



Special sitting

Wednesday, 15 June 2011, 4.30 p.m.

President: Mr Nkili

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MS MICHELINE
CALMEY-REY, PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS
CONFEDERATION**

Original French: The PRESIDENT

Your Excellency, Madam President of the Confederation, for me and for all of the delegates assembled here today, it is a great privilege to welcome the highest authority of the Swiss Confederation, to whom we are very grateful for its constant hospitality.

To welcome and introduce the President of the Swiss Confederation I now give the floor to Mr Juan Somavia, Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference.

Original French: The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Madam President, it is a great honour and a personal pleasure to welcome you to the ILO on the occasion of the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference. Your visit bears witness to the constant loyalty of Switzerland to this Organization. Your predecessors, Ms Doris Leuthard and Ms Ruth Dreyfuss, addressed us in 2010 and 1999, respectively.

On each occasion, and I would like to emphasize this point, Switzerland has been represented by a woman President of the Federal Council.

As you are very well aware, Switzerland provides an unflinching support to the ILO, and it has done so since the Organization was founded in 1919. All the annual sessions of the International Labour Conference bear witness to this, and since we are celebrating the 100th Session this year in 2011, please allow me to assure you that the Lake Geneva area is well known to tens of thousands of Government, Employers and Workers' delegates around the world; this is our contribution to Switzerland.

The commitment of your country to a fairer globalization is real and tangible. Switzerland, as we know, is a strong advocate for a more coherent multilateral system, for a better balanced globalization that will benefit us all.

Your country was not spared by the crisis, but its economic growth picked up quickly. Its unemployment rate is one of the lowest in Europe, confirming a trend that dates back very many years. This situation is due to a great extent to effective dialogue between the social partners – whom I see here in this room – which contributes to social peace and creates the necessary prerequisites for the develop-

ment of enterprises and the creation of high-quality jobs in a context of social cohesion; in other words, the values of the ILO.

You entered politics in 1979. You were very active in Geneva, your own city, in the early days of your career, running the Department of Finance in the Canton of Geneva in an exemplary fashion during very difficult times. You were also President of the Council of State of the Republic of Geneva; and you were elected in 2002 to the Federal Council, responsible for the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Your foreign policy is strongly committed to promoting peace, international law and human rights, and to combating poverty. Alongside all this, your country assumed the Presidency of the 65th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. In 2007, you became President of the Confederation for the first time, and you will be occupying this post again throughout 2011.

At the international level, your campaigning in favour of human rights is well known to everyone. Your interventions on this subject, particularly from the podium of the Human Rights Council, are taken very seriously. You have been for a very long time now committed to the promotion of gender equality. You are a member of the Council of Women World Leaders, a network for women prime ministers and presidents whose mission is to mobilize women leaders to promote the role of women.

At this point, I should like to point out that the Federal Council, the highest authority of governance in Switzerland, is exemplary, because its Executive is made up of four women and three men. Perhaps future delegations from other countries might have this same composition?

You also are an eminent member of the high-level group of experts on sustainable development, established by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. You are hoping, through this group, to provide new responses to the challenge of world governance and sustainable development.

Finally, I am very pleased to remind the assembly that Switzerland is a very faithful partner of the ILO in the area of technical cooperation. For all these many reasons, we would like to welcome you here today and look forward to hearing you speak; we are very honoured by the presence of someone with such stature, who has the same convictions as the ILO at heart and believes in human dignity at work.

I now have the honour to give the floor to Her Excellency Ms Micheline Calmy-Rey, President of the Swiss Confederation.

Original French: Ms Micheline CALMY-REY (*President of the Swiss Confederation*)

You are meeting for the 100th time in this world parliament of labour to reaffirm the need for the international protection of working conditions and to promote the social rights of women and men. It is also for me an opportunity to demonstrate Switzerland's commitment to and support of the ILO.

On behalf of the Swiss Federal Council, on behalf of the international community in Geneva, and all Swiss women and men, allow me to pay tribute to the indefatigable efforts of the ILO and its Members.

At the outset I would like to welcome Mr Robert Nkili, the President of the Conference, and congratulate him on his election. I should also like to greet Mr Juan Somavia, the Director-General, and I wish him every success in his very important position.

The ILO is the "elder statesman" among international organizations. Created in 1919, it is the oldest international organization in the United Nations system. However, it is surprisingly modern because it was invested, from the very beginning, with a mandate and with structures that were particularly innovative. More than 100 years after its founding, the ILO remains a model for international governance.

The ILO is exemplary in its structure and in its working procedures. Its tripartite structure still constitutes today one of its main strengths. It is a model inasmuch as one of the major challenges of international governance today is to involve all actors concerned.

Current political discourse focuses greatly on international cooperation; yet, international governance remains fragmented and inefficient. In national governments, just as in multilateral organizations, specific political changes require great efforts and a major institutional overhaul.

We are living in a polycentric world, in which local, national, regional and global processes are interconnected. And in an interconnected world, the decisions taken by one state have an effect on the others.

It is for this reason that we need to move towards a pluralization of our governance model, making a space alongside nation States, local governments, multilateral agencies, transnational actors, business forums, non-governmental organizations, civil societies and human rights' defenders.

Switzerland also experienced, like other countries, decades of class conflict until 1936, when the social partners reached a peaceful labour agreement whereby workers would renounce the right to strike in return for the right to bargain collectively. This labour "peace accord" (*paix de travail*) was inspired by mechanisms such as tripartism and dialogue, which have proved their worth – and continue to do so at the ILO.

Institutional and cultural infrastructures in our societies need to undergo similar transformations as those that occurred during the first Industrial Revolution.

Going beyond structural issues, let me stress once again how modern the vision was that accompanied the creation of the ILO. Its mission was to ensure social justice, which complemented the role of the League of Nations – whose role it was to maintain and guarantee universal peace.

This concern with social justice is clearly laid out in the Constitution of this Organization, which states: "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice".

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, social justice is more of a burning issue than it has ever been. Allow me to underscore its many dimensions. Social justice first and foremost implies the respect of two fundamental principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principle according to which "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", as well as the principle of the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language".

Social justice requires that everyone is entitled to dignity and real equal opportunity; and it implies that even the poorest populations should have the opportunity to improve their situation, and that women and men should have equal access to education, health and decent living conditions.

By social justice, we also mean more equal access to natural resources and their exploitation. Twenty-five per cent of the world population is consuming 75 per cent of its resources. How can we have enough drinking water, food, raw materials, and natural and energy resources, at an accessible cost, to cover the needs of some seven billion human beings? How can we ensure that development is equitable – and what does social justice mean in the twenty-first century?

When I call for social justice, I am also calling for fairness among the regions of the world and among generations. Social justice is a prerequisite for widespread sustainable development, it being understood that if our lifestyle is not sustainable, then we are automatically being unfair towards certain populations in the world. Why? – because we cannot hand over our lifestyle to all of them, and we cannot extend it to future generations. Hence, the solutions that we are looking for must be just and fair and apply throughout the world.

Given the economic and social integration of our world, any justice that stops at national or regional borders would only be illusory. We must endeavour to find global institutional arrangements and policies capable of improving the situations of people living in extreme poverty, and to guarantee that the distribution of resources and opportunities provide freedom to the most vulnerable members of society to the greatest extent possible and in a sustainable manner – irrespective of where they live in the world.

All solutions that are designed to be more sustainable will have varying effects on people, and this implies sharing responsibilities among members of different generations. And this transition calls for responsibility based on the collective interests of a community, as well as a willingness to reflect on values, priorities and justice.

Social justice requires a Social Protection Floor. Only an estimated 20 per cent of the global population of working age has access to a social protection system. This is not only a serious injustice but it is also a danger for economic stability. Social protec-

tion is a fundamental instrument to absorb shocks and to guarantee better and more robust economies. I should like here to express the full support of Switzerland for the Social Protection Floor initiative, developed by the ILO and the WHO.

I should also like to thank your assembly in advance for its endorsement of what will become Convention No. 189, which will provide some 100 million domestic workers with access to economic and social rights. They will be recognized in the same way as other categories of men and women workers, with rights and legal and social protection.

The ILO plays a central role in international questions related to labour and employment – and this role should be strengthened. It is incumbent upon the ILO to spare no efforts in adopting a coherent multilateral approach towards economic, social, commercial and financial policies, by consolidating the means at its disposal and engaging in international dialogue.

There can be no fair international governance without the ILO, and I urge the Organization, from this podium, to demand observer status of the WTO. This is the key that will open the door to greater coherence and a closer cooperation between these two institutions. I am also firmly convinced that enforcing the fundamental labour standards requires strengthening the ILO's standard-setting policy, as well as its supervisory mechanisms and standards, in order to avoid differing interpretations or to create economic or political choices. We must be resolute in clarifying and consolidating law, for example, by establishing a law-making body. I would invite you to consider these thoughts with a view to strengthening the security of international social law in the context of multilateral regulations.

The impact of these activities will not be measured by an international yardstick; rather they will be measured within national borders, and I am convinced that if control procedures are simplified, accelerated and made more specific, they will ensure

that serious labour violations will not remain a dead letter, especially when a country has a political or trade advantage due to these violations.

Switzerland will be a member of the Governing Body for the period 2011–14, and I thank those member States who voted for my country.

In February 2011, Switzerland ratified the Maritime Labour Convention, which was adopted by your Conference in 2006.

I have lastly the pleasure and the honour to state that the Swiss social partners have agreed that Switzerland should ratify the ILO Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122). I welcome this agreement among social partners which will allow Switzerland, through this ratification, to make its contribution to better global governance.

With some 190 Conventions, the ILO has built the framework of social justice. Two recent Declarations – the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008) – are crowning achievements.

By accepting the 2008 Declaration, States and governments pledged to ensure that the fundamental standards of the ILO would be universally ratified and implemented. But the challenge remains and it is ongoing. It is for this reason that I invite you not to give up and to spare no efforts to persevere in order to ensure justice, freedom and social protection.

Original French: The PRESIDENT

Your Excellency, Madam President, we would like to thank you sincerely for your very instructive message to the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference. Once again thank you, Madam President.

I now close this special sitting of the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference.

(The Conference adjourned at 4.50 p.m.)

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