



Third (special) sitting

Monday, 2 June 2008, 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr Salami

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR DANILO TÜRK,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA**

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

I declare that this third (special) sitting of the International Labour Conference is now open.

Your Excellency, ministers, delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the International Labour Conference has the great honour today to welcome His Excellency, Mr Danilo Türk, the President of the Republic of Slovenia. To introduce our very distinguished guest, I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference, Mr Juan Somavia.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Mr President, it is my honour to welcome you to this special sitting of the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference – the world parliament of labour, representing governments, workers and employers of country Members. President Türk, allow me to say from the outset, what a personal and institutional privilege and pleasure it is to receive you as a global leader of today. I have been honoured to know and work with you in many mission capacities.

Dear friends, it is not often that so many sources of knowledge and experience find their way into the hands of a President of the Republic. A lawyer, an intellectual and human rights activist, a tenured professor of international law, a person of global vision, comfortable in the world of international relations and the United Nations, and certainly a significant voice in national politics. He was elected President of the Republic of Slovenia with nearly 70 per cent of the votes last November.

Again, Mr President, what an honour to have you with us, also representing the country that has assumed the presidency of the European Union (EU), a region so close to the history of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Many of the social struggles in Europe that erupted with the wave of globalization at the end of the nineteenth century are at the origin of the ILO. Your presence with us further underscores the EU support for the Decent Work Agenda and fair globalization that comes not only from the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, but also the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee. You have a profound belief that the European Union can play a key role as a global leader to help address, together with others, many of the complex issues of today and, most importantly for us, you are today making history. I say that you

are making history because you are the first Head of State of a country that has assumed the presidency of the European Union to address the International Labour Conference. We thank you for this.

Everyone in this room certainly hopes that your precedent will be followed in the future. As the Head of State of Slovenia, you are well known as a leader of strong conviction and commitment, a fervent believer in the rule of law, democracy and dialogue.

Much of your professional life has been devoted to research and teaching international law at institutes and academic institutions in your own country, throughout Europe and in the United States. You have written numerous authoritative studies and are active in the International Law Association.

You are also an outstanding human rights advocate, an adviser and expert on such pressing issues as the prevention of discrimination, the protection of minorities and the need to put economic, social and cultural rights into practice. You also initiated and played a leading role in the Human Rights Council in Slovenia. And, of course, you are also a distinguished diplomat, serving as the First Ambassador of Slovenia to the United Nations in New York, where you twice presided over the United Nations Security Council and then served as United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. You have also participated as a key actor in numerous major international conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, which was directly linked to the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, and, as you said in a speech recently, "The world needs effective models of sustainable growth Globalization will be considered as good if it helps in spreading prosperity and improved standards of human well-being and freedom."

This conviction is given added force as Slovenia now presides over the EU. In fact, during the course of this session of the Conference, your country will chair a ministerial-level meeting on decent work for young people in the Western Balkans. This is one of the major challenges, of course, in a region that has known such turbulence.

Mr President, over the years, I and many others throughout the world have admired your political wisdom and the conviction of your values, which go hand in hand with the independent thinking of an open-minded, intellectual and a creative force for dialogue and consensus building. Let me, on behalf of all present here, thank you for your presence in this hall today which represents, as I said, the par-

liament of labour and what we regard as the *real* economy – the employers, the workers and the governments who have to establish the parameters for that activity. Mr President, you honour us. Thank you for being with us.

Mr TÜRK (*President of the Republic of Slovenia*)

I feel honoured to have the opportunity to take part in the work of the International Labour Conference and in one of the most important contemporary debates, the debate on the Decent Work Agenda. I wish to commend the International Labour Organization and the Director-General, Mr Juan Somavia, for the pioneering work which has already generated a high level of acceptance of the concept of decent work and its relevance to policy-making both at the national level of States and internationally.

Later in this session, the Minister of Labour of Slovenia will speak in more detail about our own, that is, Slovene experience, and she will also chair a meeting on the labour issues relating to the south-eastern Europe region. For my part, I would like to share with you some more general thoughts on the concept of decent work in the context of globalization and on the role of the European Union and the rotating presidency, which Slovenia currently holds. But at the outset, let me put my remarks in context.

We live in an era of globalization that is driven by a very dynamic development of new technologies, in particular telecommunications technologies, and is characterized by impressive global economic expansion. This has created an impression that some factors of production, such as technology and capital, are decisive, while the significance of other factors has been diminished. This impression corresponded to the belief that globalization is something entirely new in human history and that new technologies have an inevitable transformative effect on societies. This is how globalization optimism came about. According to globalization optimists, the effects of globalization have already made the world flat. According to this view, modern technologies have levelled the playing field, thus offering comparable opportunities to everyone in the world and the promise of a great future to all.

However, in recent years, this line of thinking has been giving way to a more nuanced, more realistic and therefore somewhat less enthusiastic view. First, the process of globalization started centuries ago and had earlier surges, including the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. The difference between the globalization of today and its earlier periods is that the processes of today affect much larger numbers of people around the world much more immediately. Second, expressions of technological optimism should be viewed cautiously. Historical experience is relevant here. Technological advances, such as the introduction of electricity into the daily lives of large numbers of people a century ago, transformed societies in many ways. However, this transformation has not brought prosperity to all and has not prevented social and political upheavals or armed conflicts.

The new technologies of today and new economic opportunities do not automatically translate into greater freedom and justice or more durable peace. Peace and justice, including social justice, require special efforts.

It is not surprising that the current debates on globalization concentrate on the issues of the un-

even distribution of its fruits, on the ethical and legal aspects of technological development and on a variety of social and political problems generated during this recent phase of globalization. Issues revolving around employment and work are an important part of this debate. This is not surprising. A mature understanding of the advances of the past decade necessarily involves greater emphasis on their social and political dimensions, and the current financial upheavals and rising food prices have only added an element of drama to this already existing understanding.

This is the context in which the International Labour Organization is expected to offer an effective strategy of decent work to guide its member States, as well as employers and workers. It is not an exaggeration to say that the recent evolution of the debate on globalization deepened the understanding of the centrality of issues of decent work at this point in time. The excellent recent Report of the Director-General, *Decent Work: Some strategic challenges ahead*, has confirmed this conclusion with great clarity and has addressed the key strategic challenges in a manner which invites serious discussion. Implicitly, the Report also reminds us of the ethical basis of the concept of decent work and, importantly, of the fact that the significant body of existing law already seeks to ensure that decent work becomes a reality. It is therefore entirely appropriate for the international community to insist on the basic principles advocated by the ILO and to strengthen the implementation of existing legal standards.

Labour is not a commodity; labour adds value in the process of production and is a value in itself; labour and creativity go hand in hand and they represent a basic guarantee of decent human existence and a basic guarantee for development. Ethical postulates such as these are of great importance in any discussion on the strategies of decent work. Based on these postulates, the strategies of decent work can effectively develop both their legal and policy dimensions. Our legal standards of decent work have been developed over time and their importance has not diminished. On the contrary, the Report of the Director-General, has shown in paragraph 90, that there has been a 50 per cent increase in the ratification of the eight fundamental ILO Conventions in the past ten years. This is a huge change and a huge rise, and, indeed, as the Director-General recognizes, the significance of this hugely encouraging outcome has yet to be fully appreciated. Premature conclusions are not appropriate. However, the fact that the acceptance of the basic labour standards has grown so steeply at a time when it appeared that the significance of labour had become less appreciated than it was in the past conveys a powerful message: it tells us something about the enduring importance of the ethical basis of labour standards and about their legal soundness; it tells us something about their importance for social stability and for development. The effort to bring the actual practices into compliance with labour standards has to be strengthened. At the same time, the labour strategists should be encouraged by the high rate of acceptance as such and use this in the process of policy-making.

Now it is necessary to understand the variety of ways in which international labour standards help. The implementation of economic and social rights, including the right to work, requires a variety of

policies, depending on the relevant circumstances. Taken together, such policies constitute the progressive realization of human rights. But how does one measure progress? Economic and social indicators, a variety of statistical data which, in the end, allow a judgement on the level of achievement represent, one of the tools. But techniques for the statistical measurement of progress rarely provide a sufficiently comprehensive picture. They have to be combined with the implementation of legal standards, in particular those enshrined in the eight fundamental ILO Conventions. A combination of statistical measurement of the effects of policies and legal assessment of the level of compliance with the accepted labour standards can provide the best available insight into the question of the realization of the postulates of decent work. The two processes of evaluation – statistical and legal – have to go hand in hand. Statistics provide the basic understanding of the levels of achievement. Information about the implementation of legal standards tells us about the actual situation of human beings and makes the dependence on statistics less vital. Therefore, the current high acceptance of international labour standards provides an opportunity that must be seized by the strategists of decent work policies.

Decent work is of vital importance in every society because it represents the first and most critical step out of poverty. This is the case even in affluent societies, such as those in Europe, where material deprivation is mitigated by higher levels of social transfers and subsidies. However, subsidies and social transfers do not eliminate poverty. Very often in such circumstances poverty lingers on in the form of social exclusion. Social peace based on exclusion is precarious. Decent work for all provides inclusion and is the only viable solution. Now, in poverty-stricken societies, on the other hand, this fact is even more pronounced. There simply is no way out of poverty without development, and there is no substitute for the basic requirements of development, that is, expanding employment and decent work. This is why worldwide implementation of the concept of decent work is called for. The creation of employment opportunities and the implementation of the basic labour standards, as well as the creation of opportunities for an adequate income, social protection and social dialogue between the main partners within a society, are objectives of global importance. They are also among the criteria by which history will judge the quality of our era of globalization. However, the conditions for achieving these criteria are different in different parts of the world.

In Europe, combining social justice and economic competitiveness represents the essence of development. Therefore, the inclusion of the concept of decent work as part of the European Social Agenda is a natural choice. The concept of decent work is also an essential element of the Lisbon Strategy on growth and employment which the European Union adopted in 2000 and which has been subject to an intense policy discussion since 2005. This discussion is expected to energize the implementation of the Strategy and to add new incentives for development. Active employment policies are emphasized in this context. They constitute the basis for an improved social cohesion and for the new cycle of development. At the same time, it will be necessary to modernize European systems of social protection, to improve the level of flexibility of labour markets

and to strengthen investment in human capital so as to ensure the required knowledge and skills.

Social partnership is a key guarantee for success in the processes called for in the Lisbon Strategy. The relevance of social partnership at this point in time is twofold. First, it helps the young to obtain the opportunity to work with the necessary attention to the development of their knowledge and skills and to permanent learning which is necessary to retain and develop flexibility for young people's future work and employment. In addition, it also assists older workers who, in the ageing population of Europe, have to work longer and who need to retain the necessary flexibility and skills and to develop new skills in a prolonged period of employment. Social partnership is a strategic necessity for effective policy-making. It involves a variety of local, regional and national institutions, as well as the institutions of the European Union.

The European Union is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of investing in people, and of improving the labour market. At its most recent session last March, the European Council emphasized the need to strengthen the education element in the triad: "research – innovation – education." High-quality education and increasing investment in human capital and creativity were defined as essential if Europe is to succeed in the globalized world of today. This is the way towards the knowledge-based economy, towards adequate employment opportunities and towards fiscal stability. And it goes without saying that these policies are the means for the eradication of inequality and poverty in Europe and for the reduction of youth unemployment, which breeds poverty in many parts of Europe today.

In the countries of the European Union, these policies are being devised to address the specific European typology of problems of development and social cohesion. It is clear that decent work, measured by a high standard of this concept, is at the core.

It is particularly important that, in order to achieve such a high standard, work be understood and cultivated in a close relationship with creativity. Creativity is the name of the high quality of work and employment in our era. Investment in education is critical for the system to be effective.

Now, while working intensely on the development of its own policies, the European Union is also aware of its global responsibilities. Here, at the International Labour Conference, I wish to emphasize in particular the global responsibilities of the European Union.

The European Union supports the International Labour Organization's system of implementation of labour standards and believes that these standards must progress globally. The Decent Work Agenda is also a source of policy-making in the context of the cooperation of the European Union with a variety of its partners. They include partners working with the European Union in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as strategic partners and other partners in Africa, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Asia. The existing diversity of partnership arrangements with countries around the world provides an opportunity for inclusion, in an appropriate manner, of the requirements of decent work as an essential element of the European Union's international cooperation.

The existing and evolving cooperative frameworks will also represent an important opportunity for testing the policy choices and methodologies to be applied in the realization of the decent work strategies. Thus, the European Union, and in particular the European Commission, will continue to strengthen external assistance for social adjustment in countries and regions outside the European Union which are involved in trade liberalization. Our trade liberalization should be promoted in a manner which will help to achieve high growth, higher employment and the progressive realization of standards of decent work. This is a difficult task, but one that must not be avoided and that will give the full meaning to the concept of international cooperation in the era of intensive globalization.

In the globalized world of today, international co-operation is indispensable for the realization of the concept of decent work. The role of international institutions is essential, and, among them, the ILO is of central importance. This has been repeatedly recognized by a variety of international bodies, including the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. The ILO itself has embarked upon the path of strengthening its capacity, and its bodies are constantly engaged in the process refining its working methods, in strengthening its knowledge base and in making the assistance given to member States more effective.

This process should continue with the necessary vigour. The work done so far in the preparation of the authoritative text promises success, and I would like to add my voice to those wishing the ILO success in this endeavour.

The International Labour Organization is one of the oldest and the most experienced members of the United Nations family. It has emerged as a result of the realization, arrived at after the First World War, of the enduring importance of labour relations and their regulation so that social and political stability can be maintained and so that development can ensue. It has developed a unique tripartite structure to make the process of decision-making and the implementation of decisions coherent and effective. It has involved a significant part of civil society in its work. In many ways, ILO practices have paved the way towards the forms of international cooperation existing today in the United Nations system and beyond.

All this experience is a tremendous asset in our era of globalization. Let this experience inform and, wherever necessary, guide the discussion on policy-

making. The ILO not only has great historical experience, but also has a great mission today and a great role to play in the future. I am convinced that social justice and decent work will be an important characteristic of that future, of our common future, towards which we all need to work.

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

Thank you, Mr President, for having left us with some words which are fully in harmony with the objectives and values of the International Labour Organization. As Head of State of the country that holds the presidency of the European Union, allow me to thank you, Sir, personally and on behalf of my country, Panama, for the support given by the European Union for my appointment as President of this 97th Session of the International Labour Conference. As a result, I now have the honour and the privilege to take the floor before you on behalf of all the participants in this room.

Your Excellency, the Conference is honoured by the presence of such an active advocate of human rights and someone who has made a valuable contribution in cooperating with the Secretary-General of the United Nations for over a decade. Your impressive career leaves no doubt whatsoever as to your commitment to promoting greater respect for fundamental values, such as non-discrimination towards minorities and freedom of expression, which are topics of paramount importance for the ILO.

Moreover, since 1989, when social dialogue was established in Slovenia, your country has been particularly active in this field, using social dialogue and tripartism, the fundamental values of this Conference, as key instruments to achieve economic and social progress. In this regard, Slovenia has been considered as a shining example to be followed by the other countries that acceded to the European Union in 2004. Likewise, the priorities established during Slovenia's presidency of the European Union this year, in terms of employment, social policies and equal opportunities will without doubt allow the European Union to make headway towards achieving the objectives of decent work. Mr President, on behalf of my colleagues, the Officers of the Conference, and all the other participants, I should like to express to you our deepest gratitude for your visit.

I now close the third (special) sitting of the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference.

(The Conference adjourned at 3.50 p.m.)

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