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“ Human Security and the Role of the ILO ”

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the reopening of the ILO Tokyo Office with us at this symposium.

The linkages between the work of the ILO and human security are more than obvious. The creation of the ILO back in 1919 - with Japan as one of the founding members - was all about human security. There was a global crisis; security had broken down; and social tensions had contributed to World War I. The ILO was founded on the conviction and evidence that gaps between the privileged rich and the exploited poor, and gaps between and within countries, could at worst lead to conflict and war.

Against the background of a devastating war, and attempts at revolution as a solution to social tensions, the tripartite structure of the ILO was designed as a democratic and participatory way to deal with conflicts that affect the working people and disrupt or prevent their well-being as well as disrupting healthy economic and enterprise activity. Social justice and peace were in 1919 seen as a necessary basis for economic growth. This was equally true in the reconstruction period after World War II. And it is also true in our globalized times.

The formula is quite simple and well proven in times of growth. Its elements include human rights at work and decent labour standards and conditions of work, together with economic and employment growth. The effects of growth are expanded through negotiations and cooperation for sharing in the outcomes of growth.

Cooperation, whether bipartite or tripartite, is easier when the prospects of growth are good. The situation is more difficult in times of economic trouble. It is one thing to have shelter from short-term economic downturns. Then you know that you are going through a period of bad weather and you have to cooperate to keep dry until the sun shines again. But it is more difficult when the economies are facing deep-reaching structural change. Then you are not only facing a rainy day, or even a hurricane. You are facing economic and social climate change.

The challenge today is how to use the traditional method of the ILO - negotiation, consultation, tripartite cooperation - when parameters change. Can this method be applied to manage

globalization, so that it would be a socially responsible process? The recent World Summit at the UN General Assembly believed so. It supported, on 13 September 2005, fair globalization as an aim, referring to the ILO's concept of decent work for all, with an emphasis on full and productive employment, including for women and young people. It called for national development and poverty reduction strategies and for the full respect of core labour standards, as expressed in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Governments and employers' and workers' organizations will have to ensure that their actions and structures can be relevant to this common goal. It is important to see what kind of change we are undergoing in the labour markets. The world of work is no longer dominated by monolithic, massive work collectives. Centralized command structures are fading away. Units of work and entrepreneurship are smaller and more spread out.

The challenge is how to function efficiently when your organization - and your bargaining partner - no longer is a hierarchy: it has become a network instead. Decisions are less and less top-down. They are more horizontal. More adjustment of interests of equal partners is needed. More attention has to be paid to individual concerns and aspirations, although this has to take place in a coherent framework.

The ILO's four-pronged decent work approach gives indications on how the security and basic interests of both the economy and people who work and live in it can be ensured in the new circumstances. I shall proceed to cover all four basic elements of the Decent Work approach.

1. RIGHTS - LABOUR STANDARDS

The observance of commonly agreed standards provides a framework, which is also a framework for flexibility. Standards are not against flexibility - in fact, they are a precondition for flexibility. They guarantee equal rights and the setting in which individuals (workers and entrepreneurs) can pursue their aspirations.

The four categories of fundamental principles and rights at work (core labour standards) are spelled out in the 1998 Declaration. They are not for ILO purposes alone but concern the whole multilateral system, and they cover all situations in both the formal and informal economies. They are universal in scope but, of course, their application is both national and local. There is no contradiction between the universal character of human rights at work and their application by people and authorities who have to gain sufficient ownership over them.

(Just as a reminder, the four categories are freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; the abolition of forced labour; the elimination of child labour; and non-discrimination in employment and occupation.)

2. EMPLOYMENT

In general the dignity of a human being is determined by what he or she does, most often as a worker, an administrator or an entrepreneur. In order to be viable, poverty reduction measures need to lead into more and better jobs. A report presented by the Director-General to the International Labour Conference two years ago underlined that above all, people have to be enabled to work their way out of poverty.

Real employment has to match real needs. I cannot share the often heard statement that there is not enough work in the world. Just to take care of the effects of both man-made and natural disasters would call for work on a massive scale. If the political will is there, the real question then is of how to organize the work. The many threats to human security, whether environmental, health, climatic and natural or through conflict and wars, also provide a list of productive and good work which needs to be done. In fact, they are employment opportunities. If we do not invest in them in time, we pay much more economically and socially when the damage is already done.

Employment calls for investments in the skills of young people, to give them a tangible promise for the future and avoiding the danger which may be the biggest one of all: a loss of belief in that progress is possible.

3. SOCIAL PROTECTION

Not everyone can or even should work. Societies have to look after the young and the old as well as those who temporarily are not able to gain their living through a decent job. Adjustment measures have to be in place when there is short-term downturn. Increasingly, we need to address the effects of long-term structural change on whole categories of workers who need protection while alternatives are being found.

We also need to address the issues of health and safety in a working environment where the development of a safety culture and its protective measures is not as easy as in big work collectives. Every day thousands of lives are lost in work-related accidents. If the daily global casualty rate at work would be concentrated in one place, it would be all over the first pages of the world's newspapers. In addition to the human tragedies involved, most of these losses are entirely preventable.

Our societies are ageing - in both industrialized and developing countries. In addition, both young and ageing workers are more vulnerable to accidents and occupational diseases. Against a global background, we have to have a comprehensive review of trends of both retirement age and remuneration as well as those of migration.

4. SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social dialogue offers what we could call "the method" to deal with these interlinked questions. Adjustment can be done through collective bargaining, information and consultation, and different ways of participation and inclusion. For instance, workplace cooperation is key for occupational safety and health measures.

Employers' organizations and trade unions may change, but there will always be those who run enterprises and public services as well as the many who work in them. They may be either in the formal or the informal economies. Social and economic progress will continue to depend on how their interests are reconciled. A good deal of human security will, in turn, be dependent on this.

If we lose belief in this method, we no longer have a decent way of settling our divergencies and of agreeing on how to make the best of our opportunities. The fairness can be brought to globalization through a process which engages those directly involved in the world of work, on the basis of the strategic objectives underlying the ILO's decent work approach.

The way to do this will differ from one country to another, depending on levels of economic development and strength and the different needs of the economies. We are currently introducing in many countries "decent work country programmes". They help in finding the right mix of social and employment measures for each country. Rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue form a coherent package. But their application needs to be determined by the governments and other key actors, in particular employers and workers and their organizations, in each of the countries.

We also need to address topical and urgent new challenges. I wish to thank the government as well as the employers' organizations and trade unions of Japan for their support in our search for solutions to many difficult questions which globalization has brought to the foreground. Here I am in particular thinking about the problems raised by human rights at work, such as trafficking of human beings, which has specially been mentioned here, already. These are the human security questions on which we have to concentrate more and more, and the ILO has its own contribution to give to the broad goal of human security.