

15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting
Introduction of the Report of the Director General
Ms Sachiko Yamamoto, Regional Director, RO-Asia Pacific
Ms Nada Al-Nashif, Regional Director, RO-Arab States



International
Labour
Organization

Madame Minister Komiyama, the Chairperson of the 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting,

Mr Greg Vines, the Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished delegates, participants, friends,

It is a pleasure and honour for us to introduce the Report of the Director General: “Building a Sustainable Future with Decent Work.”

The report presents an overview of our recent work in the region, in pursuit of the goal of fair globalization and decent work for all. It covers the progress achieved and the challenges we are still facing.

With the accompanying supplementary report, it also looks forward and considers what we need to do to accelerate progress on the Decent Work Agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

UPDATE SINCE THE LAST APRM

Five years ago, in our last Regional Meeting in Busan, we made a clear commitment for action to shape a new vision for development in the Asia-Pacific region.

Central to this was an understanding that despite the region's impressive economic performance, its future prosperity could no longer rely on economic growth alone. It needed a development path that was sustainable, inclusive, and balanced – one that would lead to greater social equity.

In Busan you agreed that decent work needs to be at the heart of development policies and strategies. Not just nationally, but regionally and internationally.

It was this unity of purpose that produced the Asian Decent Work Decade, and a new set of priorities covering both national action and regional partnerships. It also outlined areas where the ILO could assist you.

Now, this Kyoto meeting comes just after the half-way point in that Decade. It provides an important opportunity to review progress, reflect on recent developments, and share our experiences and lessons learned.

Most of all, it gives us the chance to renew our commitment to the Asian Decent Work Decade, and set the course for swifter progress in the years ahead.

IMPORTANCE OF DECENT WORK COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

Ladies and gentlemen, to deliver on the promises of the Asian Decent Work Decade, economic, social, and environmental goals need to be pursued in a coherent, integrated, and mutually supportive manner.

The growing number of Decent Work Country Programmes is one concrete example of this commitment. From only 2 at the start of 2007, there are now 20 active Decent Work Country Programmes in the Asia-Pacific and Arab States regions, and another 21 under development. Six of these are in the Pacific Islands – a sign of their renewed engagement with the ILO and decent work principles. Similarly, two DWCPs were signed with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the first time.

These documents are based on robust tripartite engagement and sound labour market information. They underscore the interconnected nature of the Decent Work Agenda. And they help us define the support we can give you in implementing your national development priorities.

REGIONAL TRIPARTITE DIALOGUE

We have also taken steps to support effective, coordinated, tripartite responses to some of the major decent work challenges we face, through a series of key meetings.

Firstly, with the Asian Employment Forum in Beijing in 2007. Then, in New Delhi, in 2008, at the Asia-Pacific High Level Meeting on Socially-Inclusive Strategies to Extend Social Security Coverage.

We have also shared knowledge and experiences, gained through responding to the global economic downturn, in line with the principles of the Global Jobs Pact;

- In **Beirut**, at the 2009 Arab Employment Forum;
- In **Manila**, at the 2009 High Level Forum on Responding to the Economic Crisis, co-organized by the ILO, the ADB and Government of the Philippines;
- In **Vanuatu**, at the 2010 High-Level Meeting on Decent Work for Sustainable Development in the Pacific. This meeting also produced the landmark “Port Vila Statement” and the Pacific Action Plan for Decent Work;

- And most recently at the first ever Arab Regional Meeting on Social Dialogue in **Rabat** in December 2010.

OUTLOOK: GLOBAL RISKS THREATEN REGIONAL PROSPECTS

Ladies and gentlemen, today Asia appears as a ray of hope in an increasingly uncertain world. As other regions grapple with persistent economic woes, this region is leading the fragile global recovery with vision and dynamism.

However, beneath this optimism lie both challenges and risks. Despite its recent economic success, Asia has yet to fully match its growth with the facets needed for a balanced and sustainable future: decent jobs, an equitable sharing of national wealth, and social justice for all.

The global economic crisis drove home the message that we need a new pattern of growth for our region – one that is fairer, more inclusive, and more job-rich. In Busan, and in your work to pursue and implement the Decent Work Agenda, you have shown your commitment to making this a reality.

Today, our situation remains fragile, and this is why we now need to accelerate and intensify our efforts. After a brief rebound, the global recovery is once again looking unsure, with a growing debt crisis in Europe and a still-faltering US economy.

Another recession could follow, and Asia – more open than ever before – may not be spared from its effects. In the Arab States region, the economic downturn has been compounded by sweeping popular revolts and a new dynamic of transition to democracy with significant socio-economic repercussions.

Yet, we already know the steps needed to build a balanced and lasting recovery. The 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization provided us with a blueprint to strengthen our collective capacities to promote the Decent Work Agenda and forge an effective response to the growing challenges of globalization.

This was reinforced with a call at this year's International Labour Conference for a "New Era of Social Justice."

Of course, as national circumstances vary, so too will the approaches adopted. But there are a number of key principles that should underpin our efforts to correct the imbalances of globalization and build a sustainable future based on decent work for all.

First, we need better coordination of macroeconomic, employment and social protection policies. This must include:

- Stronger integration of the policies to promote full and productive employment in our macro-economic policies;
- National action to build and strengthen fiscally sustainable social protection floors;
- Ensuring universal basic schooling and an end to child labour; and
- Giving young people a better start in education and employment.

Second, we need to promote productive employment, sustainable enterprises and skills development, including:

- Improving the quality and relevance of training and instilling the habit of lifelong learning;
- Providing support for entrepreneurs and business growth;
- Supporting employment-focused recovery from natural disasters; and
- Stepping up investments in green jobs and a just transition.

Third, we must prioritize rights at work and social dialogue. This includes:

- Building stronger, more relevant systems of labour market governance and administration, challenging ourselves to strive for greater equity in the world of work;
- Making greater efforts to ratify and implement core and fundamental ILO conventions; and
- Developing institutional systems of dialogue with strong, independent and representative social partners.

To date, ILO member States globally have ratified an average of 42 conventions. In Asia and the Pacific, this number is 21; in the Arab states, it is 26.

PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

We have come a long way on this journey together. Through the aforementioned initiatives, and by focusing on the five priority areas identified in Busan, we have seen concrete progress toward the Decent Work Agenda in Asia.

The report before you sets out these achievements in more detail, but let us now reflect on them briefly.

First, despite difficult economic conditions, you have made progress in boosting competitiveness, productivity and job growth. More and more countries now place employment concerns at the heart of their economic and social policies. Many are focusing on improving skills and employability, and creating a better environment for entrepreneurs and businesses.

These efforts have often rested on improving labour statistics and analysis – and the ILO has been helping strengthen national capacities for better policy diagnostics.

Second, important steps have been taken to improve labour market governance. Generally in Asia today, we see greater respect for international labour standards in Asia, as well as for fundamental rights at work. Labour laws have been reformed to achieve a better balance between the demands of employment security and business flexibility.

Countries have also been strengthening governance frameworks to promote gender equality, through gender audits and mainstreaming policies, as well as new laws on equality and anti-discrimination.

Having recently marked the occasions of World AIDS Day and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, it is also encouraging to note the expansion of workplace HIV and AIDS programmes across the region, and the widening scope of both legal protections and labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Third, a growing number of countries in the region are now building progressive, fiscally sustainable social security systems. They are exploring new ways to expand coverage and effectively deliver services at the local level. And they are reforming laws and improving inspection systems that support occupational health and safety.

Although as a percentage of GDP Asia still spends less than most other regions, these investments are vitally important. Social protection not only provides more economic stability in difficult times, but in the longer term it also encourages productivity and development.

The ILO is particularly proud to be playing a role in this area, and the principles of the Social Protection Floor Initiative are providing important guidance.

Fourth, progress has been made in both eliminating child labour and improving opportunities for young people in the labour market. Time bound programmes against the worst forms of child labour have delivered important results in a number of countries. And youth are now taking centre stage in a growing number of national development plans and employment policies, as well as being at the forefront of wide-ranging societal demands in new popular movements.

Finally, it is encouraging to see greater steps being taken to improve the governance of labour migration so that both sending and receiving countries as well as migrants and their families can reap the benefits.

With 15 bilateral MOUs across the region, the ILO-Korea employment permit system has been pivotal in strengthening the regional architecture for labour migration management and safeguarding the rights of men and women who cross borders to work.

LESSONS LEARNED & THE WAY FORWARD

These results demonstrate the tangible dividends of our efforts to achieve decent work across Asia and the Pacific. But we can still do more, not just in advancing the Decent Work Agenda for our people, but in leading the cause of social justice and a fair globalization everywhere.

Our collective experiences, achievements and lessons learned can help set the course for accelerated progress in the coming years.

First, we need to enhance policy coherence and coordination across the Decent Work Agenda.

The future prosperity of our nations is increasingly intertwined, and many of our core development challenges now transcend national borders. So ensuring that our national and regional policies are coherent and mutually reinforcing is all the more critical.

Second, stronger regional cooperation can accelerate progress toward decent work goals.

Building on current good examples, we can strengthen partnerships within the multilateral system and among regional organizations and development partners to tackle collective decent work challenges - from climate change to labour migration. We can share our experiences in developing employment-centred disaster response and enhancing labour market governance, and strive to enhance the voice of workers and employers in the efforts of these regional institutions.

By strengthening the ties among constituents across the region, in particular through thematic communities of practice, we can harness the growing momentum for regional integration in Asia and the Pacific, promote policy coherence and joint research, and respond to evolving demands.

Third, we need to strengthen evidence-based policymaking through better and more accessible real-time data and statistics. The ILO can help by serving as a “gateway” for information and policy advice and improved knowledge sharing of best practices from the region and beyond.

Fourth, tripartism and social dialogue are indispensable for delivering on our commitments, both at the policy and programme levels. Critical to this will be building the capacity of constituents - which will in turn bolster their role in national and regional policymaking. National ownership of in-country programmes is essential to delivering maximum value and impact from our activities.

Finally, in these challenging times, we need to continuously strive for greater efficiency and effectiveness, in particular through improved results-based management, which was called for in the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that while this region has embarked on the decent work journey positively and purposefully, significant challenges lie ahead.

However, our progress to date, together with the commitment and focus you have shown in implementing the Decent Work Agenda, tell us that these challenges can be overcome; that bold ambitions can be realized.

So, let us take this opportunity to renew our commitment to the Asian Decent Work Decade.

Let us ensure that growth leaves behind no woman or man.

Let us demonstrate our leadership by accelerating progress on a new development paradigm, with decent work and social justice at its core.

Thank you.

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