

The ILO – 90 years of hope

A better world starts here.

Opening Remarks by Ms. Sachiko Yamamoto,
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On the occasion of the ILO's 90th anniversary,
Chaktamuk Theatre,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 27th April 2009

Your Excellencies Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Distinguished Guests, ILO and UN Colleagues – Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I would like to thank both the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Vocational Training for taking the time to attend today and support this important occasion. It is an indication of the special relationship that the ILO has developed with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

So it is my great pleasure and honour to be celebrating the 90th anniversary of our Organization here with you today.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The world collectively yearns for a safe pair of hands to help us through these uncertain times, to ensure that principles of fairness, equity and social justice are upheld. Globally, and particularly here in Asia and the Pacific, there is a widespread desire to correct some of the failures of globalization.

Given that the International Labour Organization is the United Nations' agency that deals with work and workplace issues – and its unique three-part structure of Governments, Workers and Employers – it is no surprise that we are being called upon

to help respond to this current crisis. This challenge comes at a significant moment for the ILO, as it marks its 90th anniversary.

As one of the oldest institutions in the UN system, this anniversary is a milestone of global importance but also one of deep national significance. Cambodia became a member of the ILO in 1969 – thereby marking its 40th anniversary this year. Birthdays aside, Cambodia is also one of the countries in the region to have ratified all eight ILO core conventions.

We have been honoured to work together with Cambodian people through the years, especially through the most difficult years – after wars, brutality and social upheaval – in order to help rebuild Cambodia and expand opportunities for decent work for all Cambodians.

Here in Cambodia, and right across this vast region, the economic and jobs crises we face are of great concern. But they also offer us an opportunity to make the world of work actually work better for the world.

The greening of the economy, and the emergence of a political will to drive that forward, is an opportunity to rebuild jobs and lives in a more sustainable way. Employment should not only meet our basic needs today but it should offer some hope of social and economic progress to individuals and societies. This is what we mean by decent work.

90 years is a long time. But, in my view, the crisis we face today shows – should there ever have been any doubt – that the ILO's mandate is as fresh, relevant and universal today as it has ever been. Just consider how, as times have changed, the ILO's mandate has adapted to and incorporated changes in the world of work.

The ILO's Conventions have set the internationally recognized standards that most of us now take for granted; including the eight-hour work day, basic workplace

safety standards, maternity protection, an end to child and forced labour, equality, the right to organize and speak out. Here in Cambodia– and on these very issues – we have a long partnership in working together with the Royal Government of Cambodia, workers and employers. We are also working closely with ASEAN on issues of labour migration.

On the ILO's 90th birthday it is right that we should feel pride in the achievements of the past nine decades. The partnership we have enjoyed with the government and people of Cambodia are filled with examples of these achievements. The early efforts on employment generation, vocational training, and small business development have borne important results, perhaps most prominently, the development of ACLEDA as Cambodia's largest domestic bank. Many agencies and individuals, most notably Mr. In Channy, now the President and CEO of ACLEDA Bank, played crucial roles in bringing this about. We are very pleased that ACLEDA has joined us to celebrate this anniversary.

The employer community has much to be proud of. In a relatively short period of time, investment and enterprises have mushroomed, driving economic growth and employment in garments, construction, tourism, handicrafts, and in small and medium enterprises of all kinds. You are now feeling the strain of the global economic crisis and the ILO will continue to support and work collaboratively with the employer communities such as the Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations (CAMFEBA) and the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC) in finding ways to address these challenges.

The trade union movement as well has made enormous strides. From almost nothing in 1996, workers organizations have grown in line with the growth in the economy. With the advancement, unions yet have had some key constraints to be addressed. Endogenously, unions need to develop the will and capacity to represent working men and women and to contribute to the debates on economic and social policy, including measures to sustain economic growth and solidarity and unity within the movement. Exogenously, unions are best to operate in an enabling industrial relation

environment for freedom of association, appropriate legislation frameworks, legitimacy and recognition of tripartite representation and more specifically independent trade union activities. Unions have also identified and requested the government to speed up and intervene in (1) establishing the labour court (2) keeping Article 67 and 73 in the labour law without any amendment, (3) promoting at the fullest extent trade union rights, (4) supporting retrenched workers by ensuring that they receive lawful benefits and absorbing them into other job and (5) ensuring effective labour law enforcement.

But what is more important is the future. We must use this occasion to look ahead and renew our support for the fundamental principles the ILO stands for and - in these testing times - plan how we can work, together, to further social justice and achieve decent work for all.

So, the message of the ILO's 90th birthday is one of hope - a better world starts here – if we so choose.

Thank you.