



Opening sitting

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First sitting

Monday, 5 June 2017, 11.10 a.m.

Presidents: Mr Seidenberger, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and Mr Carles Rudy

Opening of the session

Mr Seidenberger

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

It is my honour as Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office for 2016–17 to declare open this 106th Session of the International Labour Conference. May I also take the opportunity to extend to all of you a warm welcome to Geneva and to the Conference.

I have no doubt that this year's session will live up to the expectations and trust that have been placed in it.

Election of the President of the Conference

Mr Seidenberger

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

Without further ado, let us move to the first item on our agenda of this morning, under which the Conference is called on to elect its President. I give the floor to Mr Morales Vélez, the Government representative of Mexico, who will put forward the nomination.

Mr Morales Vélez

*Government (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Government group
(Original Spanish)*

It is my honour to submit the candidacy of Mr Carles Rudy, Minister of Labour and Workforce Development of the Republic of Panama, as President of the 106th Session of the International Labour Conference. He has the unanimous support of the Government group to be elected President of this session of the Conference.

Mr Carles Rudy is participating in a session of the International Labour Conference for the third time. In June 2010 and June 2015, he attended the 99th and 104th Sessions of the Conference as a Government member of the delegation of his country, the Republic of Panama and in November 2014, he participated actively in the work of the 322nd Session of the Governing Body of the ILO. Mr Carles Rudy has also participated as a speaker, panellist and member of government delegations at many high-level international conferences and meetings on matters related to labour and the economy.

He holds a degree in law and political science from the National University of Panama and a postgraduate degree in procedural law, and has taught philosophy and religious studies

at the Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala. He was appointed to the post of Minister of Labour and Workforce Development on 14 May 2014 and, in September 2015, was elected Chairperson Pro Tempore of the Council of Ministers of Labour of Central America and the Dominican Republic, a post that he held during the biennium 2016–17.

Since, throughout his political career, he has been noted for his skill in dialogue and mediation in resolving labour disputes and has been involved in the development and implementation of public policies designed to promote and ensure social harmony, the Government group is fully confident that he will successfully guide the work of this session of the Conference. We therefore officially submit his candidacy to the Conference.

(The proposal is supported by the Employers' and the Workers' groups).

Mr Seidenberger

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the
International Labour Office

The nomination put forward with the unanimous support of the Government group, by Mr Morales Vélez, has met with the agreement of the Employers' and Workers' groups.

Are there any other proposals?

In the absence of other proposals, I therefore have great pleasure in declaring Mr Carles Rudy, Minister of Labour and Professional Development of Panama, President of the 106th Session of the International Labour Conference. I offer him my warmest congratulations and invite him to come and take the chair.

(Mr Carles Rudy, Minister of Labour and Professional Development of Panama, is elected President of the 106th Session of the Conference and takes the President's chair.)

Presidential address

The President

(Original Spanish)

It is an honour for the Government of Panama that I have been elected President of the 106th Session of the International Labour Conference, and for me it is a source of pride to represent Panama. I would like to thank all the delegates to this session of the Conference for giving me this honour and responsibility, particularly the Americas' group for its proposal and support, the Government group for officially submitting the candidacy to the Conference, and the Employers' and Workers' groups for their support.

With your help, I hope to fulfil my responsibilities in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Conference, and to conclude successfully our discussions and reach agreements.

Since 1999, the ILO has been able to renew its message of social justice based on the concept of decent work, as reaffirmed in the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. We believe that we cannot fulfil this mandate without recognizing the importance of environmental sustainability.

The Director-General's Report, *Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative*, calls for the promotion of decent work and a fair transition of the labour force towards sustainable economies and societies in harmony with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development, in search of a stable climate in the future for all individuals who live on the planet.

Another key element in the discussion on the future of work is that of gender. Today, women have not only taken on new key roles in transforming the world, but more than ever the economy and politics have a feminine face. And yet what is missing is not just quotas being met by women, but that their capacities and ability to work are respected. They are not asking for handouts but equality, and also respect for their dignity.

The Director-General, Mr Ryder, said last year that we need to work "... together to achieve genuine gender equality and women's empowerment in the world of work. Decent work for women brings decent lives for all." In this regard, we believe that it is time to talk about wage equality, "equal pay for work of equal value". We cannot continue to tolerate a structure where there is a permanent divide between men and women.

We need to eliminate discriminatory structures which have been deemed quite normal in a society which has witnessed women playing a subsidiary and secondary role.

In the same way, we recognize the efforts that the ILO is making in the discussions at this Conference, in dealing for the second year running with the question of employment and decent work for peace and resilience with a view to the adoption of a Recommendation to protect the rights of workers in such conditions.

Let us not forget that workers' search for happiness is a genuine reflection of progress; we cannot have progress at the cost of workers sacrificing their dignity. There can be no sustainable economy without human dignity becoming the fundamental principle of such development.

On the other hand, one particularly vulnerable and excluded group is that of migrant workers. The precise agenda item for this session of the Conference, which we will examine, is the report on Addressing governance challenges in a changing labour migration landscape. This provides us with an opportunity to have an informed discussion on the systematic management of migration as a positive force for sustainable development as the 2030 Agenda recognizes.

Decent work is a universal aspiration as recognized in Sustainable Development Goal 8. Work has been, is and likely will be a key component of the social contract which underpins the governance of societies. Therefore, the creation of decent work helps to strengthen world peace. The globalization of decent work is equivalent to the globalization of a sustainable development model which has people at its core.

The most humanizing message which the ILO has transmitted to the world is that work is not a commodity but an individual social, economic and cultural asset, and above all, work is human. The commitment made by tripartism, based on social dialogue, is to promote free, creative, participatory work, founded above all on solidarity.

The subjects we will deal with in the coming days are vital and I wish you all success in getting down to work.

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference

The President (Original Spanish)

Our first task is the election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference. The Clerk of the Conference, Ms Dimitrova, will read out the names of the candidates proposed by the various groups.

Ms Dimitrova The Clerk of the Conference

The nominations to the posts of the three Vice-Presidents of the Conference are as follows: Government group, Ms Majali (*Jordan*); Employers' group, Mr Lacasa Aso (*Spain*); and Workers' group, Ms Clarke Walker (*Canada*).

The President (Original Spanish)

If there are no objections may I consider that these proposals are approved?

(The proposals are approved.)

Nomination of the Officers of the groups

The President (Original Spanish)

We now move to the nominations of the Officers of the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups. The groups are, of course, autonomous in their choices and the names of those concerned are displayed on the screen, as indicated below:

Government group

Chairperson	Mr Lomónaco (Mexico)
Vice-Chairperson	Mr Choi (Republic of Korea)

Employers' group

Chairperson	Mr Mdwaba (South Africa)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Echavarría Saldarriaga (Colombia) Mr Potter (United States) Ms Hornung-Draus (Germany) Mr Megateli (Algeria) Mr Rahman (Bangladesh)
Secretary	Ms Kromjong (International Organisation of Employers)

Workers' group

Chairperson	Mr Cortebeeck (Belgium)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Ntshalintshali (South Africa) Ms Gono (Japan) Ms Cappuccio (Italy) Mr Martínez (Argentina)

Constitution and composition of the conference committees

The President *(Original Spanish)*

The next agenda item concerns the constitution and composition of standing committees and committees to consider items on the agenda of the Conference. The Conference may wish to establish the following committees: the Selection Committee; the Credentials Committee; the Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations; the Committee for Labour Migration; the Committee on Employment and Decent Work for the Transition to Peace; and the Committee on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

The initial composition of the Committees, as proposed by the groups, was communicated to participants on the Conference website as *Provisional Record* No. 4.

The Finance Committee of Government Representatives is composed, as its name suggests, of all Government delegates to the Conference. There is no need to register for this Committee.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves the initial composition of the committees and that these proposals are approved?

(The proposals are approved.)

Abrogation of Conventions Nos 4, 15, 28, 41, 60 and 67

The President *(Original Spanish)*

The next item requiring a decision by the Conference concerns the proposal for consideration of item VII of the agenda, namely the abrogation of Conventions Nos 4, 15, 28, 41, 60 and 67.

It has been suggested that the consideration of this item should be delegated to the Selection Committee.

May I take it that this proposal is agreeable to the Conference?

(The proposal is approved.)

Suspension of certain provisions of the Standing Orders of the Conference

The President
(Original Spanish)

The next agenda item concerns the suspension of certain provisions of the Standing Orders of the Conference. The purpose of their suspension is to implement at this session, pending amendment of the Standing Orders of the Conference, the various changes that are proposed to the format of the Conference to improve its functioning, in particular to accommodate its shortened length. Some of the suspensions relate to the work in plenary and others to the work of the committees.

All the relevant suspensions of the Standing Orders, of which the Governing Body took note at its 329th Session in March 2017, are to be trialled at the present Conference through suspending the relevant provisions. Let me remind you that these have been set out in *Provisional Record No. 2* and are available on the website. Those who wish to do so can also request printed versions at the distribution desk.

May I take it that the Conference wishes to suspend the various provisions of its Standing Orders for the purposes set out in *Provisional Record No. 2*?

(The proposal is approved.)

Delegation of authority to the Officers of the Conference

The President
(Original Spanish)

We shall now take up the question of the delegation of authority to the Officers of the Conference. As per the agenda, the Conference will not meet again in plenary until Wednesday, 7 June. I therefore propose that the daily organizational tasks of the Conference during the intervening period be carried out by its Officers.

If there are no objections may I take it that the delegation of authority is acceptable to the Conference?

(The delegation of authority is accepted.)

Presentation of the Report of the Director-General

The President
(Original Spanish)

We have now completed the necessary administrative and procedural tasks and can turn to questions of substance.

It is therefore my honour to call on the Director-General of the International Labour Office, Mr Guy Ryder, to present his vision of the work to be accomplished at this session of the Conference, for the next two weeks, and to present his Report on the theme of *Work*

in a changing climate: The Green Initiative together with its Appendix on The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

Mr Ryder
Secretary-General of the Conference

Let me begin by congratulating the President on his election. At the ILO we know him very well, we know his professional and his personal qualities and so we know that we are in very good hands for the next two weeks. I extend my congratulations of course also to his excellent Vice-Presidents.

Let me welcome you all, the representatives of Governments, Workers and Employers, to this unique annual assembly, to this 106th Session of the International Labour Conference. I know that you all invest heavily when you come to this Conference. You invest your time, your resources, your energy and, not least, your commitment. It is the responsibility of my colleagues and I to make sure that you are enabled to draw the greatest return on that investment. We will be called upon to accomplish our work in a considerably shorter time than was previously the case, so documentation and working arrangements in this reformed Conference format are all designed to help you do that.

Moreover, our Governing Body has been assiduous and, I would say, manifestly successful in setting a Conference agenda which is relevant and of real topical importance to the world of work, an agenda which matters to you, an agenda which makes it worth your time coming to Geneva.

As the President said, last year we began the job of revising Recommendation No. 71 and framing a new one on employment and decent work for peace and resilience, and it is for this session to complete that task. The first discussion was not easy, but great progress was made, not least in establishing a better understanding of the issues which remain to be resolved. I think that debate reminded us that while so much has changed since 1944, when Recommendation No. 71 was adopted, nowhere more than in the prevention and recovery from conflict, disaster and crisis is the permanent dependence of peace on social justice so obvious. This is core ILO business, and the adoption of a new Recommendation next week will be enormously significant for its achievements.

Equally, governance of labour migration is both a constitutional responsibility of the ILO and at the top of the international policy agenda, with the adoption of a global compact before the United Nations General Assembly next year. It is, I think, a central paradox of today's world of work that at the same time that the economic and development case for migration has never been stronger, the social and political obstacles seem to be growing ever higher.

The reasons for this are complex and the policy challenges of migration are real. But one thing we can say I think with confidence; it is that shortcomings in the governance of migration are one of the central reasons for that paradox. They fuel the apprehension of local populations, they threaten the rights of migrant workers and their families, they leave them open to abuse and they stand in the way of the fair sharing of the real benefits of migration for all involved. They constitute a major global decent work deficit. Nobody I think can envisage a future of work without migration or indeed would want to, but everybody is needed to build governance that makes migration safe, orderly and regular. Our opportunity for that starts here, it starts at this Conference.

Recurrent discussions on strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda under the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization have become a regular feature of the Conference agenda; through learning, and particularly through last year's review process, I think we are making them increasingly effective.

This year the theme is fundamental principles and rights at work. There is no other subject, none, that goes so directly to the heart of the ILO's mandate and, indeed, our very identity. On respect for these rights, the practice of tripartism, even the conduct of this Conference, depends entirely. The ILO's member States, through the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998, have recognized explicitly their own responsibilities to respect and to advance the principles that underpin human rights at work.

Yet the painful reality is that we remain a considerable way away from the goal we have set ourselves of universal ratification of the Conventions concerned, and still further from their universal application. We know where the obstacles lie, we are familiar with the arguments advanced to explain and to justify situations which can have no reasonable explanation, no justification. So I hope that it will be with a real sense of intolerance of the intolerable that this debate will redynamize political commitment and practical action to put an end to those abuses that simply have no place in our world of work.

Each year a central part of the work of this Conference is the key supervisory role of the Committee on the Application of Standards. It is essential to any positive outcome of this session, or any other, that the work of that Committee is carried out successfully and in full. The experience of the past two years gives every reason for confidence that this is what will happen again this time. But as on those occasions, this is going to require the efforts of all groups and their common commitment to produce results through the tripartite search for consensus that has to inform everything that is done at the ILO.

Allow me to underline that the success of the Committee on the Application of Standards is equally essential to the broader progress of the ILO's centenary Standards Initiative, which extends well beyond the deliberations of the next two weeks and is being carried forward in the Governing Body in particular.

Indeed, the breadth of the issues concerned is reflected in the opportunity that this Conference has to abrogate or to withdraw six Conventions which, by common agreement, make no useful contribution to the work of the Organization. So you will see that there is an enormous amount at stake here.

As I have said, the wise choice of agenda items is the fruit of the wisdom of the ILO's Governing Body. It is nevertheless for the Director-General to choose, with whatever wisdom he may have, the theme for his own Report to the Conference.

For the past four years I have tried to present reports on issues of central importance to the ILO for plenary debate and to make use of the outcomes of that debate to give real strategic direction to our Organization. If I remind you that the four subjects dealt with in that period have been: the ILO and its centenary; migration; the future of work; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, then I put it to you that there is plenty of evidence that this approach has paid off.

This year's report is presented in the same spirit. It is about the ILO's centenary Green Initiative, the contribution that the world of work can, and must, make to a just transition to an environmentally sustainable future. The need for that contribution is founded on the near universal recognition that climate change is real and is the result of human activity, and that the overwhelming proportion of that activity is work, or work-related. From that proposition, it seems to me that it is only logical that the representatives of Governments, Employers and Workers gathered here have both collective responsibilities and common opportunities to move forward this Green Initiative.

The political conditions for that have been provided by the success that we have already recorded over a remarkably short space of time in overcoming the idea – long prevalent, deeply rooted – that a choice had to be made between job creation, growth and development

on the one hand and protection of the planet on the other. That is now seen as a false choice. It has given way to a strong tripartite consensus in this Organization that the pursuit of decent work opportunities for all and of environmental sustainability can and must advance hand in hand. That is the logic of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is the meaning of just transition as contained in the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Convention on Climate Change. It is a key challenge, a key challenge for the ILO and for its tripartite constituents as the ILO approaches its centenary. Nothing will more clearly distinguish the first 100 years of the ILO's history from the second than the necessary greening of the world of work.

The Report that I have placed before the Conference highlights the potential for greening of production to be a powerful engine for decent work creation, and strong and balanced growth and development. This is not just theory; it is already happening. But at the same time, my Report does not gloss over the real policy challenges of this just transition. Yes, there will be major disruption. Yes, jobs will be lost as well as gained, and the new ones will not always be available to the same people, in the same place, at the same time as the jobs lost, nor will they necessarily require the same skills.

All of this is to say that the decent jobs of the future will not be green by definition, they will be green by our design. We need the right policies to make transition happen and to make it just. Like any other process of change at work, that will require the combined efforts of Governments, of Employers and of Workers through social dialogue.

Today, the Paris Agreement and the national commitments made under it, together with the 2030 Agenda, provide a unique opportunity to translate the tripartite consensus that we have constructed into large-scale, practical ILO work with our member States for them to trace out and travel the path of just transition in accordance with the goals that they have set themselves.

The Appendix to the Director-General's Report – this time by virtue of Conference mandates – deals once more with the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. As always, the Report has been prepared with care and impartiality and draws your attention to a situation which, I am convinced, would benefit from intensified technical inputs from the ILO. I ask all of you to help us to frame and deliver those inputs.

I therefore look forward to hearing your views on my Report and its Appendix, and would only add that the Programme and Budget proposals for 2018–19 before the Conference for adoption would also make just transition to environmental sustainability a new, fourth, cross-cutting policy driver for all areas of ILO work.

In this regard, of course, equality – and most notably gender equality – has been such a cross-cutting theme for the ILO for many years now and the ILO has a considerable record of achievement in that time. Yet the fact is that we still have a very long way to go to full equality. The reality is that progress in that direction is unacceptably slow. It is for that reason and with the conviction that we need innovative approaches, rather than just doing more of the same that the ILO launched its centenary Women at Work Initiative and decided to dedicate this year's World of Work Summit – on 15 June – to this issue of gender equality.

We are truly delighted that this event will be honoured by the participation of three women who are each the Presidents of their countries: President Bidhya Devi Bhandari of Nepal, President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca of Malta and President Bibi Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of Mauritius. Who better can speak to both authority and experience on the key challenges of equality? I think that this is going to be a unique moment and a high point of our Conference, as will be the visit of Mr Tabaré Vázquez, President of Uruguay, who we will welcome to this podium in a few minutes.

For the representatives of the ILO's tripartite constituents from all regions of the world it is self-evident that this Conference does not take place in a vacuum but in a global world of work context which confronts all of us with enormous challenges and combines the great divergence of national experiences.

It is the ILO's task to understand the complexities and the transformative changes within which all of you are working and to respond effectively to the needs arising from them. The ILO programme and budget proposals for the next biennium, which are before the Conference, are the result of intense tripartite discussion and they constitute our response to these challenges. That programme is, I believe, a coherent, focused, practical and relevant agenda of action to advance the Decent Work Agenda. It strengthens ILO capacities through the redeployment of resources from back office administration to frontline work through efficiency gains in a zero real growth setting. I want to urge the Conference to adopt it. This programme will also constitute the first phase of the implementation of the ILO Strategic Plan for 2018–21 which contains the vision ILO 2021, the culmination of continued improvement in the Organization which we are pursuing vigorously on the basis of the gains which have already been harvested from the rigorous and demanding process of reform of recent years. Let me take this opportunity to reassure the Conference of our determination to travel that road of ongoing improvement all the way to its logical conclusion.

Along the way, we will of course celebrate the ILO centenary in 2019. Many of you have participated in previous Conference discussions of how we will do that and you know that the ILO's Future of Work Initiative stands at the centrepiece of our activities. Let me thank all the member States – now 110 of them – which have undertaken national future of work dialogues, which have been the first stage of our Future of Work Initiative. In the near future, we will move on to the second stage, with the launching of the High-level Global Commission on the Future of Work. Let me already set you a rendezvous for exactly two years from now for a third and final stage, which will be the 108th Session, the centenary session, of the International Labour Conference, which will be the culminating moment of our Centenary Initiative.

As we look forward to that moment, our centenary, now not so distant, it is important that we focus on the continuity of purpose that has given unchanging reason to the work of the ILO for nearly one hundred years, years during which the world of work has been transformed beyond recognition: it is the pursuit of global social justice and, through it, the preservation of peace in the world.

I think it is a useful exercise as we start our Conference to pick up a copy of the ILO Constitution and to read, or maybe re-read, its Preamble and the Declaration of Philadelphia. It will take you only a minute or two. I would challenge any one of us not to be inspired by the beauty of its language and by the compelling power and humanity of its ambition. I do not think that anybody here would dissent from its content. But, at the same time, I ask myself if all of us would be able today to come together to frame and adopt these very texts, were we called upon to do so. It is a question worth asking. Does it really have to take the experience of global conflict, with all of its horrors, to lift us to the heights that were scaled by those who drafted these historic texts in 1919 and in 1944? Are their achievements beyond our own reach and capabilities? I do not think that that should be the case.

At a time when tension and conflict is on the rise around the world, when inequalities have become intolerable, when denial of social justice is so widespread, when basic principles of international cooperation are being called into question and the practice of multilateralism is coming under strain, we can call upon the example of the history of our own Organization to lift us to meet our responsibilities.

But in the end, the responsibilities are ours. Remember, the ILO was the very first building block in the edifice of the global multilateral system, a system that was later torn

apart by the rise of authoritarianism, terror and war; and yet the ILO survived. It survived because of visionary leaders, but mostly because the cause of social justice is not easily extinguished by the vicissitudes of history, nor the negligence of the disinterested, nor the egoism of blind self-interest. It survived because by working together, Governments, Employers and Workers produce something stronger, something more enduring than any of them can do on their own.

There is remarkable resilience in the course of social justice and it finds its strongest vehicle in the successful practice of tripartism, which means all of you. So, I hope that we will go about the important work of this Conference in this spirit, with this sense of responsibility and with the ambitions that our circumstances surely demand of us.

The President

(Original Spanish)

Thank you very much, Director-General, for giving us a clear overview of the work before us and for the presentation of your Report. The three groups will be guided over the next two weeks by the highly pertinent and timely perspective that you have put forward.

Presentation of the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body

The President

(Original Spanish)

It is now my honour to call on the Chairperson of the Governing Body for 2016–17, Mr Seidenberger, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, to present his report on the activities of the Governing Body for the period of his tenure, which is contained in *Provisional Record* No. 1, published on the Web a few days ago.

Mr Seidenberger

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

I am honoured to present to you my report of the work of the Governing Body during my period as Chairperson, from June last year to the present date. This report, contained in *Provisional Record* No. 1, is to be discussed in plenary under item 1 on the Conference agenda.

Every effort has been made to keep the report as short as possible, but the Governing Body agendas, especially in November 2016 and March 2017, were not light, and covered a very wide range of issues. It is also perhaps particularly apposite to point out at this session of the Conference, during which the composition of the Governing Body is to be renewed, that this is the only moment at which the full membership of the Organization is given a “briefing”, via my report, of all the work done by its Governing Body over the previous year.

As I mention at the beginning of the report, for anyone who wishes for a fuller account of the Governing Body’s work, the ILO keeps very clear and concise minutes of all its Governing Body’s discussions and these are available on the website. I shall therefore limit my remarks to highlighting aspects of the Governing Body’s work.

One of the most important actions taken by the Governing Body in November last year, was to elect its Director-General, Mr Ryder, for a second term as Chief Executive Officer of the International Labour Office. This election clearly showed that the Organization has full

trust in the direction in which Mr Ryder is leading it and I should like to offer him, once again, my warmest congratulations.

(Applause.)

In its supervisory capacity, the Governing Body has followed up on a number of complaints made against governments under article 26 of the ILO Constitution for non-respect of ratified Conventions. Quite full details are given in my report. These are understandably difficult issues, but I wish to recall a remark made by the Director-General in this connection. While acknowledging that governments subjected to article 26 scrutiny might perceive the procedure as a threat, the Director-General pointed out that in his experience, every article 26 complaint carried out in a spirit of cooperation and transparency had been effective, had improved the situation, helped to resolve the issues concerned and, ultimately, improved the relations between the governments in question and our Organization.

The Governing Body has made progress in each article 26 case it has examined and in one instance has closed the procedure initiated. I believe that measured, balanced and wise decisions have been taken in each instance; for this we must thank social dialogue and tripartism.

Article 26 complaints are of course among the supervisory mechanisms of the ILO, along with the Committee of Experts, the Committee on the Application of Standards and the Committee on Freedom of Association. The Organization is in the process of reviewing the operation of this mechanism, under the umbrella of the so-called Standards Initiative, launched by the Director-General in 2013, and in the context of the so-called Standards Review Mechanism. In this regard, I report on implementation of the Standards Initiative and, in some detail, on the second meeting of the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group. Improvements have been made and there are certainly more to come. I am convinced that the Standards Initiative will lead to a more coherent supervisory system and corpus of labour standards.

Next, in addition to its supervisory duties, the Governing Body played its governance role effectively, following up on many Conference decisions, not only from last year's session of the Conference, but from the 2015 session as well. It also kept abreast of issues that have been ongoing for many years, following through on its own decisions from earlier sessions. In all instances the discussions, which were sometimes difficult, resulted in decisions and guidance that will clarify the Office's action. I am thinking in particular of the follow-up to the resolution stemming from the evaluation of the impact of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, and that addressing decent work in global supply chains, but also of the direction given to Office action in relation to Outcome 3: Creating and extending social protection floors; Outcome 4: Promoting sustainable enterprises; Outcome 5: Decent work in the rural economy; and Outcome 6: Formalization of the informal economy. All were reviewed over the past year, as were many other examples that I cover in my report.

The adoption of its draft programme and budget is of course an important moment in the life of any organization. I do not wish to pre-empt any discussion that may take place here at the Conference of the Director-General's proposed Programme and Budget for 2018–19, but I will simply say that the zero real growth budget was well received by the members of the Governing Body, who gave it their full backing.

Over the past year, the Governing Body continued to fine-tune the arrangements put in place for the Conference in its two-week format. Much effort has been put into this reorganization, and I hope that you – the guinea pigs, as it were – find these successful. The

process of reform of the Conference is of course shared by all constituents and ILO staff alike. Please let your opinion be known, if you have further improvements to suggest.

In addition to the supervisory role and the governance role, politics naturally runs through all sections and segments of the Governing Body, but its High-Level Section can be perceived as its most obviously political element. In March, the High-Level Section was convened for a discussion on ways in which the pursuit of decent work could support countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was a very lively and interesting discussion, which benefited from a presentation by the current President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Ambassador Frederick Musiwa Makamure Shava of Zimbabwe.

Again, I give details of the debate in my report, and here I would only add that this discussion, as it progresses, will be central to ILO action over the years to come. It is critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda that multilateral action should be framed coherently around the SDGs and that the SDGs be integrated into the programmes of each agency.

My personal perception, with my experience over a fair range of multilateral institutions, is that the ILO has gone further in integrating the SDGs than many other organizations at this point in time.

And that leads me to my last point. As I said, I have experience of the operation of a number of United Nations agencies and bodies, but before last year, frankly, no knowledge of the ILO. Today, as I prepare to stand down as Chairperson of the Governing Body, I have to tell you that the ILO is genuinely different. The tripartite dialogue gives the discussions a completely different dynamic – one for which I was honestly not entirely prepared at the beginning, but for which I have developed strong feelings in the course of the past year.

If the Governing Body has worked successfully during my tenure as Chairperson – and I hope and I believe it has – this is largely due to my Employer and Worker counterparts or, as I should rather call them, my tripartite partners: Jorgen Rønneest and Luc Cortebeek.

Their skill at unifying their groups, their ability to see all parties' points of view, their willingness to work for an agreement and, ultimately, to achieve consensus, has constantly impressed me and helped me tremendously in carrying out my duties as Chairperson.

If I mention this particularly now, it is because both Jorgen and Luc are standing down from their posts as Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons of the Governing Body and I wanted to take this last opportunity of thanking them publicly, for their dedication and commitment to our Organization and for their friendship and assistance to me personally.

(Applause.)

Once again, it has indeed been a great pleasure and an honour to work with you. You have my warmest gratitude.

In closing, I should like to thank the three groups, Governments, Employers and Workers and, of course, Director-General Guy Ryder and his fantastic team for their strong support over the past year. Without them, I would not have been able to do the job. It has been an honour, both personally and for my country, Germany, to serve the ILO.

With that, I humbly commend my report to the Conference and wish all participants the greatest success in their work over the next two weeks.

The President
(*Original Spanish*)

Thank you very much, Mr Seidenberger, for that report, to which I subscribe. As the report shows, the Governing Body was faced with many difficult and serious issues, and I can appreciate the hard work that all members put into achieving tripartite consensus when seeking the way forward.

I should like to congratulate you on behalf of all the participants in this session of the Conference on your successful guidance of the debates in the Governing Body, and my congratulations are also extended to your colleagues, the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons and to Governing Body members as a whole. Congratulations, Excellency, and thank you very much for your professionalism and dedication over the course of the past 12 months.

Opening statements by the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Conference

The President
(*Original Spanish*)

We now move on to the opening statements by the Employers' and Workers' groups' Chairpersons, in which they will put forward their groups' views on the work that faces the Conference.

Mr Mdwaba
Employer (South Africa), Chairperson of the Employers' group)

Allow me to begin by congratulating Mr Carles Rudy, Minister of Labour of Panama, on his election as President of the 106th Session of the International Labour Conference. On behalf of the Employers' group, I wish him the very best for the task ahead. We look forward to working with him, as well as with the Workers and the Governments.

The International Labour Conference is the largest tripartite forum bringing together Employers, Workers and Governments all around the world. We also count on high-level policy-makers, practitioners and experts in the field of employment, industrial relations and social policies, which represents quite a unique mix of talent. We have proved to be productive, if you look at the number of outcomes produced in the Conference's almost 100 years of existence. These outcomes enjoy the important strength of the widest tripartism. Employers have been clear about the need to ensure that the ILC is current in its approach to guarantee its relevance in today's world. The two-week format will, for the third year and, despite all the difficulties, reinforce our credibility and efficiency. To continue being successful, though, we want first to insist on our joint responsibility to assure good time management in our discussions.

I will turn briefly to the items on this session's agenda.

We come to the discussions of the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) with the satisfaction of having strengthened its value. Several steps were taken in the last two years to achieve what we have now, including but not limited to growing ownership in the way conclusions are drafted, strengthening clarity on what the areas of consensus are, as well as allowing constituents to freely express and reflect their different views while simultaneously keeping a keen eye on the guidance of the Committee of Experts. We will

keep expressing our divergent views. It is important to note that Employers and Workers have also acted with a sense of commitment and responsibility to achieve a timely agreement on the list of cases. All these efforts have been of great value even though, admittedly, many areas are yet to be traversed to make substantial progress.

Improvements towards the better running of this crucial Committee cannot be viewed in an isolated manner though. They are intrinsically linked to the functioning of the overall ILO standards supervisory system. Employers expect to achieve a positive output from the ILO Standards Initiative, which deals with the improvement of other supervisory tools, such as the Committee on Freedom of Association or article 24 procedures. Workers and Employers provided a joint position during the most recent session of the Governing Body of the ILO and many Governments also expressed their willingness to engage in this process. We now need to honour our commitments.

A general discussion on migration will take place at this session. Employers have been defending this item as highly relevant for the credibility of the ILO. We need to be up to the complex challenges that new migration phenomena raise for the world of work. A great deal of ambition is necessary for the ILO to become a leading UN agency in this area. The traditional ILO rights-based approach, even if important, has proved to be limited. Around the world, there is a tremendous global mismatch of worker skills with the needs of the labour market. This is caused in part by demographic realities and by a very weak alignment of both educational and lifelong learning systems with business needs. We are convinced that better qualifying migrant workers will be a key piece of maximizing the global economic opportunities of migration. It will also help to overcome unfounded fears and prejudices with regard to migration. Working with the private sector through employers' and business organizations will be crucial. Building efficient public-private partnerships will help enormously. Strengthening capacities of labour market and educational institutions in collaboration with the private sector will also benefit migrant workers. We expect that the outcome of the ILC discussions will effectively enable the ILO to take this practical approach and will reinforce the leadership that it deserves.

A robust practical approach is also required to guide the recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work. Recurrent discussions need to be improved to achieve a better understanding of the diverse realities and needs of constituents.

We still suffer from an implementation gap on fundamental principles and rights at work. Despite the progress made in many areas, especially in the eradication of child and forced labour, we should do much better to tackle unacceptable situations. The ILO report notes that, in 2012, 21 million people were victims of forced labour, of whom 5.5 million were children. Despite a total reduction of almost one third in the worst forms of child labour in 2012, 168 million children remained in child labour. Freedom of association and basic non-discrimination principles are still far from being realized in law and in practice in many countries.

We need to be realistic and honest. We will waste our time if we spend it having repeated discussions on controversial topics which do not add value. The world is oversupplied with Conventions, standards, frameworks, tools and initiatives; we must be careful to resist theoretical and ideological discussions for the sake of it. International organizations also have a tendency to promote competing and cumbersome agendas that do not achieve the policy adherence in reality that we need. We need to better understand what programmes and what action the ILO and its constituents have taken to fight against forced and child labour, how effective different initiatives have been in preventing workplace discrimination or what measures have brought the maximum impact to make freedom of association a reality. What has worked, what has not? And what lessons can we learn for the future to provide clear, specific and achievable practical suggestions?

The Employers' group actively supported the inclusion on the agenda of the revision of Recommendation No. 71 on employment and decent work for peace and resilience, as we believe that an update of this instrument could help to strengthen the impact and authority of the ILO. The international community has a number of challenges when war and disaster strike, many of which are at the core of the ILO mandate, such as the loss of employment skills through migration, or the breakdown of social cohesion. In order to face those challenges, an enabling environment for businesses to be sustainable will be decisive. The role of the ILO's development cooperation in fragile States will again come into particular focus in this discussion. We need to agree on how we can do better using ILO expertise.

But let me be clear: last year the Workers and Employers worked well together in finding convergence. We call on the Governments to avoid debates which will put the achievement of a consensual and practical outcome on such an important topic at risk.

(Applause.)

Allow me to finish by briefly referring to the reports submitted by the Director-General. The Director-General has given us useful input on the Green Initiative. We believe that the ILO could and must provide a unique contribution for a more sustainable environment. I will refer to two drivers of success in our influence.

First, attitudes matter more than ever before and social partners can efficiently help to transform behaviours in the workplace. Second, the ILO needs to play a much more relevant role in supporting constituents to meet skill demands in the transition to greener economies.

We also appreciate the submission of the ILO Programme and Budget proposals for 2018–19 which were already discussed in the Governing Body. The Employers would like to reiterate and share their request for a future mixed-model budget, from an operational and strategic point of view, that would enable constituents to better appreciate how the figures are calculated and where the resources go. This would help strengthen ownership, monitoring and accountability.

Mr Cortebeek

Worker (Belgium), Chairperson of the Workers' group

Let me congratulate the President Carles Rudy and the three Vice-Presidents on their elections. At the beginning of this session of the Conference, I wish to touch on the items on our agenda and some of the Workers' group's priorities.

The Committee on the Application of Standards has an essential constitutional task to undertake. In too many countries, the realization of decent work and social justice remains jeopardized by violations of labour rights, particularly those enshrined in the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). The discussions in this Committee are therefore of crucial importance. They show that ratification has to go hand in hand with the commitment by member States to give effect to Conventions they have voluntarily ratified. I am confident that Workers and Employers will come up with a shortlist of cases and that the Committee will adopt consensual conclusions that will help redress rights abuses.

We trust that in two weeks, the Conference will adopt a Recommendation – in line with existing ILO standards and other relevant international instruments – providing comprehensive guidance on placing decent work and social dialogue at the heart of peace-building initiatives, reconciliation and rebuilding, as well as conflict prevention.

Priorities for our group include: the coherence of labour approaches with humanitarian, human rights and development responses to crises; the recognition of the key role of the public sector in crisis responses; the need for the instrument to better reflect the responsibility of business to conduct human rights due diligence in order to address adverse impacts of their operations; and the need for the Recommendation to cover all forcibly displaced persons, in addition to refugees.

The Workers' group welcomes the discussion on migration. Debates on migration are often characterized by controversy and negative rhetoric. Even where there are evident labour market needs for migrant workers, restrictive migration policies, based more on public misperceptions and xenophobia than on actual evidence, create an environment that hinders sound international cooperation on migration governance. For labour migration to work for all, priority must be given to decent work, the protection of migrant workers' rights, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, the application of the principle of equal treatment, non-discrimination and effective access to justice and remedy. ILO Conventions on migration provide an essential framework to promote fair migration and their ratification and implementation should be actively pursued.

Increasingly, labour migration is being governed through bilateral and regional agreement processes. These agreements should build on, rather than serve as a substitute for, the adoption and implementation of national laws consistent with relevant international labour and human rights standards.

The Office report rightly addresses the abusive practices that characterize parts of the cross-border recruitment industry. Effective regulation and monitoring of recruiters is necessary to prevent migrant workers from experiencing fraudulent and abusive conditions. The discussion of the Committee offers a unique opportunity to discuss the gaps and challenges that exist in the area of fair recruitment.

The recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work takes place in a challenging context. The denial of the fundamental principles and rights at work remains widespread, particularly freedom of association and collective bargaining. Fifty per cent of the world population live in countries that have not ratified Convention No. 87 and/or Convention No. 98. Responses to the financial crisis have led to reduced coverage of collective bargaining, with priority being given to workplace collective bargaining at the expense of industry and national bargaining.

The discussion should lead to greater commitment by member States to achieve universal ratification of core Conventions with time-bound targets in the lead-up to the ILO centenary. The ILO should step up its ratification campaign, including by ensuring that Decent Work Country Programmes systematically include targets of ratification and implementation. Member states should commit to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work as part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They should also ensure the coordination and coherence of the positions they take at the ILO and in other organizations in order to promote fundamental principles and rights at work.

The ILO should take the lead in ensuring policy coherence with organizations of the multilateral system in order to ensure respect for these rights in line with the mandate provided by the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization and the Declaration of Philadelphia. In order to achieve an effective integrated strategy in the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work, greater focus should be given to the role of Conventions Nos 87 and 98 as enabling rights. We expect the Committee to reflect also on better use of the Annual Reviews debate in the Governing Body in order to increase ratification rates.

This year, the Conference will be called upon to adopt the programme and budget for the next biennium. After the good debate at the March session of the Governing Body, I am confident that the proposed programme and budget will be adopted.

Our group looks forward to the discussion of the Director-General's Report on *Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative*. Let me also thank the Director-General for his Report on *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. While the peace process is at a standstill, the occupation has expanded, making the living and working conditions of the Palestinians extremely difficult. Unemployment has reached record levels, with youth and women being the hardest hit. Serious efforts must be exerted to bring occupation to an end, with the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, where decent work and social justice can become a reality for Palestinian workers.

I wish you all a fruitful Conference. Let us be ambitious in the results we will achieve.

(The Conference adjourned at 12.35 p.m.)

Special sitting

Monday, 5 June 2017, 1 p.m.

President: Mr Carles Rudy

Address by His Excellency, Mr Tabaré Vázquez, President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay

The President

(Original Spanish)

I call to order this special sitting of the International Labour Conference.

We are honoured to receive the visit of a distinguished guest, Mr Tabaré Vázquez, President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

Your Excellency, on behalf of the International Labour Conference allow me to welcome you warmly and thank you sincerely for accepting the invitation to address our assembly. The Government of Uruguay, like that of my own country and many others in our region, was among the founders of the ILO in 1919; thus, I am certain that his words will provide guidance for this Session of the Conference. I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference to officially welcome President Tabaré Vázquez.

The Secretary-General of the Conference

(Original Spanish)

Distinguished President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, Mr Tabaré Vázquez, it is a great honour for the Conference to welcome you here and, on behalf of our Organization, to thank you for accepting our invitation.

When I was thinking of how to introduce you at this plenary sitting, I faced a number of quandaries: I did not know whether to say that you were a noted medical doctor, a consummate politician who has twice been President of the Republic, or a keen fisherman, an activity that requires patience, skill and, like politics, a bit of luck.

You represent a country that was a founding Member of the ILO and has contributed its values and principles to this Organization since it joined in 1919. It has ratified more international labour Conventions than any other country in the Americas and is in fifth place among our Organization's 187 member States in that regard. Uruguay was also the first country to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), a fact that is highly significant.

Uruguay's overall commitment and close links with the ILO can also be seen in the steadfast support that your country has provided to our Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) for the past 54 years. With its headquarters in Montevideo, the Centre promotes technical cooperation between the ILO and a community of over 60 vocational training institutes in 27 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Your concern for the poorest members of society in a country where education is a national tradition rather than a privilege of the few has been a hallmark of your leadership and of your career since you first went into politics. Throughout your professional and

political activities, you have borne in mind that unless economic growth goes hand in hand with social development, there can be no progress towards social justice.

During this time of economic and political uncertainty, dialogue between the world of politics, employers and workers is increasingly important. In recent years, your country has emerged victorious from its struggle for democracy and now has robust, solid institutions and a political culture that embraces dialogue.

I witnessed this climate of peace, political stability and strong, constructive social dialogue on my last visit to Montevideo, where I attended the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Act on the Eight-Hour Working Day; Uruguay was the first country to incorporate a working day of eight hours into domestic law. It was also the first country to win the football World Cup; Uruguayans have a special gift for this, and for other important things.

We at the ILO are convinced that lasting peace can best be achieved by promoting social justice through decent work with equity and respect for fundamental labour rights. Your presence at this session of the Conference leaves me confident that Uruguay will continue to accompany us on this path that we have been following together for almost a century.

Once again, President, welcome and thank you very much for being with us today.

Mr Tabaré Vázquez

*President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay
(Original Spanish)*

On behalf of the people of Uruguay, I would like to thank you for inviting me to participate in the opening sitting of this Conference, which is humanity's most inclusive and representative current labour forum. I am personally honoured by this invitation, which, more importantly, honours the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, on whose behalf I greet you fraternally.

Since, for Uruguayans, an honour is not an ornament or an end point but a stimulus and a commitment to moving forward, I want to share with you my country's commitment to the values, principles and objectives that characterize the International Labour Organization.

Indeed, for my country this is not a new commitment; Uruguay has been a member of this Organization since 1919 and, as the Director-General has said, it has ratified and is implementing over 100 international Conventions, including the eight fundamental Conventions. Thus, more ILO Conventions are ratified and in force in Uruguay than in almost any country in the Americas and in the world.

This is evidenced by the fact that the ILO has had a presence in Uruguay and in our beloved Latin America, CINTERFOR, for over 50 years.

We would like to express our appreciation for all of the cooperation with which the ILO has provided us, including, in December 2015, your presence in Montevideo, Director-General, at the launch of the first tripartite programme on decent work, which is currently being implemented.

Our country also has other features that make it not a model (personally, I distrust rigid models), but rather a global benchmark in terms of tripartitism and social dialogue in pursuit of sustainable development as a strategic national vision.

As I said a moment ago, this is not a new commitment; back in June 2007, when the social dialogue on social security was launched, we called for the development of a multifaceted national social protection system to coordinate public policies. But this commitment has been renewed because we can and must make further progress as both a country and an integral part of this Organization.

In today's world, we modestly believe that those who seek to meet today's challenges with the solutions of the past are doomed to failure and that those who halt, turn back and hope to be saved in isolation are hopelessly lost.

We cannot wait for the future; we have to build it in the knowledge that it will never be unchanging or perfect; it can always be improved and perfected through, first and foremost, dialogue and a commitment to peace as a means of coexistence.

Without losing our individual identity we must move forward together, leaving no one behind, with courage and responsibility (which, by the way, are not incompatible) in pursuit of ambitious, achievable goals.

I know from personal experience that what I have just proposed is not an easy task, but neither is it impossible.

The session of the International Labour Conference that we are now opening will address a broad, varied and complex agenda that will doubtless allow us to build a brighter future.

One of the topics to be discussed is labour migration. According to the ILO, as at 2013 there were 150 million migrant workers – 4.4 per cent of the global workforce – of whom 71 per cent are employed in the service sector and almost 8 per cent are domestic workers. Women account for 44 per cent of all migrant workers. I could provide more statistics, but I would rather highlight some of the concepts set out in the ILO report, which we consider essential in addressing this issue.

First, we must make a clear distinction between labour migration and the movement of refugees, forcibly displaced persons and irregular migrants in various parts of the world.

These problems are related, as you know, but they are not the same thing. We believe that this should be borne in mind, particularly in light of the current threats. For this reason, we should also involve ourselves in the effort to achieve peace and disarmament, including nuclear disarmament since it is, unfortunately, a current threat.

Second, labour migration is an increasingly dynamic and complex phenomenon that occurs in and between all of the world's regions.

Third, technological progress, new forms of employment and new modalities for labour relations present new challenges for the regulation of labour migration. We therefore endorse the ILO's Future of Work Centenary Initiative, proposals for addressing new aspects of value chains and trade agreements that contain labour and social clauses, all of which we must address in order to achieve development with social justice, without which there can be no development.

Fourth, we need to move towards safe, orderly labour migration in accordance with international labour standards and national policies because, once again, growth without development is neither growth nor development; it is hoarding by a few at the expense of many of the world's other citizens.

Fifth, we would also like to discuss measures and actions to ensure the protection of migrant and local workers, especially the most vulnerable among them. In Uruguay, since our first Government in 2008, Act No. 18,250 has granted migrant workers equal rights and opportunities and numerous bilateral and multilateral social security agreements have been signed with other countries. Further action is also needed in order to promote renewable and sustainable enterprises and productive investment, and increase productivity. Productivity is extremely important for countries in the short term and is paramount in the long term. We are making progress on these issues, but much remains to be done in my country.

We must do all of this through social participation and the involvement of national and international institutions and, to that end, the ILO is essential.

I would like to add to the concepts that I have already mentioned another, which, while relevant, broadly transcends them: dialogue and collective bargaining in the private sector and, in the public sector, between governments and trade unions and employers' organizations as a key instrument for building a world of work that serves the interests of all.

Therein lies the key to the social contract and democracy, which are essential to progress.

In today's world, while the opposite may at times seem true, the fact is that without dialogue there can be no agreements and without agreements there can be no genuine and sustainable progress or development.

The power of dialogue and negotiation lies not in shouting, threatening, pounding on desks or slamming doors but in recognizing others as fellow beings, listening to them without fear that they may be right, and being able to make proposals, negotiate and reach agreement.

Dialogue and negotiation are important not only on major issues, but also at the level of enterprises and industries on issues such as wages, occupational health, working conditions and ensuring that rural, domestic and home workers, who have so often been neglected in the past, are not left behind. They should also be involved at the highest level in social security administration, vocational training and other public policies.

You say that this comes at a price? Of course it does! But it is always worth the effort and it makes us better as individuals and as a society.

They say that Uruguayans do not suffer from arrogance and this is true; we do not believe that we live in a perfect country or claim to be role models.

But let me say that for many reasons, Uruguay has a great deal of experience with social dialogue. It has not been linear or uniform; there have been ups and downs and even today, we see new challenges arising in this very Organization. But in my country's past and that of the ILO – particularly since 2005, when tripartite negotiation, which is now being expanded, was re-established – it has, in our modest opinion, been a clear success. This is true in many ways, of which I would like to mention a few.

First, workers' real wages have improved and this has been achieved through tripartite collective bargaining; for example, in the second half of 2016, with a 95 per cent agreement rate between employers and workers, it was one factor in an unprecedented improvement in retirement pensions and benefits in my country.

Second, job quality and formalization have improved, particularly for women, and membership in social security schemes has increased by 60 per cent in recent years.

Third, we have taken a tripartite approach to education and training for workers and entrepreneurs, which is essential for development.

Fourth, 75 per cent of collective agreements include gender clauses. These have increased six-fold over the past 12 years and the gender gap has been reduced, but much remains to be done in my country.

Fifth, social security and health-care coverage and benefits have been expanded. We are developing a national care system, which is already in operation; dealing with the new rights of various groups and sectors of society; and seeking to achieve gender equality in the provision of care – the burden of which has heretofore fallen essentially and unfairly on women – under this system. Our focus is on three groups: first and foremost, young children, who are a priceless treasure that we must all protect because they represent our countries' future; persons with disabilities; and older persons. We need to provide them with professional care and to train the caregivers, with equal opportunities for men and women. We offer direct and audio-visual health programmes for children, and particularly workers' children, in all of our public schools.

Sixth, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) data show that Uruguay's poverty rate has fallen from 19.7 per cent in 2005 to 4.4 per cent in 2014.

Seventh, the country's economy grew by an average of 5 per cent per year from 2005 to 2015 and by 1.6 per cent in 2016. This is very encouraging in the regional and subregional contexts.

Eighth, economic growth has also been accompanied by increased social justice and inclusivity. Comparisons may be controversial and even invidious, but they encourage us to work for further improvement in the areas of equity, the GINI index of per capita income, collective bargaining on behalf of employers' organizations and trade unions, democracy, reduced corruption, the rule of law, freedom of the press, peaceful coexistence, institutional and social stability and job security.

In the area of digital and technological inclusion, we have been able to provide every public school child and their teachers with free computers and plan to do the same for all our retirees. As part of this process, we are also promoting and defending the right to strike, established in our Constitution, which is essential to democracy and improving the culture of work: human beings require decent, ethical and high-quality work and continuing training.

Lastly, we have provided a better climate for foreign investment and productive enterprises. We are concerned at and responding to climate change and strongly object when the governments of major countries slam the door on climate conventions and on humanity's only hope for survival. Thus, Uruguay now draws most of its energy from renewable sources, allowing us to promote ourselves as a good country in which to invest, work and live.

This has been achieved not by any government, or by our Government, but by Uruguayan society as a whole.

Let me repeat: yes, much remains to be done. There is considerable room for improvement and we are all working to that end from our respective positions. Sometimes the Government agrees with workers and sometimes with employers, but we are simply trying to protect the public interest with the utmost justice, transparency and honesty, and in the knowledge that countries build their future one step at a time and with the involvement of all stakeholders in a collective effort, without revealed truth or manifest destiny.

In this context, we have been pursuing social dialogue that will serve as an instrument and a process in which various organizations representing society (and, of course, labour) participate. In so doing, we hope to make a contribution in areas that are important to the country's long-term development strategy in a manner consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We consider it important to do so because experience shows that what keeps a nation united and vibrant is not merely its history and its traditions, territory or symbols of State – its flag, its coat of arms and its institutions, however obvious – but the people who call it home and, at heart, their trust that by working together, they can build a better shared future for all.

Without that trust in a better shared future, the International Labour Organization would not be what it is today and we would not be here; it is this trust that continues to drive us forward. Today, in all modesty, Uruguay would like to reaffirm the founding principles of this Organization and to endorse the seven thematic initiatives that are now being implemented as we move towards its centenary.

Today, Uruguay renews its commitment to working as a member State of this international organization and to all of its organs, including the Governing Body whose members will be elected at this session of the Conference, whether or not you decide to entrust us with the responsibility of joining it as an official member for the next term of office.

Uruguay will always honour its commitments and meet its development goals through social justice, democracy, redistribution of wealth and, above all, peace: peaceful coexistence with dialogue, tolerance and respect so that we can all move forward together and leave no one behind.

The President
(Original Spanish)

Thank you very much, President Tabaré Vázquez; your remarks will inform our work over the next two weeks. On my own behalf and that of the Conference, I would like to thank you again for honouring us with your presence and for your words today.

(The Conference adjourned at 1.35 p.m.)