

Comments by Minister of Labour of Palestine to the ILO Governing Body document regarding the Enhanced Programme of Development Cooperation in the occupied Arab territories

**Chair of the Governing Body,
Director General of ILO,**

I write to submit Palestine's comment to the Governing Body document GB.340/POL/5 titled the Enhanced Programme of development Cooperation for the occupied Arab territories.

The world is confronted with huge challenges caused by the serious health threat facing the humankind through COVID-19, which directly impacts the future of work everywhere. In Palestine, we were not isolated from such a challenge, which we have been addressing in addition to the Israeli occupation, the expansion of settlements, economic and financial blockade on Palestinian people, all result in deepening the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable and in more poverty. This comes at a time where Palestinian Authority's capacity to support its social partners is diminishing, which would eventually jeopardize the outcomes already achieved the Decent Work Programme signed with the ILO.

More than 100,000 Palestinian workers inside Israel have lost their jobs and incomes, as Israel does not allow them to their workplaces. Humiliation and discrimination continues against them at the cross borders, preventing their wages and not providing them with adequate occupation safety and health at the workplace. As of first half of 2020, occupational accidents increased among Palestinian working in Israel to more than 300 including 30 death cases.

In addition, the Israeli authorities continue to impose blockade on Gaza in order preventing thousands of workers from accessing their workplaces in occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, and inside Israel. According to international reports, including the annual Report of the ILO Director General submitted to the International Labour Conference, Gaza has turned into a large prison for more than 2 million Palestinians. We consider this Report an important international one that documents the Israeli violations to international labour standards while accurately notes down the challenges facing the world of work in Palestine and the necessary technical and financial assistance needed to address them.

We at the Palestinian Authority have been easing the impact of the pandemic, in collaboration with our social partners as well as through ILO's technical support, through a contingency plan, which included among other things the following:

- The signature of a tripartite Agreement for wage protection, at the early months of the crisis, and the establishment of unemployment support fund.
- Provision, by the Palestinian Employment Fund, low interest finance to SMEs.
- Continue with the implementation of the Decent Work Programme in Palestine 2018-2022, signed with ILO, which is risking delays and obstacles as long as COVID-19 pandemic remains. In this respect, let me refer the conclusion of the first ever National Employment Policy in Palestine as one of the most important achievements of the ILO technical cooperation provided to us. As we envisage soon its launch, we hope it will strengthen the Palestinian labour market by enhancing its capacity to create decent jobs.

Similarly, it is important to refer to the fact that the momentum behind the social security coverage has been restored at the national level, which we consider as one of the priorities ahead with the support of ILO.

Chair of the Governing Body,

Director General of ILO,

Any progress we have been able to achieve is attributed to the partnership with our social partners, our resilience in facing the Israeli occupation and its discriminatory practices, holding of our responsibilities in protecting Palestinian workers, and our commitment to social dialogue as a means of addressing crises.

In conclusion, I thank the International Labour Office as well as the countries and partners for their technical and financial support for the implementation of the Decent Work Programme, and I look forward to the consideration and support of the Governing Body to the following:

- Maintaining and enhancing the technical and financial resources for ILO's programmes and activities in Palestine, for the remaining two years of the DW Programme.
- Prepare a resource mobilization strategy linked to the National Employment Policy with a view to enhance the capacity of Palestinian Economy to create decent jobs.
- Support the ILO Director General for assuming a mediating role with Israeli side for regaining the Palestinian social security dues held by Israel since 1970.
- Place an agenda item on your next Governing Body session for the consideration of the conclusions, which appear in the Director General annual Report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.
- Provide an urgent support to the Palestinian Fund in support of wages.

I thank you.

Nasri Abou Jaish

Minister of Labour