



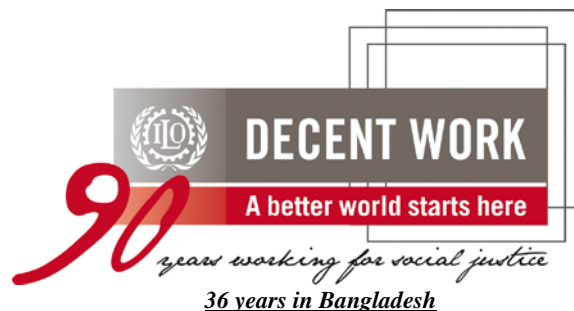
NCCWE



## **OBSERVANCE OF ILO 90 IN BANGLADESH**



**JOINTLY ORGANIZED BY ILO  
WITH  
MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT & EXPATRIATES'  
WELFARE AND OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT,  
BANGLADESH EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION (BEF), &  
NATIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR  
WORKERS' EDUCATION (NCCWE)**



### ***Introduction:***

The ILO Office Bangladesh commemorated the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ILO in collaboration with its tripartite constituents, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), and National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE).

The national events for ILO 90 comprised of a press briefing, trade unions rally and a high level forum. All events had a strong forward looking dimension, with linkages to the implementation of Bangladesh Decent Work Country Programme, 2008 Declaration on Social Justice, the current global economic crisis and the ILO's policy prescriptions.

A key note paper was exclusively formulated for the theme on ILO 90: "Social Dialogue and Decent Work – Our Challenges". The paper identified the vision and future challenges for Bangladesh in terms of policies and programmes reflecting national priorities and the unique ways in which ILO can improve people's lives at the local, sectoral, regional and national level.

### ***Press Briefing:***

Press briefing on ILO 90 was organized on April 29<sup>th</sup>, at the Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka. The media actively participated in the event, and highlighted ILO 90 and its 36 years in Bangladesh both in the print and electronic media. The leading newspapers of Bangladesh were present at the occasion, namely: The Daily Star, Newage, The Financial Express, The Independent etc. Press kits were also distributed amongst the participants. The national and private television channels also presented spots of the press briefing.

The press emphasized on the need for protecting the rights of workers in the informal sector, particularly in the migration and agriculture sector. The press was of the view that workers and unions should solve issues amongst themselves and then work as one united force for the socio economic development of the country. They referred to lack of implementation mechanism of the 33 ILO Conventions ratified by Bangladesh.

Mr. Abdul Matin Master, Chairman, NCCWE, assured his support on behalf of all trade unions to the ILO for implementation of its programmes. Ms. Panudda Boonpala, Country Director Bangladesh, highlighted the significance of ILO 90 and the positive role of the media in this regard. She focused on the need for partnerships with ILO's constituents and partners in response to the upcoming challenges for the country.

### ***Trade Unions' Rally:***

In Dhaka, during morning hours of May 3rd, a rally was organized by NCCWE in which some 1000 trade unions and workers participated with great zeal and enthusiasm to mark ILO's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Ms. Begum Monnojan Sufian, State Minister for



Labour and Employment, was the chief guest at the occasion.

At the opening of the rally, Mr. Abdul Matin Master, Chairman NCCWE, congratulated ILO on their 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and thanked them for their generous support in organizing the rally. The trade union leaders were carrying slogans and banners on promoting decent work, safe working conditions for workers, combating child labour and gender equality. The unions raised the slogans, "long live ILO, long live Bangladesh".

Ms. Panudda Boonpala, Director ILO, in her opening remarks thanked NCCWE for calling upon all the trade union federations to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ILO. She appreciated the commitment from unions and workers for supporting ILO 90 and their concerns for the protection of rights of workers. She assured that it is one of the mandate of the decent work agenda to promote employment and to protect workers rights. She thanked the State Minister for her valuable presence which showed the commitment of the Ministry in supporting the unions and workers concerns.

Mr. Kamran T. Rahman from BEF was also invited at the rally. He expressed the need for greater cooperation between workers and employers organizations to assist the Government and ILO for the socio-economic development of the country.



The State Minister in her remarks appreciated the active participation of the unions in commemorating 90 years of ILO, and she congratulated ILO for completing their 36 years in Bangladesh. She emphasized the fact that workers rights should be protected in both the formal and informal sectors, and special attention should be given to the rights of female workers as they are the most vulnerable in society. She formally opened the rally by setting free birds in the air.

The rally was lead by the State Minister with Director ILO, along with trade union leaders. The 40-minutes walk started in old Dhaka from Jatiyo Shaheed Minar and ended at Jatiyo Press Club.

### ***High Level Forum:***

In the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> May, in Dhaka, a high level forum was organized at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Center, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Bangladesh Employer's Federation (BEF), and National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE). The theme of the high level forum was "Social Dialogue and Decent Work: Our Challenges". Engr. Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, the Minister of Labour and Employment and Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, was the chief guest at the occasion.

The participants included senior government officials, employers and trade unions, social and private partners, UN and donor agencies, civil society, academia, research organizations and media.

**Information materials produced for ILO 90 by ILO Office Dhaka:**

1. ILO 90 folders
2. Key note paper on Bangladesh: Social Dialogue and Decent Work – Our Challenges
3. Information booklet on ILO 90
4. video documentary
5. ILO 90 brochures on social justice translated in Bangla language
6. Eight core conventions of ILO translated in Bangla language
7. ILO Declaration on Social Justice and Fair Globalization 2008, translated in Bangla language
8. ILO 90 writing pads and pens

At the opening session, the ILO curtain raiser was presented which recapped the major past achievements of ILO during the last 90 years for promoting social justice. Ms. Panudda Boonpala, Country Director ILO, presented the welcome address and thanked the government, employers, workers and the UN system for working 'hand in hand' with the ILO for the past 36 years in

Bangladesh. "On the ILO's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday it is right that we should feel pride in completing more than three decades in Bangladesh. But what is more important is the future challenges! We use this occasion not only to celebrate our past but to look ahead and focus on the pressing priorities of working people and forge solutions.", she said.

This was followed by Mr. Kamran Rahman, President BEF, he endorsed the role of ILO in promoting social dialogue and decent work for a fair globalization. He said eliminating child labour from the ready-made garment sector and placing them in various formal and non-formal education programmes has been a major achievement of the first phase of the DWCP.

Mr. Mateen Master, Chairman NCCWE in his speech emphasized the need for protecting the rights of workers especially in the informal sector. He informed the audience that NCCWE is a federation representing 14 national trade unions with the maximum number of workers and employees of the country. He referred to the speech of the Minister of Labour on May Day that ILO standards should be followed to protect the rights of workers.

Mr. Mateen expressed his willingness to work with the employers to solve out problems at all levels in a cordial environment. He said that NCCWE is supporting the Ministry through the tripartite committee for reviewing the Labour Code 2006. He congratulated ILO for completing its 90 years and assured all cooperation from the trade unions in implementing programmes under its decent work agenda.

Ms. Renata Dessalien, United National Resident Coordinator, praised the study conducted by ILO on the impact of global economic crisis. She emphasized on the importance of social dialogue in responding to the financial crisis, and said, "I note that all three parties of the social dialogue, namely government, employers and workers plus civil society are present here. I hope the recommendations of the forum will be followed up through appropriate measures under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Employment."

This was followed by the final inaugural speech by the chief guest which formally opened the forum. The Minister of Labour stressed on poverty alleviation as being the manifesto of the government to provide jobs for one bread winner from every household and to provide social safety nets and in-kind support (mainly rice and wheat) to the poor. "I wish to assure you that the Ministry remains committed to providing support to the ILO for continued dialogue with its constituents and social partners to achieve its *decent work goals*." He exclaimed.



In closing, he declared that the government is planning to ratify ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum age for admission to employment. With the ratification of this convention, Bangladesh will ratify all the eight core conventions of the ILO. At the end of the opening session, a colorful cultural show was present by children.

### ***Social Dialogue and Decent Work: Our Challenges***

During the business session, Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, President, Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), presented the keynote address on "Social Dialogue and Decent Work: our Challenges". In his paper he highlighted the challenges in terms of implementation of the decent work country programme: unemployment, low wages, gender inequality, inadequate coverage of social protection, child labour, weak implementation of laws and lack of capacity building of social partners.

He informed the participants that the government has announced the formulation of a five year plan which effect from 2011, and a 25 year perspective plan for the necessary framework for its vision for 2021. Thus, it is pertinent that decent work agenda should be envisaged in these plans in terms of employment promotion-focused policies and programmes. For the point of view of equitable and inclusive national development, the ILO should concentrate on promoting decent work in the informal sector.

The ILO should help in minimizing the adverse effects of the financial and economic crisis by strengthening the domestic economy and social equality through employment promotion and protection of workers rights. The ILO policies should focus on sustainable application of decent work in the informal sector such as agriculture.

The ILO approach to social dialogue and 'tripartism' can play an important role in terms of formulating concrete strategies and recommendations for the five year plan through consultations with government, employers' and workers' organizations. He emphasized that the successful implementation of Bangladesh DWCP can be sought through effective cooperation and commitment of trade unions, employers' and government at the national and local level.

The summary of the keynote address was followed by an interactive question and answer session. Mr. Mahbubul Alam, Editor, The independent, moderated the session. The first comment came from Mr. Masood Ahmad, Director General BMET (Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training), on population increase as a

major problem for the country, and therefore, it should be well reflected in the keynote paper.

Dr. M. S. Islam from Grameen Shakti, commented on the challenges faced by Bangladesh in terms of climate change, environmental degradation and decreasing land which is ultimately affecting the economy of the country. Mr. Sanjeev Dronng from the Organization for Tribal Association highlighted the fact that since the Government has ratified ILO Convention No.107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, the national laws should be formulated in line with this.

Dr. Abdul Hye Mondal, from BIDS, suggested that the implementation of decent work country programme should be measured by its indicators, particularly, in the informal sector. The representative from the agriculture workers unions expressed their concern that the government is not giving attention to the rights of agriculture workers, and there is loss of land for farmers.

Ms. Sumaiya Islam, from Bangladesh Ovibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), emphasized the rights of migrant workers and the need to empower them through skills training and capacity building. She stressed that the government should ratify ILO Convention No. 97 on Migration for Employment.

#### **Follow up action:**

- The Ministry of Labour declared their commitment for ratification of ILO Convention No. 138.
- The key message from the ILO 90 events stressed on the need to raise productivity and address the rights of workers in the informal economy, particularly in the migration and agriculture sector.
- The forum emphasized that Bangladesh Decent Work Country Programme should be part of the next five year plan of the government.