bahrain) said that the problem of unemployed youth was serious in his country. The Government had launched an innovative programme to mobilize awareness, encourage youth to register for jobs, provide job placement services and relevant skills training to enhance employability. Some trainees, especially housewives, were provided entrepreneurship training to start their own business.
69. Ms. N. Vederero (Workers' delegate, Philippines) noted that a comprehensive macroeconomic policy with clear policy guidance that promoted secure, quality employment for youth was necessary. Better education and training facilities were vital and policy-makers should listen to the voice of youth in designing policies for them. "Decent work was the stuff of dreams of most youth", and it was necessary for more countries to become YEN members and to pay greater attention to employment contracts, conditions of work, wages, social safety nets, and strong labour laws for decent work for young people.
70. The last panellist, Mr. P. Anderson (Employers' delegate, Australia) said that youth employment was a complex issue, there was no "one size fits all" solution and employment policies should have a specific focus on youth. The challenge could only be met adequately if the social partners worked collectively as well as individually to address the issue. Better skills development mechanisms were required and these needed to be responsive to market needs. Youth unemployment had social and political consequences, in addition to economic ones. Employers could play an active part through corporate social responsibility initiatives, providing information and advice to governments on skills requirements, giving

youth work experience and skills, working with educational institutions and facilitating the transition from school to work. Greater resources needed to be allocated as a priority to the ILO for youth employment in keeping with the conclusions reached in the 2005 ILC discussion.

71. The tripartite constituents all emphasized that youth unemployment was a critical issue with economic, social and political dimensions. Speakers also felt that it was time to take the youth employment issue seriously and develop relevant employment policies for youth on a priority basis. Many shared information on innovative steps that their government or organization had taken to address the issue.
72. Most speakers underlined the need for a skills development strategy to enhance employability of youth. There was consensus on the necessity to base such strategies on good basic education and market-oriented vocational training. This was especially important in the context of the educated unemployed, a major problem in some countries of the region, largely the result of skills mismatch. The need for certification, including for those trained through informal mechanisms, was highlighted, as was the need to ensure that trainees were not exploited and were provided with career guidance.
73. Participants emphasized the importance of creative partnerships, involving the social partners to address the issue. A few emphasized that it was equally important to listen to the voice of youth in designing policies for them. Gender concerns needed special focus, as did issues of health and safety at work. Reliable statistics and better labour market information were essential to assess and promote youth employment. Speakers urged the ILO to facilitate in the sharing of country experiences and to allocate greater resources for youth employment programmes in the region.

Labour migration: Regional strategy towards implementation of the ILO multilateral framework

74. Ms. L.L. Lim, Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, opened the session and introduced the topic. The very large number of speakers who asked for the floor in the session on labour migration was indicative of the great interest in the topic. The panellists were Mr. M.G. Inson (Government delegate, Philippines), Mr. M.H. Song (Government delegate, Republic of Korea), Mr. V.T. Nathan (Employers' delegate, Malaysia) and Mr. M.Z. Hasan (Workers' delegate, Bangladesh). There were also more than 20 speakers from the floor and others who could not be accommodated due to time limits.
75. In both sending and receiving countries, labour migration is part of national employment and poverty reduction strategies, and a means of coping with demographic and labour market trends. The challenge is to manage labour migration to benefit both sending and receiving countries and to protect migrant workers, recognizing that "a protected migrant worker is a more productive worker" benefiting host and sending countries and the worker's own family and community.
76. All stages of migration require management, from pre-departure, to working in the destination countries, to return and reintegration. Countries in the region have a wealth of experience in laws and regulations, good practices, and training programmes on the management of labour migration. Despite many efforts, irregular migration and trafficking have been on the rise. Speakers noted the social costs of migration and examples of exploitation and abuse, especially for female migrant domestic workers, but were reminded that these examples were not the norm. For many, the migration experience was positive. The tripartite constituents stressed the importance of constructive dialogue for more effective policies and programmes, learning from the mistakes of the past.

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77. Each country establishes its own migration policy as part of its employment and social protection policies. Such policies should ensure that women and men can find decent work in their own countries. Speakers from sending countries raised a number of common issues: Pacific Island nations are concerned about brain drain; others seek to lower the cost and improve the effective use of remittances. Receiving countries had concerns about potential impacts on wages and working conditions. Many agreed that bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries could not simply be a matter of balancing supply and demand, but should address a range of issues, including recognition of skills and competencies and the portability of social security benefits.
78. Speakers recognized the ILO's multilateral framework for a rights-based approach to the management of labour migration as providing guidance, but stressed that implementation would be based on each country's own circumstances and priorities. At the same time, many delegates saw scope for practical regional cooperation. They called on the ILO to promote dialogue between sending and receiving countries, to establish relevant data and information and to enable constituents to learn from law and practice. Several urged increased ratification of relevant ILO Conventions.
79. The Office had developed a plan of action to assist constituents in four areas: implementing the multilateral framework; facilitating labour market complementation through information sharing among countries in the region; promoting fair and efficient systems of recruitment such as through a code of practice; and providing social protection for migrant workers. The session gave ideas of which elements would be of interest to different constituents for subsequent follow-up by the Office.

Panel session of regional and international organizations with the IOE and ICFTU

Decent work in the twenty-first century: Making it a reality through strategic partnerships

80. The Director-General informed the Meeting that due to recent events in Lebanon, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) could not be present. He noted that the need for regional cooperation had been consistently stressed throughout the Meeting. Asia was ascendant, not in the least because this diverse but dynamic region was increasingly assuming global policy leadership. The Decent Work Agenda was equally ascendant. It was becoming a global agenda, articulating the need for job creation and quality employment based on competitiveness. Developing strategic partnerships to build a knowledge base, establish regional forums to exchange ideas and confront concrete challenges was essential to the implementation of the Agenda.
81. Mr. H.S. Kim, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), identified three key challenges in the Asian world of work: jobless growth in a region that is home to half of the world's unemployed youth; the working poor, particularly in the informal economy; and the daunting task of creating decent work for over 600 million or three-quarters of the world's poor people. Asia and the Pacific also harboured the majority of people caught up in child or forced labour. He observed that the ongoing United Nations reform offered a timely opportunity to enhance UN system-wide efforts in realizing decent work, which had become a common goal since the 2005 World Summit and the 2006 high-level segment meeting of ECOSOC. UNESCAP and the ILO had achieved synergies in areas such as policy analysis of jobless growth, the working poor and youth employment; joint cooperation regarding child and

youth victims of commercial sexual exploitation in the Greater Mekong subregion; and the promotion of the right to decent work of persons with disabilities. UNESCAP and the ILO had been partnering throughout two Asian and Pacific Decades for Disabled Persons. The Biwako Millennium Framework had set out decent work goals such as promoting training and employment for persons with disabilities, and recent cooperation had focused on raising employers' interest in recruiting persons with disabilities. He envisaged that the strategic partnership would grow stronger in the areas of labour migration and informal economy statistics, and expressed particular appreciation for ILO's active membership in the Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration. Mr. Kim offered to strengthen the UNESCAP-ILO partnership in at least two ways: by serving as a regional platform to promote normative efforts towards decent work and enhance multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogue; and by opening the Asia-Pacific Business Forum to strengthen corporate social responsibility. He also proposed to expand the partnership by working more closely with ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Asian Development Bank.

- 82.** Ms. M. Thuzar (ASEAN secretariat) recalled the key elements of strategic partnership within and among the ten member countries of ASEAN and its dialogue partners as set out by Mr. Ong in his address to the plenary earlier at the Conference. She informed the Meeting that ASEAN was moving towards the establishment of an ASEAN free-trade area (AFTA) by 2015. In 2000, the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) had formulated vision and mission statements, which recognized the need for collective action to confront problems related to globalization and competition. The ALMM also adopted a regional work programme in 2001 covering five key areas: employment generation; human resources development; enhancing labour mobility; strengthening social security and social protection; and strengthening tripartite dialogue. These five areas aligned quite well with the Decent Work Agenda, illustrating the relevance of ASEAN's work to this Agenda. It was, therefore, natural that ASEAN was now engaging more with the ILO and other international organizations operating in these priority areas. She suggested that ASEAN's work could link up with ongoing operational ILO activities in the areas of regional labour migration and skills development.
- 83.** Mr. B. Wilton (International Organisation of Employers) reiterated IOE's commitment to play an active role in various partnerships covering an extended area of operations aimed at achieving decent work, including the fight against HIV/AIDS and employment-generation programmes. He highlighted some challenges that IOE members who want to play a role in these extended partnerships may face. First, many organizations still had insufficient knowledge about various converging initiatives, and as a result could not capitalize on new opportunities. Another challenge was the complexity created by the large number and wide scope of initiatives in Asia. Poor preparation could lead to a duplication or dilution of efforts. A clear strategy facilitating joint planning and implementation was still lacking in many countries. He observed that donor priorities sometimes changed over time, resulting in the premature termination of programmes, or termination before actors had been prepared to take over the corresponding responsibilities. Capacity remained a major challenge. Much more capacity building was needed in order to make partnerships work in a long-term perspective. He also recommended that success stories be documented and examples of best practices which could be replicated elsewhere be shared. He stressed the need to be strategic when planning and preparing new partnerships. New initiatives had to take into account all new opportunities arising at the local, as well as at the national and regional levels. He gave the example of a strategic alliance with the UNDP as a showcase of a coordinated approach which allowed IOE members to become efficient partners in various programmes. To conclude, he highlighted the importance of looking at the outcomes and concrete results achieved through the proposed extended partnerships.

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- 84.** Mr. N. Suzuki (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions-Asian and Pacific Regional Organization) stated that globalization had generated huge economic wealth, but that the pace of poverty eradication had remained extremely slow, while the gap between the rich and the poor was visibly widening. The reasons for such “globalization deficits” had to be sought in a lack of adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of national wealth. Such mechanisms included collective bargaining, supported by freedom of association, social safety nets, and fair taxation. Trade unions played a particularly important role, as they set the patterns for the redistribution of national wealth. Decent work remained a distant dream for many people. Decent work deficits were staggering, and worsening in countries where women and young workers in particular experienced downward pressure on wages, longer working hours and precarious employment.
- 85.** The speaker noted that the Asian region had the lowest rate of ratification of fundamental ILO Conventions, and urged the ILO to sustain its campaign for ratification and its support for their application. The decent work deficit was most obvious in the informal economy. Globalization and discrimination based on gender, nationality, race, age and other factors were directly responsible for a growing informal workforce. He observed that gender inequality was still deeply rooted in society due to traditional values, and proposed gender audits to combat such inequality. Child labour still affected some 217 million children worldwide, and he expressed the view that the root cause of persisting child labour was the lack of political will among governments to provide universal compulsory education for all children. He deplored the fact that both slave labour and bonded labour still existed in Asia, mainly affecting the most vulnerable groups, and recommended that more technical assistance should be provided by the ILO. More specifically, he recommended that the 2006 ILC conclusions on Burma be strongly reaffirmed by the Regional Meeting. Determined and concerted efforts by all social partners were needed to realize decent work, not only within industries but across national borders. Trade unions were seeking recognition by regional economic groupings and international financial institutions because of the impact that the policies of these institutions had on labour markets and the lives of people. The ILO could support these initiatives by promoting fundamental labour standards and the concept of decent work in these circles.
- 86.** The speaker stressed that peace and democracy were essential for development and decent work. Workers’ rights could only be protected in a democratic society. He urged that international frameworks be strengthened to build peace and security, as workers in many countries were the victims of either war or growing global terrorism. He pledged the ICFTU and ICFTU-APRO’s commitment to building strategic social partnerships at the national, regional and global levels in pursuit of a globalization that generated balanced outcomes, both between and within countries.
- 87.** The Director-General, in summarizing the discussion, noted the strong commitment of both governmental and non-governmental actors to regional cooperation, and the appropriateness of the Decent Work Agenda as a framework to promote a fair globalization and pursue policy coherence among international organizations.

Information sessions

- 88.** Information sessions were held on the following topics: follow-up to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006; the ratification campaign for the 1997 Amendment to the ILO Constitution; technical cooperation and DWCPs; regional skills network: ILO initiatives on skills and employability in Asia and the Pacific; and the promotional framework for occupational safety and health. These sessions are summarized below.

Follow-up to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006

- 89.** The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 is a significant step towards realizing decent work in the context of globalization. The maritime industry, both globally and in the Asian region, with its major flag and port States as well as its role as the world's major provider of seafarers, can benefit from the Convention which seeks to provide effective protection for seafarers, a level playing field for shipowners and greater flexibility for governments to implement their obligations.
- 90.** The Maritime Labour Convention is a comprehensive instrument bringing together 68 existing ILO Conventions and Recommendations, which it will replace when it comes into force. This will occur when 30 member States making up 33 per cent of world gross tonnage ratify the Convention.
- 91.** The five-year process of tripartite deliberation and the clear advantages that the new instrument provides to all parties has led to an unprecedented level of support. The Convention was adopted by the Maritime Session of the International Labour Conference in February 2006, by a vote of 314 in favour, with none opposed. This tremendous momentum and nearly universal support needs to be carried forward to ensure the widest possible ratification in the shortest period of time.
- 92.** The Office is in the process of launching an action plan to turn the Convention's potential for effective protection into a reality. International and regional cooperation is critical for its success. The Office welcomes advice from Members regarding areas for technical cooperation that will allow them to move forward to ratify and effectively implement the Convention within the next five years.

Ratification campaign for the 1997 Amendment to the ILO Constitution

- 93.** The ILO Governing Body has asked the Office to launch a ratification campaign for the 1997 Amendment to the ILO Constitution because progress towards its entry into force has been slow, although steady. The campaign goal is 32 additional ratifications by 2007, the tenth anniversary year of the adoption of the Amendment by the International Labour Conference. This would permit the Amendment to enter into force.
- 94.** With a new paragraph 9 added to article 19 of the ILO Constitution, it would become possible for the Conference to abrogate (or "terminate") a Convention that had lost its purpose or no longer made a useful contribution to attaining the objectives of the Organization.
- 95.** Guarantees for employers and workers are built into the new approach. A determination that a Convention is obsolete would require a two-thirds majority by the tripartite Conference, prior to which consultation of the social partners should take place. Finally, even when a Convention is abrogated, countries can, if they so wish, keep in place legislation or other measures related to it.
- 96.** The majority of member States in the Asia-Pacific region (24 by the end of August 2006) have ratified the Amendment. Another 15 have not yet ratified it, however: Afghanistan, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and Vanuatu. They are encouraged to do so.

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97. Information about the simple ratification formalities is available from the Office of the Legal Adviser – web site: www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/leg/ and from ILS specialists in the region.

Technical cooperation and decent work country programmes

98. The international community at large has embraced the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. From various regional summits to the October 2005 United Nations Summit and the July 2006 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration, countries at all stages of development have recognized full and productive employment and decent work for all as a global goal and a central national objective, including for poverty reduction and as part of the efforts to achieve the MDGs.
99. This consensus provides a solid basis for influencing development cooperation policies and for mobilizing resources for technical cooperation, focusing on DWCPs as the main vehicle for the ILO to collaborate with a particular country in support of its national plan to achieve the objectives of decent work. Each DWCP is a platform that pulls together resources from all available sources at national and international levels, providing integrated support for clearly defined priorities identified through dialogue with national constituents: governments, employers and workers.
100. Intense debate on development cooperation, in particular among donor countries, is going on against the background of United Nations reform. Efforts point to greater coherence, convergence and coordination of multilateral support for development at the country level.
101. DWCPs are an effective way for the ILO to make a distinct contribution to international cooperation frameworks, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to build strategic partnerships around this agenda. This requires mobilizing donors' resources, which are increasingly moving to the local level. Ownership, based on the active involvement of governments, together with employers and workers in the tripartite ILO, is a guarantee of success.
102. In the case of Viet Nam, for example, the recently signed Decent Work Country Framework (DWCF) sets out the strategic framework within which the Government and employers' and workers' organizations agree to work in partnership with each other and with the ILO towards decent work for all. The DWCF also guides and gives coherence to the work of the ILO in Viet Nam and allows for demand-driven action and planned resource mobilization. Technical cooperation for 2006-07 is articulated in a prioritized DWCP that reflects the four strategic themes of the DWCF and responds to immediate priorities within each. Priority areas of focus include labour institutions, labour markets and employment, social security and occupational safety and health, and vulnerable groups.

Regional skills network: ILO initiatives on skills and employability in Asia and the Pacific

103. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific are finding it difficult to respond to the need to develop the workforce skills required for competitiveness, productivity and jobs. The major decline in resources for technical cooperation means that new approaches, such as networking and technical cooperation between countries, are needed.

104. The ILO is assisting constituents to respond to these challenges by developing a new Regional Skills and Employability Programme (SKILLS-AP), which works through a revitalized regional skills network. SKILLS-AP builds on the invaluable earlier work of the Asia and Pacific Skills Development Programme (APSDEP), which will now be fully integrated into SKILLS-AP. In 2005, all ILO member States in the region met to identify the key skills issues and discuss ways of sharing experience. They agreed upon a framework for cooperation – a “roadmap” for countries to work together, which “comes out of a shared commitment to cooperation, recognizing that all partner organizations in the region have information and experiences to share which will be valuable to others”. The network has been designed to provide a base for sharing knowledge and experience and technical cooperation among member States.

105. Pakistan provides a good example of a country which places major emphasis on skills development. It has also benefited from SKILLS-AP and the network by both learning new approaches and sharing its own experience. The ILO is supporting the Prime Minister’s skills development programme along with the recent Pakistan Employment and Skills Forum and the very successful TREE project. Skills development is an important part of Pakistan’s decent work country programme.

Promotional framework for occupational safety and health

106. The Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 197) were adopted at the 2006 International Labour Conference. The Convention is promotional, non-prescriptive and easy to ratify. The intention is to promote the application of existing OSH instruments, rather than to duplicate their provisions, and to target continuous improvement in national OSH systems and performance. Development of a national policy on OSH, a national programme to set priorities and a national system to ensure implementation are key elements. The Convention calls for the formulation of national policy in accordance with the principles laid down in Article 4 of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155). In addition, a national programme focusing on specific priorities should be developed, following tripartite consultation. The aim should be to strengthen the national system for OSH and to build a safety and health culture, taking into account relevant, up to date ILO instruments, including Conventions and Recommendations as well as codes of practice and guidelines. National systems provide the main framework for implementation. They include laws and regulations, the designation of competent authorities, mechanisms for ensuring compliance with legislation, such as labour inspection, arrangements to promote cooperation between management and workers, the establishment of a national tripartite body on OSH, information and advisory services, and the provision of training. The ILO will work closely with member States in the Asia-Pacific region to encourage the implementation and ratification of the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

Consideration of the report of the Credentials Committee

107. The Meeting took note of the report of the Credentials Committee.

Consideration and adoption of the conclusions

108. Mr. T. Suzuki, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Employers' group, expressed his group's endorsement of the conclusions. His group would have liked to see their concern with the potential negative impact of inflation on decent work reflected in the document. Although that was not possible, the compromise reached was fully supported.
109. Ms. C. Beaumont, speaking on behalf of the Workers' group, also expressed her group's endorsement of the conclusions. Her group would have preferred the conclusions to place greater emphasis on collective bargaining and the sharing of the gains of productivity. Nonetheless, the Workers' group supported this valuable text.
110. The conclusions were then adopted by the Meeting.

Consideration and adoption of the report of the Meeting

111. Several delegates submitted amendments which were incorporated in the final version of the report. The report was then adopted, subject to the approval of the Governing Body.

Closing of the Meeting

112. The Chairperson and the Vice-Chairpersons congratulated the delegates on a successful Meeting. They felt the Meeting had reached balanced but meaningful conclusions that endorsed all aspects of the Decent Work Agenda as a solid basis for the various processes supporting development in Asia, including the MDGs and the PRSPs. They expressed their support for an Asian Decent Work Decade founded on tripartism and regional partnerships.
113. The Director-General expressed his deep satisfaction that the Decent Work Global Agenda had now also become an Asian agenda, and that the Asian century now had its Asian Decent Work Decade. The clear priorities set out in the conclusions, the policy directions and realistic suggestions emerging from the panel discussions, and the "can-do" atmosphere palpable throughout the deliberations were evidence of the global policy leadership that Asia was developing. He commended the delegates for heeding the call of the Thirteenth Asian Regional Meeting and bringing the concept of DWCPs to fruition. He noted that the Meeting had embraced tripartism and social dialogue as the way to determine objectives and find balanced solutions to the social challenges posed by globalization. He expressed particular appreciation for the tireless work carried out by the Ministry of Labour preparatory team, and for the contribution that Mr. I.P. Anand, special invitee of the Director-General, had made to the growth of the ILO as an institution over several decades.

Appendix

Special session for ministers of labour “Developing workers’ skills for decent jobs in a globalization context”

(30 August 2006)

1. The special session, hosted by the Ministry of Labour of the Republic of Korea, was opened by the Director-General of the ILO, who summarized the challenges facing governments in the region. For there to be a Decade for Decent Work in Asia, spreading and deepening the skills base of the region was essential. This was an area where each country had much to learn from others. The Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195) was proving to be a valuable tool for developing training strategies and was itself a product of knowledge sharing.
2. Mr. Lee Sang Soo, Minister of Labour of the Republic of Korea, provided a comprehensive overview of the evolution of his country’s approach to training and skills development. As Korea’s economic strategies had evolved and the country had developed, so, too, had the strategies for skills development changed to meet those needs and to build for the future. As Korea had moved to a higher technology and knowledge-based economy, the skills strategy had also changed. It was now focused on producing workers who had multiple skills and the capacity to be flexible and to innovate. New approaches to financing also made it possible for training to benefit small and medium-sized enterprises through SME training consortia. The Republic of Korea had made a successful transition from an agricultural economy, and was eager to provide assistance to others through the regional skills network.
3. All ministers expressed their support for greater regional cooperation in skills development. Mr. Kazumi Matsui, Assistant Minister in the Minister’s Secretariat of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, observed that Japan and others had supported APSDEP for 25 years. His country had assisted in the development of skills systems in many nations. He considered it timely for the ILO to develop the new Regional Skills and Employability Programme (SKILLS-AP) and Japan would continue to support it. Mr. Malik Asif Hayat, Vice-Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis of Pakistan, agreed. APSDEP had played an important role in skills development in the region and Pakistan fully supported SKILLS-AP. Mr. Hu Xiaoyi, Vice-Minister in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of the People’s Republic of China, supported such new approaches to collaboration between countries on skills development, which would benefit many countries. Mr. Arturo Brion, Secretary of the Department of Labor and Employment of the Philippines, described the many new policies under way in his country and expressed his willingness to share the results so that others could learn from their successes and possible failures. Mr. Luvsan Odonchimed, Minister for Social Welfare and Labour of Mongolia, quoted a proverb to the effect that “If you do not know the way, ask someone who does”, agreeing that this was an area where countries had much to learn from each other.
4. Other common themes raised during the Meeting included the urgent need to invest in skills development and to engage employers and workers in the process to ensure that workers had skills which were relevant to the needs of economic growth, a point stressed by Worker and Employer spokespersons. Ms. Ruth Dyson, Minister of Labour of New Zealand, and Mr. Mathew Siune, Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations of Papua New Guinea, emphasized the need to reach out to indigenous peoples and informal economy workers. Mr. Athauda Seneviratne, Minister of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment of Sri Lanka, agreed, stating that while basic education was a foundation for employability, continuous upgrading was critical for productive employment.