

## **STATEMENT**

**Ms Tine Staermose, Director, ILO DWT South Asia and CO India**

**Concluding Session of**

**South Asia Labour Conference**

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2014, Lahore, Pakistan**

- Your Excellency, President of Pakistan
- Honourable Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, Chief Minister Punjab
- Honourable Raja Ashfaq Sarwar, Minister for Labor and Human Resource Punjab,
- His Excellency Gamini Lokuge, Minister for Labour and Labour Relations, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
- His Excellency Mr. Md. Mujibul Haque, State Minister, Ministry of Labour and Employment, People's Republic of Bangladesh
- Raja Hassan Abbas, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & HRD, Government of Pakistan
- Mr. Muhammad Yousaf, Secretary, Labour & Human Resource Department, Government of the Punjab,
- Representative from the SAARC Secretariat
- Mr. Nicolas Gibert-Morin, Head of Cabinet for the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Brussels
- Distinguished delegates from South Asian Countries including trade unions and employers' organisations.
- Ladies and gentlemen

Assalam-o-Alaikum, Ayu Bowan, Namaste, Good Morning!

Your excellency, the President of Pakistan, your presence here today is a testimony to the high importance Pakistan places on issues related to fundamental rights and principles in the world of work, sustainable enterprises and the promotion of decent work.

Friends and colleagues from South Asia....it has been very enriching spending the last couple of days together here in Lahore. Not only have I learned a lot but more importantly, the high relevance, the deep interest and the commitment to work more closely together across borders to find solutions to common challenges related to decent work has been amply demonstrated. The labour market dynamics are changing rapidly and the sub-region clearly understands that it needs to move fast on key issues. Many of our countries have young populations who are new entrants into the labour market....the transition from a safe childhood with focus on education into a productive and meaningful adulthood requires careful manpower planning as educational and skills development programmes not only need to meet the demands of tomorrow's industry but also need to match the aspirations of young people themselves. Fundamental to moving forward on the decent work agenda in the sub-region is the ratification and compliance with the international labour standards and in particular the eight core conventions of the ILO to which all member states of the ILO subscribe and report on periodically. Whilst it is understood that countries move at different pace towards the realization of these, it is also imperative that the sub-region progresses and shows results and the ILO stands ready with technical assistance to make this happen. We have heard concerns from a few countries of the requirements and what is felt to be high standards in relation to the situation in their own countries, but we have at the same time also heard a strong unified commitment to these fundamental principles and rights at work and a zero tolerance towards the worst forms of labour practices, the

unacceptable forms. Businesses today in South Asia know from experience that complying with national labour laws that are in line with the international standards pays off in the long run. A healthy, safe, engaged and satisfied workforce is a more productive workforce.

There is no doubt that stepping up the sharing of knowledge and experience between our countries will be of great benefit in improving the design of interventions, learning what works and what does not work. This relates both to policy formulation as well as to how children in villages stop working as child labourers and start attending school. Although the situation in countries of South Asia may vary there are also similarities. Importantly, for implementation and ownership to happen and change to take place, widespread consultations are critical. Tripartite consultations and social dialogue is the modality that works when it comes to tackling important issues in the world of work and we would like to encourage governments to build strong relations with your representative trade unions and employers' organisations in order to promote decent work. There can be many modalities for regional cooperation, but South-South collaboration is a modality, which already happens and which can be further formalized. The ILO is already working on this modality in relation to BRICS and IBSA and this can be adapted to the sub-region as well. From the ILO, we are looking forward to the follow-up to this Conference that countries will take, knowing that more collaboration will benefit all the peoples of South Asia.

Honourable President, on behalf of the ILO, let me thank the Government of Pakistan, the Government of Punjab, the Chief Minister and the Minister for Labour and his team in particular for their excellent organisation of this important Conference to promote decent work in South Asia. We are looking forward to working closely together with you in moving the agenda forward.