



World of Work Summit

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Thursday, 7 June 2018, 10.15 a.m.

Moderator: Ms Robino

High-level panel discussion

Employment and decent work for peace and resilience: How we make it happen

The President of the 107th Session of the Conference, Ms Majali, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, welcomed the participants to the World of Work Summit. She provided an overview of the programme for the day, with particular reference to the morning's high-level interactive panel on the theme of "Employment and decent work for peace and resilience: How we make it happen".

Subsequently, she introduced the distinguished panellists: Mr Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Mr Helder Da Costa, General Secretary, g7+; Ms Lucija Ljubić-Lepine, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ms Rokia Traoré, Ambassador for the Fondation Passerelle, Mali; Ms Sylvia Escovar, President, Terpel, Colombia; and Ms Rosa Helena Flerez González, General Secretary, Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC), Colombia. The moderator of the panel was to be Ms Carolina Robino, Director of BBC Mundo.

The President highlighted the central role of employment and decent work in addressing situations of conflict and disaster, especially for refugees. The importance of this topic led to the adoption of the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), at the 106th Session of the Conference in June 2017. Recommendation No. 205 should guide the panel discussion and inform the work in member States towards the achievement of social justice and lasting peace.

In his opening remarks, Mr Ryder, the Secretary-General of the Conference, underscored the importance of the theme of the Summit. The need for the ILO's presence was demonstrated by the plea of the hundreds of millions of women and men living in conflict-affected fragile countries and disaster situations for jobs, social justice, livelihood, freedom and dignity. The wish of those displaced was to educate their children and to go home to jobs and security as had been voiced repeatedly in refugee camps. All participants had a stake in securing peace and resilience. The Secretary-General of the Conference confirmed the ILO's engagement and echoed the Constitution of the ILO, that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere.

The Secretary-General of the Conference highlighted an emerging new global consensus to address the root causes of conflicts and crises. There was a convergence between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the United Nations Secretary-General's "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace" agenda. It provided a momentum for inclusive growth, employment generation and decent work, core components for sustaining peace and addressing inequality and the violation of human rights. He reminded the participants of the speech of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his address to the delegates of the International Labour Conference in 1941 and cited that: "the International Labour Organisation, with its representation of labour and management, its technical knowledge and experience, will be an invaluable instrument for peace".

Decent jobs were part of a better world, as Mr Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, President of the Republic of Colombia, had reminded the 107th Session of the Conference in his

address. The ILO had put its expertise and knowledge at the service of the most vulnerable populations with an approach deriving from the founding values and principles of the Organization. Recommendation No. 205 constituted a landmark instrument in addressing concerns that were at the crossroads of humanitarian and development assistance. It provided guiding principles and policy guidelines to member States and called for coherent and integrated strategies to prevent and deal with crises, facilitate post-conflict recovery and sustain peace and resilience.

The opportunities of the new humanitarian and development architecture needed to be seized to sustain peace, to do more to respond to conflicts and in their prevention. This called for more strategic and operational partnerships and enhanced coherence of international efforts in support of national governments and their people. The Secretary-General of the Conference therefore welcomed the presence of Mr Grandi representing the UNHCR and Mr Da Costa, representing the G7+.

That objective had been essential when the ILO launched the Jobs for Peace and Resilience (JPR) Flagship Programme. With a strong focus on youth and women, it provided a multi-track approach based on social dialogue bringing together relevant employment and local economic development actors in a coherent, comprehensive, and context-specific manner in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Such initiatives needed to be part of a larger endeavour for peace based on committed, inclusive national ownership that integrated the needs of the most marginalized, including women, young people, minorities and people with disabilities.

The Secretary-General of the Conference concluded by stressing that the ideas coming from the panel would contribute to such collaboration and would take the ILO on a path to better fulfil its mandate for promoting lasting peace through decent work.

An ILO video was projected illustrating the role played by the ILO in building peace and resilience, highlighting the challenges faced by hundreds of millions of people affected by crisis and the importance of promoting employment and decent work to alleviate their suffering. Recalling the century-long engagement of the ILO for sustainable peace, which was explicitly acknowledged through the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969, the video presented two recent milestones: the adoption of Recommendation No. 205, and the launch of the JPR Flagship Programme. The video introduced the main elements of the JPR Flagship Programme, namely employment-intensive investments and local economic development; skills development; enhancing of employment services; and entrepreneurship training and enterprise development. It ended by noting the current global consensus for tackling the root causes of conflicts and by emphasizing the momentum for a growing role of the ILO in building peace.

The moderator introduced the first round of questions centring the role of employment generation and decent work in sustaining peace.

A Worker member from Ireland made reference to the role of employers' and workers' organizations and the importance of social dialogue, and in particular the contribution of decent work in addressing the needs of people affected by precarious work, especially women and young workers. She asked panellists to highlight challenges faced by youth in finding decent work and how best to assist them in realizing their ambitions.

An Employer member from Guatemala raised the example of his country, emerging from a long conflict, to illustrate that peace alone was not sufficient. He mentioned the various initiatives taken by the Government from the signature of peace agreements to the recent creation of a national commission for labour relations and freedom of association to the launch of a Decent Work Country Programme. However, he noted, violence and organized crime had grown, along with an increase in informality and migration. He asked

how post-conflict conditions could be changed to generate favourable conditions for sustainable enterprises and decent job creation.

A Government member of Turkey, speaking on behalf of the Western European group, stated that the EU was currently facing the worst forced displacement crisis in history due to people fleeing conflicts, human rights violations and natural disasters. Between 2015 and 2017, 3.1 million forcibly displaced persons had sought asylum in the EU, of which 1.4 million had been awarded refugee status and protection, including with support from Turkey. Continued cooperation was crucial to overcome the challenges posed especially for front line EU Member States. One example was the support programme launched by the EU in cooperation with affected countries and other international organizations. Equitable burden-sharing was needed.

The basic needs of refugees should be at the centre of any initiative, with focus on humanitarian assistance, education and health services, municipal infrastructure, social protection, public services, socio-economic support and decent work. The ILO was urged to use its resources effectively to assist member States to promote employment, labour market integration, capacity development of local constituents and institution building, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. He asked the panellists for their expectations of the Global Compact on Refugees, in particular if they could share views on the role the ILO and tripartite constituents could play in ensuring burden-sharing of international responsibilities, and on how the ILO could contribute to strengthening the response to large numbers of refugees.

A Government member of Lebanon spoke on behalf of his Ambassador and of the Asia and Pacific group (ASPAG). He underscored the importance of employment generation to support different interventions in fragile countries to sustain peace, restore decent work and find durable solutions for refugees, including repatriation and sustainable reintegration. Many developing countries in the region were assuming the burden of extending protection to large numbers of refugees despite their limited national resources and capacities.

He believed in the need to increase international cooperation, solidarity and responsibility-sharing to strengthen assistance and protection to both refugees and host communities. He asked the panellists how the ILO could combine efforts with development partners and the private sector to support and sustain decent work in order to reduce fragility in countries of origin as well as to address economic factors triggering displacement. He further questioned how developing countries could address their own market failures while supporting the transition for refugees.

Mr Da Costa stressed the importance of decent work in conflict-affected States. A Memorandum of Understanding between the g7+ Secretariat and the ILO had been signed in 2014 promoting Jobs for Peace. Young people in fragile States lived in poverty and violence, and he mentioned that the main root causes were either natural disaster or man-made politics which created suffering and triggered massive forced displacement. Decent work was an imperative: jobs for peace were important for both peace and state building. The g7+ with international partners embraced the first framework for international dialogue by signing up to the “New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States” in 2011. The New Deal included several peace- and state-building goals, including one dealing with the “generation of employment and improved livelihoods”. Goals 8 and 16 of the 2030 Agenda reaffirmed the same principles, that development was impossible without jobs and security. He stressed that strong institutions were needed in order to deliver services to people.

Ms Ljubić-Lepine noted that although the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina dated back to the 1990s, the country still faced serious challenges, such as ensuring employment opportunities for ex-combatants, women and young persons. National capacity development

was important to ensure resilience and recovery from conflict, and in order not to depend on external resources.

Ms Escovar highlighted that private actors could contribute to employment and peace. She remarked that ex-combatants should have confidence in the transition to peace, but also, more broadly, should have hope in the future. They must be able to strive for peace, with confidence and dignity, and decent work that allows for a better future.

Ms Traoré noted that although the arts may not typically be perceived as a resource for peace and resilience, art can be an important economic sector and serve as a social vector in post-conflict situations. The arts often vanish during conflict, and their re-establishment can be a way to support people in work and to live together in harmony.

Ms Flerez González noted that although Colombia was striving for peace, much remained to be done. There were great expectations to improve and achieve decent work. She stressed, however, that an active dialogue between social partners and the Government on the way forward was missing. It was essential that social dialogue be strengthened and that trade unions continued to remain involved.

Mr Grandi remarked that forced displacement of individuals represented a challenge for their survival, sustainability, dignity, identity and their reintegration. With approximately 70 million displaced persons, access to gainful employment was critical. Without such opportunities displaced persons would continue to be a factor of instability. Referring to the crises in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, he noted that access to jobs in those countries was important and contributed to peace. He stressed the importance of building safe and dignified means for refugees' return, addressing the root causes, and making decent work available in their countries of origin, in order to find sustainable solutions for forced displacement.

The moderator opened the second round of questions on recent experiences regarding the contribution of decent work to address the needs of the people affected by fragility, particularly women and young workers.

A Government member of Paraguay, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), indicated that in order to achieve decent work, Governments needed to take necessary measures to build appropriate social security systems including functional institutions with support from the ILO. Already vulnerable groups affected by crises had more difficulties to find decent work. This was especially true for youth who represented one third of the population in fragile States as the result of them not having access to formal education and skills development. Without a decent job, young people had no alternative but to do nothing which in turn led to frustration. Governments needed to adopt a special policy for young people especially, to avoid them ending up in informality. The ILO should focus on global experiences to be able to provide advice. He asked how countries could create decent work for young people for the consolidation of peace.

An Employer member from Tunisia noted the importance of all stakeholders in contributing to the process of democratic transition and the important role of job creation for young people during the transition. He thanked the ILO for its support to emergency employment programmes including social measures for young people. However, he pointed to the limits of these measures and the challenge of sustainability of programmes. Sustainable creation of decent jobs needed the promotion of investment and an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises. Investment needed to go hand in hand with an inclusive economic growth strategy. He asked what would be the basic measures at the regional, national and international levels in order to ensure peace, and what would be needed for tripartite constituents to create a model for more inclusive growth and investment to ensure job creation and the transition to formality.

A Worker member from Senegal stressed the need for proper implementation of Recommendation No. 205. He highlighted the need to not only focus on those people affected by crises but also on prevention measures and post-crisis management. Given the importance of social dialogue for decent work, he asked how Governments, Workers and Employers could be better involved in the overall process and what strategy could ensure a higher degree of effectiveness.

A Government member of Liberia, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, stressed that women and children were particularly vulnerable and asked about the role of the ILO and social partners to ensure women's empowerment at local and national levels in order to decrease their vulnerability.

Ms Escovar highlighted that Terep, an oil and gas company in Colombia, contributed considerably to peace building, for example through working with women in rural areas, who faced more difficulties than men in reintegration after the war. Society and even families rejected many women who had been among the guerrillas. The key point in the process of reintegration was to recognize the problems, identify the changes required and create job opportunities.

Ms Traoré explained the importance of identifying sectors with opportunities for organized work. Social work, arts and culture provided potential for employment. She highlighted her experience in supporting young people in the transition to formality and in encouraging employers to hire young people from rural areas. She stressed that country-level context mattered to identify suitable solutions. It was important to involve social partners to provide adequate analysis and advice, and in order to be able to participate meaningfully in the process of social dialogue they needed capacity building.

Mr Da Costa shared three practical examples from the work of g7+ in situations of conflict and preventing refugee crises. He first referred to refugees at the airport in Bangui, Central African Republic. After discussions with the Government and the United Nations, a safe environment had been provided, and resources and building trust had been central to identifying a solution. He then mentioned the internally displaced persons in Timor-Leste, where the solution included providing resources for each person to return home and to ensure their livelihood. And finally, he emphasized the role of support for livelihoods to promote recovery in Afghanistan. Local solutions and building trust were at the core of g7+.

Mr Grandi stated that 70 million people were refugees or internally displaced, with a large proportion being young people and women and almost 90 per cent found in countries with very limited resources. Failure to create decent job opportunities carried enormous risks of exploitation, marginalization, exclusion and radicalization. He stressed the need to make a shift in the culture of response, from purely humanitarian to developmental long-term solutions and emphasized the importance of Recommendation No. 205 in this shift. He expressed appreciation to the ILO and the Conference for their work on that issue. The Recommendation would also prove helpful for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. He referred to a new approach tested by the UNHCR together with the World Bank, local civil society and the private sector in 14 countries around the world.

The moderator opened the floor for the third round of questions on the contribution of employment promotion programmes.

An Employer member from Rwanda described the journey from experiencing conflict and crisis leading to the genocide in 1994 to emerging as one of the most highly performing African countries with considerable achievements in poverty reduction. He stressed the important role of the private sector in contributing to high-quality jobs, in particular for youth

and women. He asked the panellists what was the main role of international cooperation and the private sector for countries emerging from conflict.

A Government member of Latvia emphasized that comprehensive employment strategies were critical for recovering from conflict and fragility. He stressed that they must include employment-intensive investment programmes and income-generation opportunities, combined with training and the involvement of local communities. Structural transformation, labour market participation and an enabling environment for the private sector were key. He asked panellists to elaborate on their experience with employment-intensive investments in recovering from crisis situations.

A Government member of Papua New Guinea, speaking on behalf of ASPAG, commended the ILO's efforts in aiming to break the vicious cycle of conflict and disaster, particularly through its JPR Flagship Programme. It was meant to address root causes of economic, social and environmental vulnerability by providing employment and income opportunities with adequate protection of labour rights to reduce tensions, facilitate social cohesion and build resilience to future shocks.

He asked what type of interventions the ILO and its member States could propose to businesses and multinational enterprises for their active role in rebuilding, reconstructing and providing social protection after disaster and conflict, with reference to the particular challenges for small economies.

Ms Ljubić-Lepine agreed that the ILO's guiding principles were a backbone for work in crisis prevention and response. She emphasized the relevance of local solutions for communities and of adopting holistic approaches, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda, noting that sustainable development was key to sustaining peace, and vice versa. She affirmed that cooperation of all stakeholders was vital at all levels within a country as well as at the international level.

Ms Flerez González stated that Recommendation No. 205 provided elements to generate decent work. However, only with the political will of Governments to implement the Recommendation would decent jobs become a reality. Informality in her country was considerable and problems of inequality, poverty and marginalization persisted. She added that women were most affected by conflict, oftentimes covering expanded roles in their families.

Ms Traoré said that, even though there was agreement that decent work was a solution for all, solutions needed to be contextualized. She added that young people were required to have work experience in order to find a first job which was logically impossible. She gave an example of a project in the hotel and restaurant industry which consisted of inspiring young women to acquire innovative professional skills to increase their employability. She added that all jobs were equal and deserved respect, regardless of their status.

Mr Grandi reflected on the role of the private sector in humanitarian assistance. In light of the shifts of our response from purely humanitarian to developmental objectives he hoped that a different approach would be adopted to channel the philanthropic aspirations of the private sector in different ways to become real partners in development. For instance, to attract private investment the UNHCR, with the help of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), had trained South Sudanese refugees in a region of northern Kenya to gain relevant skills. He stressed the need to focus specifically on women in fragile situations, who were carrying the weight of resilience. He added that there was a need to reinforce the linkage between education outcomes and labour market needs.

The moderator opened the last round of questions on strategic partnerships.

A Government member of Botswana, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, stressed the importance of the ILO in the current peace agenda to address the root causes of conflict and wished to know how those could best be addressed.

An Employer member of the Philippines remarked that crisis conditions required strong and specific policy responses. Recognizing the policy constraints in such situations he asked whether the ILO should concentrate initially on generating employment opportunities and skills development. He suggested that given the demand for technical assistance, the ILO needed to carefully consider diverse funding opportunities.

A Worker member of Pakistan stressed that action should be focused on the most vulnerable segments of the population, including ex-combatants, and that the development of their skills was key for their employability. He remarked that military spending could be frozen to tackle the root causes of conflicts. Core international labour standards and global social dialogue were critical factors in ensuring peace and resilience.

A Government member of Paraguay noted that the vulnerabilities of a wide range of people including people with disabilities and refugees, needed to be addressed to promote peace and resilience. He questioned how international organizations could best pool their resources to tackle disasters and conflicts.

Mr Da Costa responded that it was important to attract private sector investment, especially in energy, infrastructure and telecommunication sectors. He added that employment-intensive investments could boost gains in decent work creation. Strategic partnerships needed to be established, including between UN agencies. There was no peace without development and no development without peace. He stressed the importance of young people and women in these processes.

Ms Escovar stated that the end of an armed conflict could take countries out of hell but that it did not lead directly to heaven. She noted that 47 per cent of ex-guerrillas had practically no education at all, and it was therefore important to support education and training as a pathway to employment. She stressed the importance of education and skills for businesses and women in rural areas.

Ms Ljubić-Lepine remarked that a strong education system was crucial for peace and resilience, as was working with international partners such as the World Trade Organization and the EU to assist in raising national employment levels and incomes. Decent work played a central role in ensuring the survival and growth of her country but also in keeping people's dignity.

Ms Flerez González stressed the importance of social dialogue, freedom of association and labour rights in general, noting in particular the lack of rights of women. Recommendation No. 205 was an important tool to ensure peace and resilience. She pointed to a natural disaster in the making in her country that would cause the forced displacement of many people as a result of a geographic change of three national waterways, a challenge that urgently needed to be addressed.

Ms Traoré emphasized that the cultural and artistic sector in Africa could contribute to job creation. However, the ILO and other international organizations needed to recognize and better support this sector in Africa. It needed to be treated as a proper economic sector that contributed to development if sufficiently supported by policies.

Mr Grandi thanked the Secretary-General of the Conference for being a fundamental partner and for sharing the responsibility of development. He emphasized the importance of not only the normative work of the ILO but also its practical operations. Through the UN reform and the Global Compacts, the UN entities were increasing their capacity to work

together. He appealed to all Governments, the business community and workers' organizations to reach out and engage in finding solutions.

In closing, the Secretary-General of the Conference thanked all the panellists for the excellent interaction. He noted how far and quickly the debate on jobs for peace and resilience had progressed within the ILO, given that there had been doubt at the outset of recent events about whether the ILO had a relevant mandate and would not duplicate the work of other UN agencies. With the change in paradigm, the ILO within the international system and led by the Secretary-General of the United Nations together with member States, including Governments, Workers and Employers, stood at the intersection between humanitarian and development assistance and was taking its responsibilities through its JPR Flagship Programme. He confirmed that the ILO would take Recommendation No. 205 as the guiding framework to move forward.

The Secretary-General of the Conference reminded the audience that displacement increases the fragility of any individual, which has repercussions. Jobs for peace and resilience was not a distraction from the ILO's normal business, but should be an integral part of the ILO's regular work. Finding solutions to the challenge was everyone's responsibility.

The President closed the session by thanking all the participants for their important contributions and Ms Carolina Robino for the moderation.

Thursday, 7 June 2018, 12.35 p.m.

President: Ms Majali

Special sitting

High-level visit by His Excellency Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland

The President

The 107th Session of the International Labour Conference is honoured to receive the visit of a most distinguished guest, His Excellency Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland.

Your Excellency, on behalf of the Conference, please allow me to extend a very warm welcome and to express our gratitude to you for coming to address our assembly.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ryder, the Secretary-General of the Conference.

The Secretary-General of the Conference

Your Excellency, President Higgins, this 107th Session of the International Labour Conference is honoured to receive you today. It is truly a pleasure to welcome you back to Geneva, to the ILO and to our Conference.

Mr President, as you know well, through much of its history Ireland has been no stranger to conflict, but at the same time it has amply demonstrated its vocation for peace and its capacities for resilience, both at home and abroad.

We are particularly pleased, therefore, that you visit us today as our Conference focuses on employment and decent work for peace and resilience. I think it is also most fitting that you visit us in the year of the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the historic Good Friday peace agreement that has provided the foundation for a better and peaceful future throughout Ireland.

President Higgins, as many of us know well, you are a man of many dimensions: president, but also poet, writer, philosopher, linguist, sociologist and statesman. First and foremost, we know you as a tireless and a most passionate advocate for social justice – the vocation of this house – for human rights, for equality and for human dignity, both in your own country and globally. These concerns are at the heart of your vision for the future of Europe and for the international community, a vision built on peace, solidarity and sustainability.

We have seen many times your boundless energy in applying these convictions to the cause of peace and democracy, not only in Ireland but elsewhere, from Nicaragua and Chile to Cambodia, Iraq and Somalia and, more recently, in Colombia and in the Syrian Arab Republic. You have become a part of Ireland's long and proud tradition of commitment to peace and security around the world through its peace-making and peace-building activities – a tradition, I hasten to say, from which this Organization has itself benefited very significantly. Your own work for peace and social justice has been recognized, including when you became the very first recipient of the Seán MacBride Peace Prize in Helsinki in 1992.

Mr President, you have given some cautionary advice, if I might call it that, to a world in which a new brutalism, as I described it at the beginning of our Conference, prevails ever more widely. You have pointed to the absence of adequate and inclusive discourse, and to the consequent “rise of an ever more rancorous rhetoric often sourced in despair, alienation, anomie and exclusion”. To counter this, you seek understanding from the past to make a better future, one whose ethical core is shaped by a vision that reconnects society, economy and ethics. And here I find that you echo William Faulkner, who said that the past is not dead, it is not even past, but merely an aspect of the present. This is to say that whatever our past has been, it has to serve and inform us in our construction of a better future. With that inclusive vision, it comes as no surprise that in 2011, when you took office as the ninth President of Ireland, you undertook to be a president for all the people.

Mr President, we were honoured that you delivered the ILO’s Edward Phelan lecture in Dublin in 2015 on the theme of the future of work, a theme which is always in our thoughts as we move towards our centenary at the ILO. You have stressed that the challenges of the future can only be met by a strong narrative of hope, and that we can change our destinies and societies to shape an inclusive future. That is a message, Mr President, that resonates with all of us at the ILO. We thank you once more for being with us and look forward to hearing from you now.

The President

Thank you Secretary-General of the Conference.

It is now my honour to invite His Excellency Mr Michael Higgins, President of Ireland, to take the floor.

Mr Higgins President of Ireland

I am deeply honoured to be here to join and speak to many distinguished delegates from so many nations. May I begin then by thanking the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, for his generous and indeed gracious comments and for his invitation to address this plenary sitting of the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference.

I am very conscious that I am addressing the longest-established, and one of the most important, institutions in the conduct of international relations, one that gives voice not only to governments but to the representatives of workers and employers, one that attempts a partnership, one that was born of the collision of empires – the collapse in human solidarity – that we now know as the First World War.

This year, of course, on 11 November, many of the nations of the world shall commemorate the conclusion of that war, and it is my hope that they will do so not as a celebration of militarism or as a valorization of martial spirit, but as a recognition of the wasted promise and potential of the millions who lost their lives during that conflict, of the lasting damage to further millions who were wounded and maimed, and of the countless others who suffered mental anguish as a consequence of bearing witness to the horrors of war.

Is it not one of the great tragedies in human history that such a global consciousness as might privilege cooperation rather than aggression, conflict, domination, exploitation or insatiable accumulation has not emerged, established itself, sustained itself, but rather – in so many places in modern times – has been dismissed, devalued, even abandoned?

Of all the institutions established by the international community in the wake of that cataclysm that was the First World War, only one has endured to this day: the International Labour Organization with its affiliation of 189 peoples. That it has done so is testament to the moral vision and indomitable hope that is contained within the Preamble to the Constitution of the Organization, which reads: “[U]niversal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice”. In our present circumstances, 99 years after that Constitution was first proclaimed, that spirit of idealism and vital moral purpose are surely more urgently required than ever.

Today, as we reflect on the adoption of the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), by this Conference last year, let us seek to draw more from those foundational moments in this Organization’s history, such as in 1919 and again in 1944, when the community of nations was, for a moment, resolved to build from those ashes of war – a war that had brought human behaviour to the nadir of cruelty and abuse of the most basic human instincts – a more just and equal economic order, one built on the dignity of labour, one in which all those involved in economic and social organization recognized their duties to the common good. There was then a certain urgency, even desperation, to move to a new place in human experience.

The precursor to the 2017 Recommendation, the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71), was, let us recall, adopted on 12 May 1944, only two days after the adoption of the Declaration of Philadelphia. To read it today is a reminder of the enormous challenges that were then confronting a world which sought to meet the needs of a great variety of diverse populations: refugees fleeing persecution; invading armies; demobilizing soldiers; workers with disabilities; and, of course, women, who had entered the industrial labour force in huge numbers.

The Declaration of 1944 has an engaged intellectual and moral background that ensured that it would not simply descend to the level of a set of rhetorical flourishes to be recalled in the future. It was followed – implemented – by a defined role for the State; and, as for the accepted role of the market, recalling the devastating impact of wild speculative tendencies in 1929, there was an acceptance of the need for regulatory mechanisms if social cohesion was to be achieved. In so many States and societies, the wars had thrown people against each other and the Welfare State, with its project of shared citizenship, was bringing them together, seeking to lift them off the social floor, offering some guarantee as to basic dignity in citizenship, encouraging political participation as a space for discourse on options for the connection between economy and society.

More than 60 years later, the task before us, of building and sustaining a peace based on social justice, is as daunting as – and perhaps even more so than – the task that the 26th Session of this Conference faced in 1944. For we, in these first decades of the twenty-first century, again live in a world marked by war and the rumour of war, preparations for war that will absorb not only the muscle and sinew of our physical labour but the creativity of our intellectual labour, war built on fear of the other, ignorance and impatience as to different forms of economy presented and, too often, perceived as inevitable even if they are sustained by continuing injustice and deepening inequality. The burdens of war – famine, atrocity, starvation, displacement, forced migrations – now fall ever more upon those least able to bear them, upon women, children, and older people.

We too, in the new conditions of our time, must take stock of the challenges we face and our capacity for response. Are we to allow a role for the State as partner in constructing an emancipatory and more inclusive citizenship? Given, in particular, the challenges of climate change and sustainability issues, can we bring an institutional and policy architecture into being, one that not only envisages partnership but allows for an entrepreneurial State and for entrepreneurial state institutions, as has been suggested by intellectuals such as Professor Mariana Mazzucato of the University of London?

What serious scholarship supports the view, for example, that a mere adjustment of our present practices will suffice for any of these challenges?

Inequalities in wealth, income and power – both a cause and a consequence of war – are widening both between and within nations, excluding hundreds of millions on the basis of the intersecting lines of class, nationality, ethnicity and gender.

The unprecedented accumulation of greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere, the legacy of two centuries of industrial civilization, now threatens a planet most vulnerable to, and as yet unprepared for, the catastrophic consequences of climate change with all of its devastating implications for the displacement of people, involuntary migration, the degradation of the environment and the eruption of new conflicts over diminishing natural resources.

Yet, at the very same time that we as an international community hold within our collective grasp the capacity to organize our labour within a framework of irreducible and indivisible dignity of work, whether by hand or brain, and when the resources, whether material or intellectual, to abolish all forms of human poverty exist and could ensure that in the words of the Declaration of Philadelphia, “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity”, in terms of those aims are we not drifting towards failure? In affirming that principle I have just quoted, we the Members of the International Labour Organization accept a moral, political, social and economic responsibility, not only to the peoples of our own nations but to the peoples of other nations and indeed, may I emphasize, to future generations as well, for there can be no social justice that is not unlimited, no peace that is not universal and no solidarity that is not open to all.

Two months ago, I addressed the United Nations General Assembly as part of the High-Level Meeting on Peace-building and Sustaining Peace. It is very clear that Secretary-General Guterres is seeking to meet the aspirations outlined in the resolutions on peace-building adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly in 2016.

The report of the Secretary-General on those resolutions has outlined an ambitious plan of action for the United Nations and its agencies. It presents a vision of, and relies upon, the member States and agencies of the United Nations, working cohesively across the pillars of peace and security, human rights and development to address the root causes of conflict so that we are not merely responding.

Yet the activities of the United Nations have been fractured by the actions of the most powerful. If our predecessors of 1944 saw how global accountability in international capital flows was necessary, a fact that led to the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions, we in our time have failed to secure even a space for the discourse of accountability. Future history will contrast the moral urgency of the discourse of 1944 with the contemporary spectacle that is Davos, and they will draw the inevitable moral conclusions.

Ever since its inception, the International Labour Organization has been dedicated to the proposition that peace can only be built, and can only be sustained, when it is founded on a just and equal economic order, one capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of all people in their diversity.

In the words of the Declaration of Philadelphia, which still ring through the decades to us today, “poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere”. The International Labour Organization draws for its ideas, for its inspiration and for its decisions, upon States themselves, upon workers and employers, and, in short, upon nearly 100 years of social dialogue that has been seeking consensus and partnership. By placing decent work

and social justice at the very heart of its approach, the International Labour Organization has not only secured a mandate but achieved credibility, and it still retains the potential to be one of the international organizations best equipped to assist nations and their peoples to build resilience and prevent conflict.

Ireland, as the Director-General has said, has been a part of the transformative work of the International Labour Organization since 1923. It was the first international organization that our newly-independent State joined and one of our most distinguished international civil servants in those early years of our independence, Edward Phelan, devoted his career to this Organization and was instrumental in the drafting and preparation of the Declaration of Philadelphia. As Director-General, he championed and pursued the spirit of diplomacy and dialogue that has been, and continues to be, so characteristic of this Organization – a diplomacy of the common good, a diplomacy informed by deliberation, courtesy and respect, rather than any cynical and narrow diplomacy of transaction derived from an immiserated and, at best, insufficient and narrow theory of interests or threatened disadvantage.

Ireland, the country I represent, knows from our own peace process, to which you have referred, that a diplomacy of mutual respect, of plural and shared narratives can succeed if it is practised with consistency and transparency of purpose. The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement of 20 years ago, signed on Good Friday, represents and remains a profound achievement, one that is underpinned by many of the guiding principles recognized by the Recommendation of 2017: the importance of reconciliation; the need for international solidarity; the need to combat discrimination in all its forms; and the imperative of recognizing fundamental human rights, whether they be civil, social, economic, cultural or political.

Support for decent work, for social protection and for fundamental rights may not remove or supplant what are – as in the case of Northern Ireland, of course – deeply held views regarding the constitutional arrangements under which people wish to live or the legitimate national aspirations that many of the peoples of the world hold. Yet the Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland does demonstrate that when all parties to a conflict respect and commit to those fundamental principles of decent work, security to participate in the public world, security from fear of insufficient provision in health, housing or education, it is possible to create a shared space capable of accommodating different aspirations, one in which it is possible to imagine a shared future of hope and possibility.

It is also important to emphasize that our peace could not have been achieved, nor could it have been sustained, without the persistent and courageous activism of civic organizations campaigning for a more equal and peaceful society. The trade union movement, on an all-Ireland basis, has been the greatest, most consistent and most courageous opponent of sectarianism. Many of those campaigns against sectarianism and for the welfare of citizens and workers were led by the women of Ireland, North and South. Their campaigns demonstrate that gender equality can never be simply residual to peace-building; it must be placed at its very heart.

One of the most critical components of the peace process, and of the process of peace-building in Northern Ireland, has of course also been the sustained financing for peace undertaken by the Governments of Ireland and of the United Kingdom, and through the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (2000–04) (PEACE II).

Indeed, European Union investment is of such material and symbolic importance that it is embedded within the Peace Agreement itself through a special European Union programmes body which coordinates funding for Northern Ireland, the border region, and the west of Scotland. That funding is directed towards training young people, creating shared spaces for education and meeting the needs of victims of the conflict.

These initiatives were, and are, appropriate in a very specific regional context, one which is not necessarily reproducible in other parts of our planet and, indeed, one which is subject to some uncertainty at present. And so, as President of Ireland, I welcome the commitment of the International Labour Organization to its programme on Jobs for Peace and Resilience.

Expanding economic opportunities; ensuring the recognition of fundamental social and economic rights; advocating, advancing and achieving decent work; and facilitating social dialogue between workers, employers and civic organizations are critical components of recovery from conflict and the prevention of any return to war.

I therefore welcome the ambition to place the International Labour Organization at the centre of our efforts to create a new global architecture for sustaining peace; sufficient and effective investment in rights-based peace-building programmes will not only save lives but offer the peoples of the world all of the possibilities for development and human flourishing that peace can bring.

This will be necessary if we are to accomplish the goals of that most remarkable declaration of shared global solidarity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which we committed ourselves in New York two and a half years ago.

The message of the International Labour Organization must be brought to the attention of the world. How much better it would be if the necessary elements of what constituted social cohesion were the discourse that prevailed on the streets of the world, rather than the excluded being abandoned to become the prey of xenophobes, homophobes and racists?

In our present circumstances, none of what I have described will be easy. The diplomacy of the global common good, exemplified by this Organization, is giving way to a recurrence of the kind of diplomacy practised in the worst moments of the past century, one characterized by narrow self-interest and, at its worst, a disdain for those hard-fought and hard-won basic rights that stand at the centre of international law, whether it is encoded in the Refugee Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or, indeed, the Conventions governing the most foundational rights at work.

When I spoke to the United Nations General Assembly two months ago, I said that so many of our global citizens, and particularly the young of the world, are so often appalled by the suggestion that where the United Nations is concerned, what is normative or based on values is for the General Assembly but that the strut of the powerful and the wielders of power must prevail in the Security Council. What is normative is now regarded as something that, as it were, can be parked on a siding. And thus, a false dichotomy between what is theoretically normative and valuable and what can be empirically validated simply becomes the work of lazy commentary.

May I suggest today that this Organization itself has too often and for too many years been treated as if it were simply normative, as some kind of advisory body or some echo of conscience, to be acknowledged, and then disregarded.

I say this not to diminish in any way the work that has been carried out by the International Labour Organization. Indeed, the intellectual agenda forged by this Organization through the rigorous and critically engaged intellectual work of its Research Department has been instrumental in equipping nations and people to understand the far-reaching impact of the liberalization of finance and trade on employment rights, labour markets, the new international division of labour and the increasing power and reach of global value chains, controlled and organized by transnational corporations that often offer no transparency to the global community.

However, I would challenge some of our member governments to show evidence that they took as a primary source the commitments made to the Constitution and Conventions of the International Labour Organization, or indeed any account of the United Nations Commissions for the different regions of the world. These reports are evidence-based, rigorous and relevant in their policy recommendations but are rarely quoted by governments or government agencies. For too many governments, the reports of ideologically predictable consultancy bodies, not research-based and rarely referred to by peers, are far more comfortable reading.

This Conference has itself been the site of so many important interventions as to rights. The Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted by the 86th Session, has provided a shared and universal framework in which to achieve dignity at work, in a world in which regions and nations are experiencing all of the differential effects of globalization, expansion and recession, development and underdevelopment.

The Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted in 2008, advocated an alternative to the simple deregulatory nostrums of the now-discredited Washington Consensus based on a vision of decent work for all, one that promised a globalization of the social floor rather than the social ceiling, a globalization based on employment, social protection, social dialogue and rights at work.

This should amount to more than one voice from a discordant chorus of silos. Too often, the international financial institutions, the World Trade Organization and member States have turned their face away from the fundamental principles promulgated by the International Labour Organization and have not merely been seduced, but have become proponents of a theory of government and governance now popularly known as neo-liberalism, which is really an ideology that need not declare its name. Its policy agenda is now familiar to us all: the removal of constraints on the growth, use and flow of capital and wealth; the privatization of state assets; sharp reductions in the taxation of capital; the curtailment of social protection; neglect of the public realm; the dismantlement of collective bargaining in so many States and, in its most extreme variant, of the very concept of social dialogue. It is based on, draws on and stands for the radical experience of an exclusive private existence that is perceived as being under threat from any concept of the public world, the citizens of a shared public space, publics that might be served by democratically accountable institutions.

I believe that all of these contemporary difficulties can be overcome. For let us recall that in the difficult climate of the Cold War this Conference struggled, understandably, to reach a consensus. Though every national delegation, whether representing the State, workers or employers, shared the same faith in that immortal precept – that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice – they disagreed, often profoundly, on the manner in which social justice was to be expressed. Their arguments were legitimate; it was to be expected that what were then termed the East and the West would offer alternative visions based on their strengths and their erroneous, even violent, assumptions. It was also to be expected that the heralds of the newly free nations of the world would bring their own conception of social justice and of the role of labour.

For all that debate and disputation, what was never in doubt was the shared conception that social justice was to be the organizing principle upon which the actions of the Organization and its Members would be based, and it was regarded as possible. Yet, ever since the end of the Cold War, the very idea that social justice is an end of policy, whether in itself or as the buttress upon which all peace – industrial peace, social peace, peace between nations, peace in its widest sense – rests has come to be disputed and even dismissed by many, replaced by an ideology which sanctions poverty amidst plenty and places private desire over the public good, insatiable consumption over sustainability, unrestricted accumulation over diversity of competition and the freedoms of the market over the rights

and dignity of labour. Indeed, I have been introduced as someone with an interest in philosophy and if ever a concept was robbed of moral content in philosophical terms in these decades, it was “freedom”.

This Conference and this Organization, along with other agencies of the United Nations, have often been lonely advocates for a much-needed alternative vision of globalization, particularly in an international environment where the self-assured and, indeed, often self-promoting voices at Davos and elsewhere have, at times, resounded louder in the halls of power than any voice of labour or, indeed, the voice of so many small and medium-sized businesses.

The rigidity of these ideological positions and their substitution for empirically testable theories is, I think, giving ground. And, surely, that is welcome. What I have described is now – albeit slowly – beginning to change, and may I commend Director-General Ryder and the staff of the International Labour Organization for their recent productive collaboration with some of the international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization.

This is an indication not only of institutional success, but of a gradual and necessary shift in the intellectual climate. Agencies which once advocated, with more than a tinge of hubris and intoning the mantra of inevitability, characteristic neo-liberal policies such as the universal liberalization of capital flows and the deregulation and creation of financial markets have now begun to question what were once their sacrosanct and unchanging policy prescriptions.

Such institutions, when confronted with the prospects of the consequences of a lost social cohesion, now speak of the need for “inclusive growth” and of policies which can address the vast inequalities that exist within and between countries in terms of income, opportunity and wealth, recognizing – however late – that more equal societies are healthier societies.

But they also realize that the space of the lost mediating institutions is a dangerous space in which to be, one without a future for jobs or employment. And, frankly, the roar from the street without mediating institutions will be threatening. Indeed, the recent arrival of “behavioural economics” perspectives in international reports may herald more than merely a lifeboat launched from a sinking ship; it may be a tentative recognition that restoring social cohesion is the alternative to facing the inchoate anger of the “global street”.

More importantly, after many years of critique from within and without, those organizations are now beginning to question some of their long-held a priori assumptions. I have been most impressed by the capacity of the International Labour Organization to place some of the most basic questions of distribution of income on the agenda.

Its recent work on the relative proportion of gross national income accruing to labour and capital under the current conditions has been a valuable contribution to responsible discourse. That work, carried out in concert with the International Monetary Fund, shows that the labour share of gross national income has been declining in most countries since 1980.

When we speak of labour, the fruits of labour and the distribution of the gains and losses of globalization, the question that this work poses is a fundamental one. For if the overwhelming gains of globalization accrue only to the few and are predicted to continue for the few while the losses are imposed and pushed down upon the many, can we truly envision a peaceful world?

So I want to congratulate those who are working on the theme of “the future of work”. I am most acutely aware of the danger of confining our vision of the economy to that which

is measured by conventional methods of national income, output and expenditure. In doing so, we lose sight of so much of that which is of substance in the world of work. Envisioning the future of work is inescapably an interdisciplinary exercise. Our citizens, all of us, have related, relate, and will relate to work from different perspectives, and all of these differences are important.

Work as a human activity is the experience of living in the fullness of lived experience within a society and a culture. It is irreducibly social and inextricably linked to citizenship. Yet much of the essential work carried out by women – caring for the family, the sick and the elderly, sustaining and educating the household – is not measured if it is not carried out in the marketplace.

Development economists such as Ester Boserup have reminded us that this so often amounts to nothing less than masking a double workload as women are so often condemned to perpetual work – work that is not emancipatory, as I described it, but is often long, unremitting and exhausting. Many working in Europe are reporting levels of stress at work and there are meaningful differences between countries that are associated with levels of social protection, provision for inclusion and adequacy of public provision in the public world in relation to these reported levels of stress.

On every continent, too many women are living in precarious conditions, with limited economic power, and are also most vulnerable in relation to household provision and the rapid movement of commodity prices which are such a structural feature of the present era of globalization.

Within the internationally traded economy, there is scant consideration for such women. Transnational corporations are permitted to transfer risk down through the global supply and value chains, often to those who can bear it least – farm or factory workers – often compounding the gender pay gap even further.

So I warmly commend the Report on the Women at Work Initiative presented to this Conference by the Director-General and its proposal to establish new forms of statistical measurement that will have the capacity to value the totality of women's work: to ensure, for example, that the growing care economy is grounded on decent work and that measures to strengthen women's control over their own work time are introduced.

Above all, on a day in which we speak of conflict and peace-building, I would like to commend the commitment to put an end, not in a decade's time but now, to violence and harassment against women in the workplace. These daily acts of aggression against women are a global outrage and know no national barriers. At times they occur within the context of slavery, indentured labour, or physical abduction and abuse. This must be ended and it requires a global response, one which begins in our own workplaces, whether in the agencies of the United Nations, in our public administrations, in factories, on farms or in offices, and let us say it clearly and unequivocally that no invocation of culture must be given the credence it seeks to block or impede any basic human right.

When he received the Nobel Prize in 1974, one of my fellow countrymen, Seán MacBride, spoke of the imperatives of survival in the twentieth century, which he believed could only be achieved through the fulfilment of the Charter of the United Nations – nothing less than a universal peace. With our planet now bearing the ravages of climate change, the imperatives of survival will rest on our capacity to fulfil the promise of the Constitution of this Organization and to meet the contemporary demands of global social justice.

We will need to move the discourse on work beyond the atmosphere of the labour market. Work has to be discussed within a model of human capacity, of human flourishing within a participatory society inextricably linked to citizenship. This challenges, I suggest –

with not a little sadness and with respect – a rather collapsed contemporary scholarship in economic theory and policy. We do so need an adequate reinvigorated social economics that can integrate with ecological realities and an inclusive global ethics, and we need an intellectual integrity that will privilege, make possible, pluralist scholarship and thinking. So much of that work is being undertaken by this Organization, whether through the Global Commission on the Future of Work or in the intellectual labour that it has provoked.

Given the diversity of our human history, of our philosophical, ethical and faith traditions and of our respective economies and societies, there has never been, nor will there ever be, a single definition of work or labour or a single expression of work as a human experience. And it would be a fallacy to simply assume that our contemporary institutions – institutions that we have the power to shape – will remain unchanged as labour-saving technology, owned and applied by the few, shapes the lives of the many.

I so welcome the work of those intellectuals who are engaging with these challenges of change. For example, in a paper published in 2016 by the International Labour Organization, Professor Dominique Méda has proposed that rather than accepting any inevitable future, be it utopian, benign or malign as to the impact of technology, public policy could be a choice between options, be directed to ensure an ecological conversion in conditions that protect, and even expand, decent work. This paper represents the type of bold, ambitious and ethically informed thinking that we require at this time in this century, one that places work, as with all human activities, within the context of global citizenship itself, and one that established a link between work, citizenship and the adequacy of ecological response.

We must be more than hopeful; we must be committed to action. After all, through those two vital moral achievements of the diplomacy of the common good, the Paris Climate Accord and the Sustainable Development Goals, we now have vehicles through which we can focus, organize and measure our efforts in a way that will enable us to meet the challenges of our century and build a lasting peace. Decent work, gender equality and climate justice are, after all, at their very core.

Secretary-General Guterres has proposed bold and necessary reforms to the United Nations system to prepare all its constituent parts for the enormous tasks ahead, the accomplishment of which will require the best of our courage and our energy, tasks to which this Organization will be central. The United Nations needs all of our support now. It is our United Nations and in too many of its parts, it is under siege from within and without.

In these times, the need for the International Labour Organization, and the rights to which it is devoted, has never been more urgent. If we are to achieve the necessary decarbonization of our economies, if we are to rise to the actions demanded of us, we must rediscover a moral courage equivalent to that which this Conference displayed in 1944 when it declared that peace could only rest upon international policies and measures which promote the attainment of social justice. This will require a convergence of vision between the institutions of the United Nations, a unified voice from the silos, the member States, organizations of regional cooperation and, if we are to be serious, the Bretton Woods institutions.

There are warning signs of which we should take note. A surge in world conflict that we have witnessed, and from which so many peoples have suffered in the last two decades alone, has occurred at the very moment that we, as a planet, have reached the highest point of the internationalization of capital, goods and markets in our history.

The great conflagration of the First World War that consumed a generation of the young and the old and gave birth to this Organization broke out during the previous high point of globalization. Despite the warnings that have issued from this Conference in previous times, a social globalization, a globalization of ethical interdependence, has in too many places

been eschewed to make way for an uncritical pursuit of a globalization of trade and of finance, a single version of globalization, one that has abused its authority to sustain an ignorance of those forms of intellectual inquiry sourced in humanism. This hegemony of intellectual thought is not an accidental phenomenon. It has been in gestation since the first reflections of von Mises and von Hayek just four years after that meeting of 1944. It has colonized universities and places of learning, bonded foundations and thought centres and served this hegemony as they eschew or devalue even pluralist scholarship.

So let us heed once again the lesson of a century ago: that peace does not simply rest on common markets or as a residue or a facilitating condition for markets, but rather upon a global solidarity, intellectually powerful and built on adequate literacy of the economic and the fiscal, one dedicated to the realization of social justice and equality for all our peoples, equality in all its forms, gender equality, economic equality, social equality and equality of opportunity. That is how peace will be built and maintained in this century, a century that must, in new and ever-changing conditions, craft the experience of work within a sustainable, ethical global citizenship.

May we succeed together. *Beir Beannacht.*

The President

Thank you, President Higgins, for your words, which will certainly inform our proceedings today, tomorrow and beyond. Once again, on behalf of my fellow Conference Officers and the delegates to this 107th Session of the International Labour Conference, I thank you for coming to address us today. We are most grateful for your visit and inspiring message.

(The special sitting is suspended at 1.30 p.m. and resumes at 3.15 p.m.)

**High-level visit by His Excellency,
Mr Faustin-Archange Touadéra,
President of the Central African Republic**

The President

I call to order this special sitting of the International Labour Conference. As you all know, as part of the 2018 World of Work Summit, His Excellency, Mr Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President of the Central African Republic, is honouring us with his presence this afternoon.

Excellency, on behalf of the Conference, please allow me to extend a very warm welcome to you and express our gratitude to you for coming to address our assembly. We appreciate that you are taking time out of your busy schedule to join us today and look forward to your address.

I now give the floor to Mr Ryder, Secretary-General of the Conference.

The Secretary-General of the Conference
(Original French)

Mr President, it is a great honour to receive you here today to the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference and to welcome you here to the Palais des Nations.

You are a brilliant mathematician with an exceptional academic career behind you. You decided to place yourself at the service of your country, the Central African Republic, and its people.

Mr President, we are very pleased to hear you talk today about how you have responded to the challenges in the world of work in your country and about how you are seizing the opportunities that arise.

The Central African Republic, as we know, occupies a strategic position in a complex subregion. It is facing economic and social challenges as well as humanitarian and security crises, not to mention refugee flows from neighbouring countries and an internally displaced population.

Mr President, we recognize your commitment to peace and reconciliation, which will contribute, we are convinced, to rebuilding hope among your country's population, in particular among the young.

In recognition of the link between peace and work, your major priority is to address the need of your country's population for jobs that provide a decent standard of living. In so doing, you are maintaining the hope of social and economic progress for everyone.

With this in mind, your Government has placed employment, decent work and investment in the population at the heart of its political objectives, thus building a secure foundation for inclusive growth. Your Government is also working to balance reforms and to exercise budgetary discipline while respecting social justice.

Mr President, allow me to recall here our very constructive dialogue during your visit to Geneva in September 2017. This was an excellent opportunity to appreciate fully your personal vision of the ILO's mandate and your commitment to promoting the work of our Organization.

We are working with your Government to make social protection a priority area so that the population of your country can receive basic support, enabling it to make use of opportunities that arise and build decent lives.

Today I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in promoting the strategic partnership between the ILO and the Central African Republic and your personal role in that regard.

Mr President, we see your presence here as the expression of your renewed commitment to the ILO and of the furthering of our solid tradition of cooperation.

I would like to thank you once again for the honour that you have bestowed on us by speaking here today.

The President

Thank you Secretary-General of the Conference. It is now my honour to invite His Excellency Mr Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President of the Central African Republic, to take the floor.

Mr Faustin-Archange Touadéra President of the Central African Republic (*Original French*)

It is an honour for me to take the floor before this assembly of distinguished representatives from the world of work. My delegation and I have come to share with you the realities of the lives of the Central African workers for whom we are endeavouring to provide the best possible working conditions in an environment that carries the scars of a violent conflict. Our basic assumption is that having the opportunity to gain access to jobs that generate income and wealth is fundamental to peace-building and the strengthening of resilience in the Central African Republic.

The conflict that has cast a shadow over the Central African Republic since 2013 has considerably reduced the State's capacity to reach people in all parts of the country in order to provide them with the basic services they need for their well-being. Indeed, since 2013, roughly a third of inhabitants have been displaced. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 582,377 Central Africans are currently registered abroad and 687,398 have been internally displaced.

This crisis has weakened the State's ability to meet the people's urgent needs. It is estimated that, owing to insecurity and to the collapse of the public payment system, just 5 per cent of public officials remained in their posts outside of Bangui during the crisis. This has had genuinely disastrous consequences for the country because sectors of essential importance such as health care and education were paralysed.

Our first priority is to overcome all of these challenges so that the perpetrators of violence can no longer take hostage the legitimate ambitions of an entire population that is striving for development and well-being.

Employment is therefore one of our primary focus areas. In this regard, we deplore the worsening of the situation owing to the drastic slowdown in several areas with a high potential for growth and job creation. This amounts to a slowdown of 35–40 per cent, including in the mining, forestry, agriculture, telecommunications and rural development sectors. The loss of income for the State in terms of tax revenue, and for many households as well, is enormous. Many of our compatriots have lost their jobs, a fact that poses a serious threat to their well-being.

While unemployment is a tragedy for the individual, it places a serious burden on future generations when it affects young people. Unemployment has a three-fold impact. From the social point of view, it increases poverty, undermines education and weakens the social and cultural structures that are the basis of social cohesion, since young people who cannot find a job are far less inclined to start a family. From the economic point of view, youth unemployment takes a toll, because young people who are unemployed make up the largest part of the population that is consuming without producing. In a country where the savings rate is almost zero, this constitutes an obstacle to investment. From the political point of view, unemployment in general, and more particularly youth unemployment, is a source of social unrest and political instability. The recurring crises that have undermined the foundations of production and economic growth in the Central African Republic have reduced the State's ability to hire. Similarly, the private sector has seen the resources available to support its production and growth reduced and this has had a serious impact on its hiring capacity. One of the indicators of this high unemployment rate is the fact that over 80 per cent of jobseekers are under 35 years of age.

Thus, the survival economy has outpaced the formal economy. Today, the informal economy accounts for three quarters of the country's economic activity. In this situation of precariousness and little prospect of decent work, young people have become a valuable workforce for the perpetrators of violence. Unemployment exposes young people to all kinds of manipulation, substance abuse and radicalization. We must all act.

In order to reverse this negative trend, we have to overcome a triple challenge. We will continue to endeavour to advance the peace process, achieve the reconciliation of our people and re-establish the foundations of a functioning state. We will work to improve the business climate to pave the way for the active re-engagement of investors. The resumption of economic production, like the revival of the public administration, requires us to develop a training provision that enables our young people to acquire the skills needed for a changing labour market and job opportunities.

We would like to transform this force bent on destruction into a valuable asset for national reconstruction. In order to do this, I will commit my Government to the implementation of the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Reconciliation Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), which was adopted on 16 June 2017 during the 106th Session of the International Labour Conference.

In analysing this Recommendation, it is clear that it is an appropriate instrument for the Central African Republic, whose workers and jobseekers, as well as employers in every sector of the economy, have been affected by the long conflict that has weakened the wealth-creating structures in my country. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the International Labour Organization to give special support to the Central African Republic with a view to making it a pilot country for the implementation of Recommendation No. 205.

One way to achieve sustainable peace in the Central African Republic is to provide the means to improve labour supply so as to increase productivity and the capacity to create jobs and wealth. Furthermore, we must ensure that work is properly remunerated to make it possible for people to meet their basic needs and to create the right conditions to ensure an equitable redistribution of wealth through a fair remuneration mechanism.

Better still, our aim is to ensure that work can be carried out in a safe environment and provides social protection for families in order to preserve and increase worker dignity. Our strong belief is that decent work by its very nature is also closely linked to job satisfaction.

For the Central African Republic, the battle for the promotion of employment and decent work for peace and resilience is a daily challenge. In spite of the difficulties that my country is experiencing, I have come here to tell you of our determination to overcome the

obstacles encountered on the road to peace. I have also come to share our vision to improve the situation of Central African workers, who continue to demonstrate their unique ability to be resilient. They have dealt with the horrors of an abject war; they have sometimes faced a subhuman existence; they continue to fight with dignity so as not to be drowned forever in the ocean of blood promised by those who would sabotage peace. It is these workers, challenged by adversity but remaining dignified, who have sent me to make their voices heard, to make known their struggle for survival, to reiterate their call for the world to continue supporting them.

As I have already underlined, now, more than ever before, employment is imperative to firmly anchor social cohesion. It is a determining factor for lasting peace. Endemic poverty, fuelled by a lack of training, unemployment and underemployment, is a huge challenge.

I therefore call for the strengthening of all aspects of cooperation between the Central African Republic and the International Labour Organization. I would like to suggest that a high-level technical mission should visit Bangui as soon as possible, so that together we can analyse what the response should be to the issue of employment and decent work, with emphasis on the following.

First: strengthening the capacities of public officials so that, despite the meagre resources available to the State, the best possible quality of services is provided to citizens. In response, and aware that no major programme can succeed without human resources equipped with the most up-to-date knowledge, we launched an initial training programme targeting 200 public officials from the Central African administration. We intend to roll out a second round of training courses for a further 200 public officials in the near future. Our objective is to provide updating sessions and continuous professional development programmes for Central African public officials to ensure the highest level of service quality for citizens.

Second: establishing an effective social protection mechanism. With the crisis, health-care costs have led to a large proportion of the population being excluded, and Central African workers have been particularly affected. The idea is to improve working conditions by putting in place a health insurance scheme for public officials with a view to achieving universal coverage fairly quickly. Initial contacts have been established with the ILO Director-General, and we would like to take this opportunity to call for a speeding up of this process, which is part of efforts towards creating a social protection mechanism for workers.

Third: promoting active social dialogue, based on ongoing consultations, with the participation of the pillars of tripartism, namely the Government, employers and trade unions. This dialogue framework, which needs improvement, should lead to appropriate mechanisms being determined to avoid social crises. This dialogue must also lead to a response to the legitimate demands for worker well-being, in a context where the scarcity of resources is forcing us to increase production and carefully manage costs to better ensure the inclusive redistribution of results achieved.

Fourth: promoting decent work for women and young people. Against the background of the prevailing crisis in the Central African Republic, productive forces have been weakened. Job creation requires the establishment of a mechanism to ensure its long-term sustainability. In this respect, the Central African Republic needs support in the form of more labour-intensive projects that must be accompanied by savings plans. This mechanism should create social safety nets and strengthen the capacity to retrain people. Furthermore, dual-system vocational training options (training in educational establishments and on-the-job training) should be given priority in the Central African Republic, the aim being to have an up-and-running workforce entering the labour market very quickly.

Fifth: establishing an innovative partnership to promote the employment of internally displaced persons and refugees. In the Central African Republic, around 20 per cent of inhabitants are either refugees or internally displaced persons. The resources available to respond to the needs of these long-suffering population groups are becoming increasingly rare. I therefore call on all friends of the Central African Republic to be innovative in their approaches to finding a solution and to come up with a formula for repatriation and reintegration into the labour market by developing the productive sectors in order to generate jobs and income. My Government would be delighted to further develop this concept in a partnership with the ILO and the UNHCR.

In view of the immensity of the challenge and the fact that the situation in the country remains fragile, but also acknowledging the solidarity shown by the international community – which I always welcome – there is a constant need to improve quality. That is why I am seeking the support of the International Labour Office in undertaking the research and resource mobilization needed to implement the Decent Work Agenda in the Central African Republic.

This is the information that I wanted to share with you on behalf of my people. These are the foundations that we would like to strengthen to lift the Central African Republic out of the abyssal depths of a crisis that has gone on for too long. This is our idea of building a future on the virtuous foundations of work that will relieve people from unbearable pressures. That is why I have come to Geneva – to a meeting where giving and receiving is the order of the day – to advocate for the interests of Central African workers.

The President

Many thanks, Your Excellency, for your words, which are extremely relevant to our proceedings. Once again on behalf of my fellow Officers and of the delegates to the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference, I thank you for coming to address our assembly today.

Commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

The President

We now move on to the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which was adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1998.

The 1998 Declaration commits member States, regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant Conventions, to respect, to promote and to realize the principles embodied in the international labour Conventions on the four categories of fundamental rights at work, which are: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

For the ILO and its constituents, this Declaration provides a bedrock of mutually supportive commitments that underpin the pursuit of decent work and ILO development cooperation to support those efforts.

I now give the floor to Mr Ryder, Secretary-General of the Conference, to give his opening remarks.

The Secretary-General of the Conference

Today we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. I believe that the Declaration stands as one of the historic achievements of the ILO, and I think it more than appropriate that our Conference take the time to reflect on what its practical impact has been and where we stand today in respect of human rights in the world of work.

This year, of course, we also commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and I am truly delighted that the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, is here today. I hope that he will remind us of the organic links between these two declarations.

As the world emerged from the Cold War and faced up to the challenges of a new era of globalization, the 1998 Declaration sought to create a level playing field between member States and to define the rights and principles that were necessary to it, and the responsibilities of all countries in respect of them. I recall that the Declaration was greatly influenced by the growing momentum of the fight against child labour at that time. And, as Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi reminded us last week, this year is also the 20th anniversary of the Global March Against Child Labour.

So, 20 years later, can we celebrate the achievements of this Declaration? Well, despite the very great challenges that we face today, despite the many and serious violations that persist and, I am afraid, the new ones which have appeared, I believe that we can. We can, so long as we continue to be moved by the imperatives of unfinished business, and that unfinished business means those continuing violations.

Why do I speak of these achievements? First because, as you have said, President, the Declaration, which is applicable to both ratifying and non-ratifying States, has quickly become what Bill Brett, the Worker spokesperson in 1998, called a “searchlight which will

illuminate those areas that have previously remained in darkness”. Global reports, including new statistics, have provided regular updates and spurred action in many parts of the world.

Second, the Declaration is embedded in many international agreements and that includes the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, where it figures most prominently in SDG 8.

Third, over these 20 years the fundamental Conventions have continued on their path towards universal ratification, which, I want to recall, remains a key objective for our Organization. Can I just say how delighted I was to receive, in the course of this Conference session, the ratification by Iraq of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87).

Fourth, despite the many remaining challenges I have referred to, there has been real and concrete progress: the number of children in child labour today, still 152 million, has fallen by almost 100 million since the beginning of this century. Many today might not be aware of the magnitude of the challenge that we and others faced 20 years ago, simply to raise awareness and put the issues of child labour on national and international agendas.

On forced labour, there is renewed recognition of embedded patterns of bonded labour and chattel slavery and of the nature of trafficking for forced labour in the modern economy. Many countries have strengthened legislation for enforcement, protection and remedy.

In addition, many countries have extended anti-discrimination laws to cover, inter alia, age, HIV status, disability, and sexual orientation and identity. Yet the pervasive gender wage gap persists and there is so much more to do to protect migrant workers and those fleeing persecution.

President Santos Calderón’s address to the International Labour Conference last week was, I believe, powerful testimony to the progress made in realizing freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Nevertheless, half of the world’s working people still remain outside the purview of these Conventions; their countries have not ratified them. There is much more to do to enable rights-holders to, in the words of the Declaration, “claim ... their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate”.

In 1998 sceptics, and there were quite a few of them, called the Declaration “soft law”, powerless against globalization and, indeed, with a potential to undermine the ILO’s hard-law instruments. But the record shows that this has not happened. The record shows that our Declaration has had a “hard impact”.

As Ed Potter, the Employer spokesperson in 1998, said: “the Declaration is a universal recognition of fundamental human decency below which no civilized nation in the ILO should fall”.

And so, as we celebrate today the 20th anniversary of our Declaration, we must at the same time place centre stage the millions who do not enjoy the fundamental freedoms that the Declaration proclaims. Let us renew our resolve to end child labour, to end forced labour, to bring an end to discrimination and violations of the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Universal ratification and implementation of the fundamental Conventions and of our Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, would be, I believe, the most powerful expression of such renewed commitment.

The President

Thank you, Secretary-General of the Conference.

I now give the floor to a most distinguished guest, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

I should add that the High Commissioner had a long-standing commitment this afternoon and has made great efforts to be with us today but unfortunately will have to leave after he makes his remarks.

Mr Al Hussein
United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights

It is a great pleasure to be with you to mark the 20th anniversary of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which coincides with the year-long celebration at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At a time of growing turbulence in the world, with the resurgence of blind nationalism and the backlash against progress in many rights agendas, I also take this opportunity to celebrate the tremendous synergies between our two organizations' mandates.

Almost a century ago, in the wake of the First World War, the ILO was created in the conviction that social justice is essential to universal and lasting peace.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up amid the devastation of the Second World War and many of its articles are clearly inspired by the international standards and common values that the ILO had developed. Article 22, on the right to social security, builds on the ILO's social security Conventions and was further developed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted in 1966.

Article 23, on the right to work, draws deeply from the ILO's endeavours on workers' rights, including the rights to equal pay and freedom of association. Together our offices stand for the same goal: to ensure that all women and men can claim and exercise the full range of rights to which they are entitled, in the workplace as in life, with dignity and without discrimination or fear.

These principles and rights have been expressed and developed in eight ILO Conventions and are anchored in the Universal Declaration and in nine core international human rights treaties. They are also embodied in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work that we commemorate today. The Declaration stands for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; for the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; for the abolition of child labour; and for the elimination of discrimination. It commits every member State to uphold and realize rights and freedoms which are fundamental to human dignity, and it provides a foundation for our common vision of decent work for all.

Anniversaries are an occasion to take stock and look to the future. As we mark the 20th anniversary and look forward to your centenary next year we can confidently state that the ILO's tripartite approach has effectively promoted labour and human rights standards, through a combination of standard setting, technical cooperation and monitoring. This has been most evident in child labour, which has seen, as the Director-General just said, a total reduction of almost one third, with the worst forms reduced by half.

What can the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work contribute in the next 20 years, as we struggle to combat trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour, and as digital tools generate rapid transformations to our ways of working in a world still deeply challenged by issues of inequality, discrimination and sustainability? With young

people struggling to achieve a foothold in the world of decent work, can the Declaration still have meaning? Can it still guide us?

It can and must, because, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is a living document that speaks not only to principle but also to the effectiveness and accountability of our actions.

Justice and social justice build peace. If we are to maintain peace and sustainable development on this small planet, it is essential that human rights and fundamental freedoms be placed at the core of the economic and social policies of States, businesses and international groups.

All of us who are engaged in working towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda know that it is a manifesto for human rights and labour rights. The Sustainable Development Goals are sustainable precisely because they are grounded in universal norms and principles, and we know that the Agenda constitutes a vital plan for action and change that is essential for sustaining humanity's future.

A rights-based approach is fundamental to addressing the challenges of achieving decent work and to keeping the promise of "leaving no one behind". I am confident that, no matter what the difficulties, we will work in close partnership to overcome them.

The President

Thank you very much, High Commissioner. We are extremely grateful that you have been able to make some time to be with us today on a very important occasion.

I now pass the floor to Mr Botora, Mr Mdwaba and Ms Passchier, who will speak on behalf of their respective groups.

Mr Botora

Government (Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the Government group

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address such a distinguished gathering at this special event to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work at the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Allow me to begin by thanking the Office for organizing this important and historic event, attended by high dignitaries and delegates from ministries of labour, workers' and employers' organizations, United Nations (UN) agencies and civil society.

The Declaration has not only laid a solid foundation for the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights; it also represents the ILO's core global mandate: a global social justice where a multilateral and collaborative approach among governments, workers and employers will be able to provide the required support to fully realize it. This commemoration, I believe, provides the opportunity to think back on the universality and value of these rights and helps remind us that their overriding significance remains highly relevant in today's world of work.

As the Organization approaches its centenary and significant changes are being experienced in the world of work, it is timely to look at the global progress on fundamental principles and rights at work. It is also important to note here that the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is the ILO's most widely referenced instrument to eliminate all forms and manifestations of exploitation and discrimination in

the world of work. The 1998 Declaration has indeed provided a strong foundation for decent work for all, and urges all member States, regardless of their level of development, to respect, promote and realize the principles embodied in the international labour Conventions on: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

These four core principles are universal, indisputable, indivisible and interrelated human rights. Therefore, we are of the view that adherence to the values of fundamental principles and rights at work is critical to achieving decent work and the other goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Countries that have taken measures to implement these fundamental principles and rights have benefited economically and politically. As a result, millions of men, women and children have been lifted out of poverty. As the Director-General already indicated, significant progress has been made in ratifying the eight fundamental Conventions among member States. Their implementation, however, remains a challenge in the context of the informal and rural economy, global supply chains and export processing zones, and in situations of fragility and conflict.

There are also opportunities for the ILO and its constituents to mainstream the fundamental principles and rights at work into existing and new partnerships with the UN agencies and with global and regional economic institutions. We encourage the Office to step up its efforts to promote the universal ratification of the fundamental Conventions in the light of the commemoration of the ILO centenary, and member States to redouble their implementation efforts. That could be done through ensuring respect for all fundamental principles and rights at work through the ILO's operations, including forging new partnerships with the public and private sectors.

Member States should strive for more political coherence in promoting the regulation of labour markets as part of their economic policies. The Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), represent an opportunity for the ILO to promote such coherence and an integrated approach. The specific role of the ILO should be in the promotion and monitoring of freedom of association and collective bargaining, social dialogue, and tripartism as an effective means to achieve sustainable development.

The commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work at the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference is not just a coincidence. It takes place against the backdrop of intense debates on the future of social dialogue and development cooperation, as well as increasing awareness of the issues of violence and harassment in the world of work. The 1998 Declaration is the bedrock upon which future standards and policies will lie.

In this regard I wish to take this opportunity to call upon all member States of the ILO to renew their commitment to the universal ratification and implementation of the ILO fundamental Conventions and the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, towards advancing decent work for all.

In closing, let me recall that ensuring fully the respect, promotion and protection of the fundamental, human and labour rights enshrined in the Declaration is the shared and collective responsibility of all of us: governments, workers, employers and other stakeholders. This is because the dignity of the human person, not only at work but in all places, is supreme and indisputable and that must be upheld by all and translated by our actions. I am confident that these lofty human and labour principles will be clearly reaffirmed in the outcome document of our historic centenary session of the Conference next year.

Mr Mdwaba

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

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the President on her appointment.

The 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work has been a game changer. Since June 1998, no country can hide behind non-ratification when it comes to freedom of association and recognition of the right to collective bargaining or to forced labour, child labour and non-discrimination.

The Declaration reflects constitutional obligations that Members incur by virtue of membership of the ILO and constitutes a universal recognition of fundamental human decency below which no civilized nation should fall. This celebration, of course, coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization as well.

The Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work does not impose on member States the detailed obligations of Conventions that they have not ratified, nor does it impose on countries that have not ratified the fundamental Conventions the applicable supervisory mechanisms.

The principles and rights of the Declaration encompass the essential essence – the goals, objectives and aims – of the fundamental Conventions. When we speak of fundamental principles and rights at work, we are concerned to know whether member nations are working towards and achieving the policy objectives and goals inherent in the fundamental Conventions; we are focusing on what is happening on the ground.

With the adoption of the Declaration, the ILO proved that the Organization can respond to a changing world of work. The 1990s saw the rise of global trade; the emergence and rapid growth of the global economy was regarded as the most significant change in the world that had affected the ILO since its creation.

In Africa we say when the music changes, you must change the dance. In 1998, the ILO took a pragmatic approach to the changes which were affecting the world most at that time. We who are involved today in the Global Commission on the Future of Work and look to the impact of artificial intelligence, digitization and robotics can certainly learn from this pragmatism.

The tasks present in 1998 and today are the same: we want to make a difference on the ground. We want to ensure that the ILO responds to the developments and trends that the world of work is undergoing and to achieve social justice for all in an unbureaucratic and practical way. As the Honourable Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour of Canada, Ms Hajdu, said yesterday in a different discussion, “let us do away with scripts and have honest conversations”. Indeed, maybe we need to reflect together honestly on how we can bring this Declaration into even more prominence going forward rather than adopting new parallel declarations.

The 1998 Declaration has had a tremendous impact far beyond the walls of this house. The UN's Global Compact and 2030 Agenda adopted the principles of the Declaration – nearly all of its initiatives on responsible business conduct – and companies' codes of conduct and statements refer to them in one way or another. Government-backed frameworks such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights have integrated them as well.

The 1998 Declaration has become the internationally- and fully-accepted benchmark for rights at work. This is a major sign of the impact the ILO can have when we all work together with a common purpose and understanding. However, equally true is that we have not yet fully achieved our aims. There is still too wide a gap between the Declaration's aspirations and the reality on the ground.

The numbers for forced labour and child labour are still painfully high. Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are restricted in too many parts of the world and too many groups still suffer from discrimination. This does not mean that the 1998 Declaration has been a failure, but we must find better ways and make more effective and efficient efforts to promote and realize its objectives. Violations of the fundamental principles and rights at work are human rights violations and are unacceptable.

In his just-released book on the impact of the 1998 Declaration, Mr Tapiola gives a number of success stories where important improvements have been achieved. It is important that we are aware of these successes and that we celebrate our wins. We must analyse what have been the success factors to get us there. We must scrutinize the way we work through rigorous evaluations to ensure that the ILO does the best that it can to help States to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work.

As for the future, the 1998 Declaration has not lost its relevance in the past 20 years. Fundamental principles and rights at work remain the essential values, principles and rights which we aim to achieve universally. The pragmatic approach of the Declaration and its follow-up procedure is still valid today.

I do promise that the Director-General and I never compared notes before quoting Ed Potter, the Employer spokesperson during the negotiation of the 1998 Declaration: in his plenary speech 20 years ago, he stressed that “[t]he reaffirmation of the fundamental principles and rights of the ILO in this Declaration and follow-up is the single most important undertaking in which any of us have engaged or will ever engage in this Organization. With this Declaration, the ILO is holding out to the world as we approach the morning of the twenty-first century that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all working men and women and their employers from all regions of this earth in freedom of association should be free from forced labour and discrimination and that their children should be free from inappropriate child labour. By virtue of their membership in the ILO, member States and their constituents in the pursuit of social justice believe that these are the essential values, principles and rights to which they hold themselves and each other accountable now and in the global economy of the twenty-first century.”

There is not much to add. Before ending, however, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessors in the Employers' group, who were strong supporters and change agents in ensuring that the Declaration saw the light of day, and in particular to my predecessor as Employer Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Body, Jean-Jacques Oechslin, who was President of the Conference at its 86th Session (1998) and who passed away last year. His commitment to ensuring that this Organization is at the forefront of the defence of human rights in the workplace is an example to us all.

Ms Passchier
Worker (Netherlands), Chairperson of
the Workers' group

My message today is that we need to go from “Declaration” to “action”. I could stop there, but I have a few more things to say.

Today, we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of this famous Declaration and, the Workers' group would certainly add, the tenth anniversary of the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. These two landmark declarations represent major developments in the history of the ILO, after its foundation in 1919 and the adoption of the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944.

As Mr Tapiola – and here again, we did not compare notes – recalls in his recent book, *The teeth of the ILO: The impact of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, this Declaration emerged from the often heated and controversial debate on the inclusion of a social clause in World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and the need to condition trade to respect for international labour standards and to recognize the ILO as the Organization competent to set and deal with recognized core labour standards in a globalized world.

The 1998 Declaration states that all Members of this Organization, even if they have not ratified the fundamental Conventions, have an obligation to respect, promote and realize freedom of association and collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, the abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination.

Let me say loud and clear that the fundamental Conventions cover all workers, regardless of the status of their employment relationship. In 1999, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), became another core Convention, and in 2014, the ILO adopted the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, demonstrating the Organization's capacity to update its standards to make them more effective.

The fundamental Conventions also became an essential pillar of the 2008 Social Justice Declaration, which reiterates the words of the 1998 Declaration – “labour standards should not be used for protectionist trade purposes” – and adds another very important notion: “the violation of fundamental principles and rights at work cannot be invoked or otherwise used as a legitimate comparative advantage”.

There have been many achievements over the past 20 years and I want to congratulate the many governments that have strongly endorsed the ratification and implementation of the core labour standards, understanding their key importance for the well-being and sustainable development of their economies and societies.

However, much remains to be done to achieve the goal of universal ratification, which was initially set for 1995. Too many countries still deny workers' fundamental rights. Recent and shocking figures from the ILO and elsewhere tell us that today 40 million people are still living under modern forms of slavery, 152 million children are subject to child labour, and more than 15 million women and girls are trapped in forced marriages, while women continue to be paid on average 23 per cent less than their male colleagues.

Freedom of association and collective bargaining are not only fundamental rights; as recognized in the Social Justice Declaration, they are also of key importance as enabling rights, providing workers with the means to play an active role in improving their own living and working conditions. It is therefore especially worrying that more than 50 per cent of all workers in the world are still living in countries that have not ratified 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), and are not properly covered by the fundamental standards that they contain. Many of those workers are in non-standard forms of employment, old and new, and many of them are women and young workers.

This is why the Workers' group expects the upcoming centenary celebration to provide a means to reiterate and reinforce the ILO's commitment to the ratification and

implementation of all core labour standards, but especially Conventions Nos 87 and 98. The participants in the most recent session of the Committee for Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work agreed to strengthen the Committee's Annual Follow-up to the 1998 Declaration concerning non-ratified fundamental Conventions. We now need to follow up with action in order to enhance ratification rates.

We need to use the principles contained in both the 1998 and the 2008 Declarations to create the level playing field that is needed in a globalized world marked by the internationalization of production and services in global supply chains and by the mobility of capital. We also need to create better synergies between them and the newly revised Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in order to strengthen company–union dialogue, as well as tripartite dialogue at the national level with regard to investments.

Finally, as mandated by the Social Justice Declaration, we need to strengthen policy coherence with other international and regional organizations with mandates in fields closely related to the ILO in order to ensure that economic progress goes hand in hand with social progress.

Twenty years after the adoption of the 1998 Declaration and ten years after the adoption of the Social Justice Declaration, the ILO's constituents must strengthen their commitment to these fundamental values and give effect to them. This is the mandate of the ILO, and the Workers' group is ready to join forces to achieve a future of work in which core labour standards are ratified and implemented to the benefit of our economies and societies.

As I said at the beginning, we need to move from “Declaration” to “action”.

The President

We have now reached the end of our special sitting. Thank you again to all of you for your participation.

(The special sitting closed at 4.35 p.m.)