

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia's Opening Statement

ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis

15 June 2009

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Esteemed Delegates,
Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2009 ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis. The call of today is for leadership. Leadership at all levels. We are clear about the challenges we face.

The world cannot afford to wait for employment to come back, several years after economic growth has returned.

Rapid recovery of employment and the accompanying social protection needs must be central to public policy and business decisions.

At the same time, we need to build an efficient social market economy that will prevent relapsing into the excesses and inequalities of the past.

And we must be attentive because we can already sense certain interests that just can't wait to go back to business as usual.

We know where we want to go. A world economy that works for all. Delivers on decent work for women and men. Social justice at home and a fair globalization in the world. This is our task ahead. That's the mandate of the 2008 Declaration. It cannot be delayed.

Dear Friends,

We have today the single largest gathering, in the history of the ILO, of Heads of State and Government, Vice-Presidents, Labour Ministers, Presidents of trade unions, leaders of employers' organizations and distinguished international personalities.

Their presence honours the ILO. I thank them for their continued engagement, the guidance they will give us and the political energy they bring to our work.

This Summit is a tribute to the significance and role of the ILO on its 90th Anniversary.

An Anniversary that you have marked so eloquently in your countries. Thank you for your wonderful commitment. 200 events in 120 countries and more to come.

Dear friends,

Tested by history the ILO has been. Tested today we are again.

We have come together to agree on a decent work recovery from the crisis through the ILO's Global Jobs Pact.

The Chair and Vice-Chairs will report to us on the work of the Committee of the Whole. I want to thank them for their intensive work and results, together with the Drafting Group and the members of the Committee.

Our task will be to apply the policies of the Global Jobs Pact to be adopted, in order to accelerate recovery at home and coordinate measures internationally, so that no one is left out, no one is left behind.

We need many things to get this done.

But above all,

Leadership.

Leadership with a moral compass guiding action.

Leadership that dares take new approaches;

Leadership to fix what has gone wrong

Leadership that listens and opens doors;

Leadership to find common ground in a world of nations moulded in different cultures and realities.

Leadership that can deliver the national and international agreements that put people first.

Strong leadership to give life to a global jobs pact; in each country, in enterprises and workplaces, at the United Nations, in the G-20, in regional bodies, in international organizations, and in local communities.

In moving forward, we can rely on a strong ILO to pursue our ideals, to carry out our mandate and to deliver for our constituents.

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A key dimension of leadership is the capacity to work together, to coordinate, to cooperate, to negotiate, to be a team player.

Cooperation and dialogue is urgent, central, indispensable.

At these times, what brings social partners together with government is far greater than their differences. The green shoots of renewed social dialogue sprouting here and there must multiply.

And yet, this is one of the biggest leadership challenges we face: to make social dialogue work at home.

We know it's not easy, we justify its absence. We find excuses for its underperformance, we blame the other. But the end result is that we all lose.

If social dialogue does not take root at home in times of crisis, we would be weakening the full potential of a Global Jobs Pact.

It is in your hands to make it fly. And fly high.

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We also need renewed leadership in international cooperation.

The Group of 20 assumed the responsibility to act and took urgent decisions. It was timely. We welcome their call on the ILO.

New forms of global governance are unavoidable, based on the democratic membership of the United Nations.

The UN Chief Executives Board is working on nine joint initiatives to confront the crisis – including on employment and social protection with the ILO as lead agency.

But overarching political guidance for a convergent multilateral system is not yet there. This requires new political impetus, bold decisions. This crisis must accelerate needed reforms.

We must urgently set in motion a process of much greater convergence and coherent cooperation among multilateral institutions.

It must cover, though different forms of action: trade, finance, development cooperation, environment and climate change, labour markets and decent work, basic needs and food security, health, education and innovation, among others, as foundational pillars of a renewed global governance.

Cooperation to implement the Global Jobs Pact will be a priority for us. But the ILO cannot implement it on its own.

Finally, leadership is about legitimacy and relevance.

Legitimacy is not just the power to decide, it is the capacity to deliver solutions that work and respond to people's needs; the accountability for what we are doing.

I believe all international organizations have to pass, sooner rather than later, a legitimacy and relevance test in this early 21st century, including about the policies that led to this crisis.

I believe the ILO is well placed to pass this test.

Our concepts of Decent Work and a Fair Globalization have received wide support and are now global goals. This can help open the way to the Global Jobs Pact.

When we do our work well, we come up with policies and solutions that are balanced; geared to the real productive economy and the life of people.

Crafted by a tripartite eye that can concentrate on the larger space of common interests that we all share, rather than tripping on differences – however important – that we certainly

have.

This is the sense of the ILO Global Jobs Pact.

It reflects our conviction of what is needed now: high levels of employment and decent work for all; an open economy that delivers opportunity and fairness, alongside a sustainable environment and low carbon growth, a basic floor of social protection accessible to all with strong and affordable social security systems, and rights at work as a source of dignity and bargaining; with social dialogue to weave agreements.

Our common future depends on these global public goods taking hold in our societies and as a global objective.

We believe such approaches are good for productive economies, stable societies, vibrant democracies, and lasting peace.

We aspire to see such values and principles shape policies and lead change within countries and in a renewed system of global governance.

Dear Friends,

This Summit can mobilize the leadership to overcome this crisis and chart a new course for a fair globalization bringing opportunities of decent work to all.

I am confident that the governments, employers and workers assembled here will return home energized by this conference, carrying with them the messages and solutions crafted here.

The way forward is through bold leadership for action at all levels, in enterprises, locally, nationally, in regions and globally.

Our collective responsibility is to make the voice of the ILO heard; to give immediate effect to our practical solutions, in partnership with others.

Dear Friends,

I call on you to act, with your eyes set on a new horizon, a future shaped by our values that have stood the test of time, the collective will to overcome this crisis and the conviction that however difficult, we shall succeed.

In this journey we are inspired by world leaders that have come to the ILO, at this critical time.

We thank them for their support.

We look to their guidance, true to our values.

Together we are going to move forward and be successful in carrying out what will be agreed upon on this conference.

Thank you.