

Human.Rights@Work

“Trade union rights are human rights”

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Decent work for sustainable development

More than 3,000 government, worker and employer representatives took part in the Annual Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on 30 May-15 June. Major topics included decent work and development, child labour in agriculture, work in the fishing industry, forced labour, and the promotion of sustainable enterprises.

Five Heads of State and Government addressed the Conference: Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile; John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana and Chairperson of the African Union; Portia Simpson Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica; Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal; and Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka.

Under the rotation system, the Conference's President should have come from the African group this year. However, the candidature proposed by the African group had not been discussed in advance with the social partners in the region, as it should have been. This led the employers and workers to oppose the candidature, and they pointed to the tripartite principles upon which the ILO is based. After consultations, Kastriot Sulka, Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Albania, was elected by all of the delegates to preside over the 96th International Labour Conference.

Chosen by the Conference as its Vice-Presidents were Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos (Governments), Michel Barde (Employers) and Marc Blondel (Workers). Ambassador Da Rocha Paranhos is Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Brazil in Geneva. Mr. Barde is the employers' delegate from Switzerland. Mr. Blondel is a member of the ILO Governing Body and workers' delegate from France.

In his report to the Conference, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia addressed a wide range of issues, from the impact of globalization to the reduction of decent work deficits. He said the Organization was moving forward through its Decent Work Agenda, which had been endorsed by the United Nations and other international and regional bodies, including the G8 Summit held in Germany in June 2007.

“We can show important advances in our cooperation around decent work objectives on each of these issues in so many countries,” he stated. “But we know that we cannot go it alone. Delivering on the Decent Work Agenda means ensuring that other organizations and other policies are also working with us.”

Mr. Somavia said a key issue for action now was decent work as part of economic, social and environmental policies.

He highlighted the key issues involved in promoting decent work for sustainable development: a balanced approach to sustainable development; more coherent policies for trade, finance, investment and employment; promoting a socially just transition to “green jobs”; the wage squeeze and increasing inequalities which threaten stability; improved policy-making through a stronger labour market information base to measure decent work deficits; a global approach to social protection; modernizing governance of the world of work; and making the United Nations and the multilateral system more effective.

The ILO should, the Director-General argued, turn the goal of sustainable development into the “overriding policy paradigm” within which the Decent Work Agenda can make its key contribution to development. The recent joint ILO/World Trade Organization study had, he said, paved the way for new, constructive research on the link between trade and employment. This approach should be applied in order to develop potential synergies that have so far remained untapped. In particular, Mr. Somavia cited the example of financial stability and the role of the International Monetary Fund. “I believe that dialogue and convergence are possible,” he stated, adding that “the ILO has opened a forum for discussion with other international agencies, including the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, on how to achieve greater coherence between policies to promote decent work for all, financial stability and market opening”.

On the transition to “green jobs”, the ILO Director-General said that measures to adapt patterns of production and consumption need to be taken now. To accompany this transition, a major research programme should be developed, and a programme of support should be launched for the creation of green employment in certain priority sectors. But there is also, he stressed, a need for “programmes to develop and expand effective dialogue among all relevant stakeholders, and especially national and international social dialogue on the environment and the world of work among government, employers’ and workers’ organizations”. Social protection, active labour market policies, education and training, investment in public and private infrastructure and capacity-building for social partners are the other main elements in the package proposed by Mr. Somavia.

The ILO Director-General also insisted on the need to slow down or reverse the trend towards the exacerbation of social inequality and to roll back absolute poverty. He emphasized the

importance of integrating informal work into the formal economy and combating discrimination against women.

For the first time, General Secretary Guy Ryder spoke in the name of the International Trade Union Confederation, formed in November 2006. He firmly supported the Decent Work Agenda: “An ILO which takes the lead on the jobs agenda which has to accompany action on climate change, an ILO which plays a central role in trade and employment, an ILO which addresses growing inequality between capital and labour and intensifies its cooperation with others in the multilateral system to advance the Decent Work Agenda, which strengthens its standards machinery, and which improves its analytical capacities and does all of this with the full and committed engagement of its tripartite constituency is an ILO that people want, and which will reach its 100th anniversary as a key actor on the key issues of the day.”

While the dominant topic of the debates at this year’s Conference was the role that the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda can play in promoting sustainable development, many speakers – particularly the worker delegates – emphasized that green jobs go hand in hand with respect for core labour standards. They linked this issue to the Conference discussion on strengthening the ILO’s capacity to assist its members in achieving their objectives in the context of globalization. So the Conference did not confine itself to setting aims, it also set out the policies to be pursued – within the means available. The budget adopted by the Conference (US\$641.7m for 2008-09) is unchanged, in real terms, from that for the previous period.

At a ceremony in the plenary, the ILO awarded its first annual Decent Work Research Prize to Nobel peace laureate and former South African President Nelson Mandela and to the eminent academic and specialist in social security Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Professor Emeritus on Economics and Latin American Studies of the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

Strengthening the ILO’s capacity – a crucial task

The debate launched this year on strengthening the ILO’s capacity is of vital importance if decent work really is to be achieved. The discussion should result in an authoritative document next year.

The need for a social dimension to globalization has become obvious, and more and more of the actors have come to accept the goal of decent work. So what should be the ILO’s role? What should be the Organization’s responses if it is to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow? Those were the key themes of the discussions in Geneva, as set out by Mr. Kaasjager, the Reporter of the Committee on “Strengthening the ILO’s capacity to assist its Members’ efforts to reach its objectives in the context of globalization”. More than 200 delegates took part in the discussion, in 14 sessions during which the organization’s mandate was reaffirmed and its working methods were evaluated. Two areas were mapped out for a debate which will need to continue next year, as well as through consultations in the meantime: firstly, anchoring the strategic Decent Work objectives within the work of the ILO Annual Conference, thus permitting a more effective mobilization of efforts and regular monitoring of the progress achieved; and secondly, projecting Decent Work and the means of achieving it (tripartism and standard-setting activities) into the heart of the United Nations reform and the plans to ensure the coherence of the multilateral system.

Commenting on the Committee's work, Mr. Leroy Trotman, spokesperson for the workers' group, emphasized that "even if we were all focused clearly on the institutional capacity of the Organization, it is true that we also had in mind the UN reform discussion which is taking place. We are not tired of repeating that the centrality of decent work is also a means of maintaining the tripartite structure of the ILO firmly anchored within the UN family".

The conclusions adopted at the end of this first round of discussions contain 17 provisions. They define the actors involved in the debate, who are the ILO constituents but also the institutions of the United Nations and the multilateral system, as well as the multinationals. And there is a proposal for an authoritative instrument which may, next year, take the form of a Declaration. The provisions emphasize resources, namely the ILO's research activities and analytical capacities together with the capacities of the constituents. They lay down a framework for partnerships with the other institutions (United Nations, World Bank, IMF etc.) on Decent Work issues. They envisage the creation of a new permanent committee at the International Labour Conference which would conduct cyclical examinations of the different elements of Decent Work (employment, social protection, international labour standards, social dialogue). And they advocate better integration of these four strategic objectives as a coherent tool for sustainable development.

So this is an ambitious programme. Ebrahim Patel (worker delegate, South Africa) took part in the negotiations on the text. As he put it, "the constituents recognize that they face a choice: either to descend to a minimalist package, simply and only focused on office efficiencies, playing, if you like, at the margins, a lowest common denominator that produces vacuous text that we all praise but with few real tools or new ideas to shape our world, and shape globalization; or to set a level of ambition that is commensurate with the importance of the topic. It is vital that the constituents really do proceed with the more visionary second option that will produce a result consistent with the way the opportunities noted were described: as the most important ILC discussion in the past 20 years." Watch this space.

Standards at last for fisheries workers

Two years after they were blocked by the lack of a quorum, the adoption of a Convention and Recommendation on work in fishing is good news for some 30 million men and women working in this sector.

Just one more little vote was all that would have been needed in June 2005 to adopt the Convention on Work in Fishing. But this year, the outcome was very clear: at 437 in favour, 2 against and 22 abstentions, the Convention was almost unanimously adopted by the delegates, while the accompanying Recommendation garnered 443 votes in favour, 0 against and 19 abstentions.

Marc Blondel, Vice-President (Workers) of the Conference, said the new instrument will "make it possible to provide decent work for many people in a sector which is known to be dangerous. The adoption of this Convention shows the relevance of the ILO's standard-setting function and the effectiveness of social dialogue. Our group will measure the success of the Convention by the impact it has on the world of work, and we appeal for its ratification and implementation."

The Convention, to be known as the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No.188), will come into effect when it is ratified by 10 (including eight coastal nations) of the ILO's 180 Member States.

The new standards contain provisions designed to ensure that workers in the fishing sector receive:

- improved occupational safety and health and medical care at sea, and care ashore for sick or injured fishers
- sufficient rest for their health and safety
- the protection of a work agreement
- the same social security protection as other workers.

Its provisions are particularly aimed at ensuring that fishing vessels are constructed and maintained in such a way that the workers' living conditions on board reflect the long periods they often spend at sea.

The Convention will certainly not be a luxury for the sector's workers. There are now an estimated 30 million fishers worldwide. In 1970, there were only 13 million. Each year, more than 24,000 fishers and other people working in fish farming and processing are killed at work. The industry has annual earnings of more than 70 billion dollars, yet it seems to invest little in safety.

Clearly, the fishing industry needs and will continue to need international labour standards. It is to be hoped that the new Convention will focus more attention on fishers' lives and working conditions, as well as the fate of their communities. And that it will help to deliver something they are entitled to – decent work.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia congratulated all those who worked on the new Convention, noting the extraordinary level of cooperation between governments and employer and worker representatives when drawing up this instrument.

“Extending the net of social protection and decent work to fishers is an important part of the ILO's commitment to social justice,” he said. “In the fishing sector many people face extraordinary and unpredictable hazards, often working long hours in harsh conditions to bring food to our markets. This new instrument will help protect them against exploitation.”

The next step for Member States, following the adoption of the Convention by the International Labour Conference, will be to submit the instrument to their national authorities for ratification.

Sustainable enterprises - the right environment and social responsibility

The delegates emphasized that the ILO's future work on sustainable enterprises must be based on its mandate, its standard-setting role and the Decent Work Agenda.

Enterprises are an important source of growth. But to be sustainable, they need an environment that includes peace and political stability, good governance, the rule of law and respect for universal human rights. However, the fate of enterprises does not depend on their environment alone. Their own behaviour is just as crucial for their sustainability and their contribution to the three pillars of sustainable development, namely its social, economic and environmental dimensions. So what role should governments play? And the social partners? And the ILO? These were the crucial issues discussed in the Conference's Committee on Sustainable Enterprises.

From the outset, workers' group spokesperson Cecilia Brighi (Italy) was careful to emphasize that, property rights are not absolute rights like human rights. She went on to point out that respect for basic human rights at work, employees' right to organize, workplaces that are safe and healthy for workers and consumers alike, fair distribution of the wealth created, payment of taxes and duties and the protection of the environment are all part of enterprises' social and environmental responsibilities.

At the end of the discussions, the tripartite delegates adopted conclusions which give detailed indicators for an environment that fosters the creation of sustainable enterprises – an environment which consists of the legitimate quest for profit but also of respect for human dignity, environmental sustainability and decent work.

The conclusions identify 17 pillars of a favourable environment, and then set out the six characteristics of sustainability at the enterprise level, namely social dialogue and good industrial relations; human resource development; conditions of work; productivity, wages and shared benefits; corporate social responsibility; and corporate governance and business practices. The document mentions governments' triple role in promoting sustainable enterprises - creating an enabling environment (including through the implementation and enforcement of labour standards); taking incentive measures; and themselves behaving as sustainable enterprises when the State is an employer or a procurer of goods and services. The role of the social partners is also described, and the importance of social dialogue and the promotion of decent work is emphasized. "Sustainable enterprises engage in social dialogue and good industrial relations, such as collective bargaining and worker information, consultation and participation," the delegates emphasized in their conclusions. "These are effective instruments to create win-win situations, as they promote shared values, trust and cooperation, and socially responsible behaviour. Social dialogue includes examples at international level, such as the conclusion of International Framework Agreements between multinational enterprises and global union federations in different industrial sectors."

Meanwhile, the ILO's role includes, amongst other things, providing specific guidance to enterprises, enabling them to promote responsible practices at the workplace throughout their supply chains. This includes using the ILO Declaration on multinational enterprises, notably by taking account of the importance of workers' rights and the economic and commercial justifications for sustainable practice.

The conclusions "clearly indicate that the ILO and its constituents can be at the forefront of a renewed and coherent strategy for sustainable development and decent work 'to ensure that the quality of ... future life (and employment) is maximized while safeguarding the sustainability of the planet'," Ms. Brighi pointed out.

The ILO's backbone – International Labour Standards

Three special paragraphs, proposals for high-level missions, direct or technical contacts, requests for reports addressed to ten governments and expressing the concerns of delegates, particularly the workers – once again, the Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations had a heavy schedule during the International Labour Conference. But progress in the case of Spain shows that the Committee's tenacious approach gets results.

Tasked with examining the measures taken by States to implement the Conventions they have freely ratified, the Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (Committee on the Application of Standards) held 16 sessions this year, during which 63 governments provided it with information on the situation in their countries.

Although the standards committee is not a court, some governments are anything but keen to appear before the social partners and be held to account for the way in which they fulfil their international obligations. And indeed, this session was marked by a number of incidents. Called before the committee in connection with alleged breaches of freedom of association (Convention 87), the government of Zimbabwe refused to attend. But its delegation, which was present in Geneva, was in the public galleries while the case was being discussed. This attitude got the Zimbabwean government into the special paragraphs of the Committee's report. The Democratic Republic of Congo, questioned about Convention 119 on Guarding of Machinery (in fact, the RDC has still not brought its legislation into line with its ratification of this instrument), also opted for the empty chair approach and ended up in a special paragraph.

Another dispute arose over Colombia, when employer delegates opposed its inclusion in the list of countries discussed by the standards committee. "If there is one case which fully responds to the criteria to be on the list, it is that of Colombia," retorted Luc Cortebeeck (Belgium), the workers' group spokesperson on the committee. Despite the number of trade unionists murdered in Colombia last year – 72, according to Mr. Cortebeeck – and the recent revelations by the International Trade Union Confederation about the links between members of the government and paramilitary groups, as well as the complicity between senior leaders of the security department and groups linked to the death squads, the employers' group felt that, while they did not dispute the seriousness of the situation in Colombia, progress had been made and it was therefore not appropriate to place that country on the list of cases to be discussed by the committee. The workers' group argued that the case of Colombia ought to have been on that list. In fact, worker delegates made that point in all of their speeches to the Conference plenary, including the closing speech by worker Vice-President Marc Blondel.

The Committee held a special sitting on Burma's application of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and on follow-up to the measures taken within the framework of Article 33 of the ILO Constitution.

The Committee expressed its profound concern at the forced labour situation in Burma, as reflected in the observations of the Committee of Experts. It concluded that none of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry had yet been implemented, and the imposition of forced labour continued to be widespread - particularly by the army, to which specific instructions should be issued. The Committee urged the government to implement all the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. The worker delegates denounced the continued investments made in Burma by multinational corporations. As a French worker representative put it: "Investors have to recognize that, in the context of their economic activities in the country, they are benefiting from the infrastructure, particularly the roads, security and services provided by the State possibly through the use of forced labour. Enterprises should cease their complicity in using these different infrastructures. Furthermore, the increase in exports coming from Burma as a result of the operation of these multinationals directly contributes to the wealth of the regime and the army, the latter being the main perpetrator of forced labour".

The worker delegates recalled that the resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2000, under Article 33 of the Constitution, asks the ILO constituents to take the necessary

measures to effectively implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry aimed at ending forced labour.

In addition to this special sitting, the Committee examined 25 other individual cases covering the whole range of concerns addressed in ILO standards. Most of these were about freedom of association.

Noting the lack of progress on freedom of association in Belarus, the Committee expressed in a special paragraph its concern about the situation there. The Committee recalled the imperative need for the government to act without delay to ensure that all workers' and employers' organizations can function freely and without interference and obtain registration without previous authorization.

The Committee also urged the government to vigorously pursue its consultations with all social partners in the country, and its cooperation with the ILO, with a view to making the legislative changes required to bring the law and practice into full conformity with the Convention and the Commission of Inquiry recommendations.

Welcoming the Belarus government's statement that it would continue to cooperate with the national social partners and that it had invited a high-level ILO mission immediately following the Conference, the Committee expressed the firm hope that significant progress in ensuring full respect for freedom of association would be made without any further delay. In order to appropriately monitor developments in this regard, the Committee recommended that the Governing Body reconsider this matter in November 2007. The workers' group immediately indicated that, if no real progress has been noted by this date, further measures will have to be decided in line with the ILO Constitution. And Luc Cortebeek emphasized that the dialogue with the Belarus government had become possible only after the conclusions reached by the Conference Committee and the Governing Body last year, and following the decisions taken by other international bodies, notably the European Union. Belarus's preferential trade status under the EU's generalized system of preferences was withdrawn with effect from 21 June 2007. In a communiqué issued on 18 June 2007, the European Commission regretted that, despite repeated calls, Belarus has not taken any concrete measures to respect trade union rights. "As soon as Belarus complies with its ILO obligations, the Commission will propose that its GSP preferences are reinstated," the communiqué said.

Among the cases on which the Committee on the Application of Standards expressed concern were Cambodia, where the Committee deplored the climate of impunity that seems to be emerging after the murder of three trade unionists, even though death threats are still being made against certain trade union leaders; Djibouti, over allegations of arrests and aggression against trade unionists; Ethiopia, over further arrests of trade unionists, ill-treatment, intimidation and "permanent" interference; and the Philippines – murders of trade unionists and anti-union violence in the sugar sector and death threats against trade unionists in a free trade zone.

The General Survey discussed by the Conference Committee this year was on forced labour. The Committee noted with satisfaction numerous cases of progress in various countries of the world. But the problem of forced and compulsory labour, including in many new and contemporary forms, continues to exist in a number of countries and many people around the world are still subjected to it. "Forced labour is taking on new forms in the industrialized countries," Mr. Cortebeek told the Conference, "be it prison labour, work to be carried out in order to be eligible

for unemployment benefit, unpaid overtime hours and bans on striking. These modern forms mean that social legislation needs to be brought up to date.”

Finally, as it does every three years, the Committee examined the report of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel. This takes stock of the implementation of the two international Recommendations concerning all teaching staff, from infants’ school through to university. Commenting on the report, an Education International representative deplored the fact that “the recommendations (the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers adopted by UNESCO in 1966 and the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel adopted in 1997) are not really applied or are widely ignored”. Summing up the workers’ viewpoint, Mr. Cortebecq noted that this ninth report once again reflects the gap between statements and reality. “Statements reiterate the vital role of education and training, whereas in reality there is a growing shortage of teaching personnel.” This shortage “certainly represents the principal obstacle to achieving the objective of education for all”.

To round off this summary report, let us end with a case of progress. It concerns Spain and Convention 155 on Occupational Health and Safety, 1981. The Committee noted the efforts made by the Spanish government to improve the national situation on safety and health at work, including for migrant workers, by adopting and applying a national policy and legislative measures. The regularization of more than 578,000 migrant workers, welcomed by the Committee has, according to the Spanish government, led to “important social effects regarding equality at work”.

Freedom of association – urgent cases

At its June meeting, the Committee on Freedom of Association, for its part, examined 30 of the 121 cases currently before it.

The Committee drew special attention to the cases of Cambodia, Colombia and the Philippines because of their serious and urgent nature.

In the case of **Cambodia**, the Committee reached, for the third time, interim conclusions on the murder of trade union leaders Chea Vichea, President of the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC), Ros Sovannareth, a steering committee member of the FTUWKC, and more recently, Hy Vuthy, leader of the FTUWKC in the Suntex garment factory, as well as on serious allegations of continuing repression against trade unionists.

The Committee once again urged the government to take measures to reopen the investigation into the murder of Chea Vichea and to immediately open independent inquiries into the murders of Ros Sovannareth and Hy Vuthy.

The case on **Colombia** concerned acts of anti-union pressure and discrimination in the University of Córdoba, including threats by the Vice-Chancellor of the University and paramilitary commanders of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, aimed at persuading the National Trade Union of University Workers of Colombia to renegotiate the collective agreement in force. In its interim conclusions, the Committee recalled that this is contrary to the principles of voluntary collective bargaining and the autonomy of the bargaining partners.

Regarding the **Philippines**, the Committee reached interim conclusions on allegations of murders, serious threats, continuous harassment and intimidation and other forms of violence

inflicted on leaders, members, organizers and union supporters/labour advocates of trade unions and informal workers' organizations. The Committee deplored the gravity of the allegations made in this case and the fact that more than a decade after the filing of the last complaint on similar allegations, inadequate progress has been made by the government on putting an end to murders, abductions, disappearances and other serious human rights violations.

The Committee also dealt with two cases in the Islamic Republic of Iran and one in the Republic of Korea.

The first longstanding case in the Islamic Republic of Iran concerns, amongst other things, allegations of violent police repression of the May Day 2004 rally in the city of Saqez and the adoption of legislation that would restrict the trade union rights of a large number of workers.

The second case relates to acts of harassment against members of the trade union of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, notably the arrest of the union's main leader, Mansour Osanloo. The Committee urged the government to take the necessary measures to ensure that all charges against him relating to the exercise of legitimate trade union activities are dropped. (According to the ITUC, Mr. Osanloo, who was at liberty at the time, was abducted and severely beaten on Tuesday 10 July 2007, and was taken to the notorious Evin prison, where he is still being held as we go to press. According to Osanloo, the arrest has been recognized by Judge Mortazavi of the Revolutionary court.).

The Committee urged the government to take all measures to ensure that trade unions can be formed and function without hindrance, including through their de facto recognition.

On the **Republic of Korea**, apart from a case dating back to 1996 and the gravity of new allegations concerning extensive interference in the activities of the Korea Government Employees' Union (KGEU), the Committee reminded the government of its expressed willingness to ratify Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 – a commitment made to the ILO high-level tripartite mission which visited the country in 1998 and reported to the Governing Body in March 1998.

Workplace discrimination – still around, but changing shape

Discussed at the Conference, the global report on discrimination at work sees two big trends. Progress has been made on the legal side, but implementation is lagging behind and new kinds of discrimination are emerging.

Speaking for the workers' group in the discussion on the latest ILO global report, *Equality at work: tackling the challenge*, Barbara Byers (Canada) said the report "draws our attention to the painful fact that ratification is good, but it is not enough. Governments must also fully implement the Conventions in law, in spirit and in practice."

The Report is part of a series of studies issued annually on core ILO labour issues and was prepared under the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1998. The Declaration focuses on four fundamental principles – freedom of association, the elimination of child labour, the elimination of forced labour and discrimination.

The global reports series is part of the follow-up to the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 1998. The reports help to measure progress and identify problems in

implementing these principles. This year's report concerns discrimination, and is based on the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and occupation) Convention, 1958.

By 2007, nine out of ten Member States had ratified Conventions 100 and 111. But while progress on the legal and institutional fronts in many countries has been noteworthy, implementation of the law remains inadequate and the bodies set up to combat discrimination generally lack resources.

The report provides many examples of discrimination on the basis of race and religion, social origin, caste or indigenous background, as well as against migrant workers. And it warns of the consequences of discrimination against younger and older workers, as well as inequalities based on sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status or a person's disability.

Approximately 470 million people with disabilities are of working age, and there is growing concern over discrimination against them. The likelihood of a person with a disability finding a job decreases as the level of disability increases, the report states. In Europe, a person aged between 16 and 64 has a 66 per cent chance of finding a job. This rate falls to 47 per cent for a moderately disabled person and 25 per cent for a person with a severe disability.

The report also points to the recent emergence of practices that penalize people with "a genetic predisposition to developing certain diseases" or those "who have lifestyles considered unhealthy". The rapid developments in genetics and related new technologies have made it easier to obtain information on genetic status. Genetic screening has important implications for the workplace as, for example, employers might have an interest in excluding or dismissing workers with a predisposition to contracting one disease or another. Genetic discrimination at the workplace has been proven and successfully contested in several courts around the world.

But one aspect of this issue seems to have escaped the authors of the report, the workers' group spokesperson pointed out. She strongly regretted that it "does not really discuss discrimination on the basis of political opinion". This is "deplorable," she said, because "anti-union discrimination is the most rampant means used to violate trade union rights throughout the world".

The global report recommends a series of steps to combat discrimination and achieve the ILO's proposed action plan. These include promoting gender equality through more integrated and better-coordinated global action; mainstreaming non-discrimination and equality into ILO Decent Work Country Programmes, taking into account specific needs of different groups; enacting better laws and promoting better enforcement; more effective non-regulatory initiatives such as government purchasing, and lending and investment policies; and helping workers and employers make equality a reality at the workplace through mechanisms such as collective bargaining agreements and codes of conduct.

World partnership against child labour in agriculture

The International Labour Organization and five major agriculture-related international bodies have joined forces in a new world partnership to combat child labour in agriculture.

Held on 12 June, this year's World Day Against Child Labour focused on eliminating child labour from agriculture, the sector which employs massive numbers of the world's working children. It is also one of the most dangerous sectors to work in, for children and adults alike. To mark the World Day and reinforce the worldwide movement against child labour, the ILO

launched a new partnership with five agriculture-related organizations. The partners in this new alliance are the ILO, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Institute of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (IFPRI/CGIAR), the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF).

Worldwide, agriculture is the sector in which by far the largest number of working children are found – an estimated 70 per cent, of whom 132 million are girls and boys aged 5-14. These children are helping to produce the food and beverages we consume. Their labour is exploited to raise crops such as cereals, cocoa, coffee, fruit, sugar, palm oil, rice, tea, tobacco and vegetables, as well as other agricultural products such as cotton and livestock.

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous sectors, especially for children. Exposed to the same hazards as adults in agriculture, children are at even greater risk because their bodies and minds are still developing and they lack work experience. In some cases, children are put to work from the age of five. According to estimates by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), children aged under 10 account for 20 per cent of child labour in some rural areas,

Welcoming the ILO's decision to dedicate the 2007 World Day Against Child Labour to the elimination of child labour in agriculture, IUF President Hans-Olof Nilsson, representing his organization at the launch, called on governments to ratify ILO Convention 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture, as part of the campaign to improve conditions for everybody engaged in agriculture.

Key areas of cooperation for the new partnership are policies and activities to:

- promote the application of laws on child labour in agriculture, especially to ensure that children do not carry out hazardous work in agriculture
- improve rural livelihoods, and mainstream child labour issues into national agricultural policies and programmes
- reduce the urban-rural and gender gaps in education,
- promote youth employment opportunities in agriculture and rural areas.

Deteriorating situation in the occupied Arab territories

The situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories is deplorable, the ILO annual report shows. And things have got worse over the past year.

According to a report prepared by the ILO for the International Labour Conference, the number of households living below the poverty threshold in the occupied Arab territories rose by 26 per cent between March 2006 and March 2007, while the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) plummeted by 40 per cent between 1999 and 2006. Today in the occupied Arab territories, seven out of ten families – 2.4 million people – are poor.

The findings of the report are based on missions sent to the occupied Arab territories and Israel and to the Syrian Arab Republic earlier this year to assess the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan.

A major contraction in average income has accelerated the economic crisis and social hardships, the report says. The immediate cause is the only partial payment of public employees' salaries since April 2006, the decline in public and private investment, and the growing difficulties faced by enterprises in moving their products to domestic and international markets, mainly due to the controls on and barriers to the mobility of people and goods. These obstacles intensified in 2006.

“There is territorial disintegration, with a tight network of closures, sophisticated controls and the expansion of illegal settlements,” says the report, adding that “closures are the main cause of the worsening socio-economic situation of Palestinian women and men”.

Two out of three people are without employment, the report points out, either because they are unemployed or because they are outside the labour force. According to the report, some 206,000 people or 24 per cent of the labour force were unemployed in December 2006.

The virtual breakdown of public institutions, which has undermined national decision-making capacities and internal reform, has compounded the economic crisis.

Pointers

- **New Chair for ILO Governing Body:** The Governing Body of the International Labour Office (ILO) elected H.E. Mr. Dayan Jayatilika, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva, as Chairperson for its 2007-08 Session. Mr. Jayatilika replaces Mr. Mdladlana, Minister of Labour of the Republic of South Africa, who served as Governing Body Chairman during the 2006-07 Session. Mr. Jayatilika has, inter alia, held positions as senior lecturer at the University of Colombo and as a political analyst. Daniel Funes de Rioja, President of the Social Policy Department of the Argentine Industrial Union and Chairman of the Employers' Group of the Organization of American States from 1995 to 1998, was re-elected as Employer Vice-Chairperson. Sir Leroy Trotman, General Secretary, Barbados Workers' Union and spokesperson of the Workers' Group in the Governing Body, was re-elected Workers' Vice-Chairperson. The three will serve as Officers of the Governing Body during its 2007-08 Session. The Governing Body is the executive council of the ILO and meets three times a year in Geneva.
- **Government interference in worker delegate nominations:** The composition of certain delegations at the Conference led the International Trade Union Confederation to lodge objections. In the case of Djibouti, trade union leaders were replaced by people who do not represent the workers, in a bid to muzzle the trade union movement. The same situation was denounced by the ITUC in the case of Zimbabwe, which appointed a government official as adviser to the workers' delegation, so putting the autonomy of the worker delegates at risk. Several countries (Gambia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) had not included worker representatives in their delegations, contrary

to the provisions of the ILO Constitution. The ITUC also protested over the fact that the worker delegate for Chad was prevented from leaving his country and his passport was withdrawn. Invalidation of the credentials of the worker delegate appointed by the Burmese military junta was requested by the ITUC “because he does not represent a workers’ organization freely constituted within the country”. The Credentials Committee also deplored the fact that, once again, the nomination process for the non-governmental members of the Venezuelan delegation was not conducted correctly.

- **Low representation rate for women:** 24.3 per cent of all delegates accredited at the Conference were women. This is the same percentage as last year. The Credentials Committee and the ILO Director-General strongly deplored this far too low level of female participation. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to note that women made up at least 40 per cent of the membership of 33 delegations.
- **G8 backs Decent Work Agenda:** At their summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, in June 2007, the Heads of State and Government of the G8 (United States, Japan, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada and Russia) committed themselves to supporting the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda as central to globalization with social progress. So the G8 leaders have assigned an unprecedented status to the ILO’s role in the construction of a fair globalization. The final declaration of the summit in Heiligendamm includes a call on Member States of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to promote the implementation of internationally recognized core labour standards in close cooperation with the ILO. Furthermore, the G8 commit themselves to include decent work and the respect of ILO core labour standards in their bilateral trade agreements, while recalling that labour and social standards should not be used for protectionist purposes.
- **Working more for less:** Nearly a century after the ILO adopted its first international standard on working time, it brought out a new study during the International Labour Conference estimating that one in five workers around the world - or over 600 million people - are still working more than 48 hours a week. Many of them are earning scarcely enough to make ends meet. The new study says roughly 22 per cent of the global workforce, or 614.2 million workers, are made to work “excessively” long hours. Shorter hours would have positive consequences, the report insists. These would include benefits to workers’ health and family lives and reduced accidents at the workplace, as well as greater productivity and equality between the sexes. But it also says a considerable number of part-time workers in developing and transition countries may be underemployed, and thus more likely to fall into poverty.
- **New Member State:** The Republic of the Marshall Islands has become the 181st Member State of the International Labour Organization (ILO) following receipt in Geneva of a letter from Mr. Gerald M. Zacios, Minister of Foreign Affairs, stating his government’s formal acceptance of the obligations arising from the ILO Constitution. The Marshall Islands, which have been a member of the United Nations since 17 September 1991, thus became a Member of the ILO on 3 July 2007.

