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Outcomes of the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work

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Saturday, 11 December 2021, 12.45 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Presentation and discussion of the outcomes of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work

The President

We now turn to the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work and its proposed resolution, which contains the Working Party's conclusions, the text of which can be found in [Record of Proceedings No. 9A\(Rev.1\)](#). The summary of the Working Party's proceedings can be found in [Record of Proceedings No. 9B](#).

It is my pleasure to recall that the Officers of the Working Party are: Ms Karvar, Chairperson; Ms Rudelli, Employer Vice-Chairperson, replaced by Mr Matthey; and Mr Dimitrov, Worker Vice-Chairperson; and the Reporter is Mr Jordan.

I now give the floor to Mr Jordan, so that he may present to us the Working Party's report. The Officers will then take the floor.

Mr Jordan

Reporter of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work

It is with great pride that I report back to you on the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work. This was the first time ever that the International Labour Conference had a dedicated general discussion on inequalities, a highly topical, but very contentious, subject. As the representative of a small island developing State, for which inequality between nations is a lived reality, I am pleased to be the Reporter of this Working Party, and to say to all distinguished delegates that we have a fair and balanced report.

We knew that the discussions would be challenging, as the issue is complex and multidimensional. Conducting our deliberations in a virtual manner certainly added to the challenge, but the Working Party managed to rise to the expectations.

While there is consensus that income inequality within countries has increased in the majority of them, that global wealth inequality is high and that there has been a long-term global decline in the labour share of income, viewpoints differ regarding the causes of inequalities, as well as the solutions. The Working Party agreed that the world of work plays a key role in reducing inequality and advancing intergenerational social mobility, because work is the main – if not the only – source of livelihood of most people around the world. It also concurred that it is not only the lack of jobs but also their quality that matters. Guided by the Governing Body, the Working Party's work focused on inequalities and the world of work within countries and between countries.

It is my belief that the discussions that took place in the Working Party and the conclusions adopted have successfully met the high expectations raised by the ILO's constituents and pay tribute to the stature and standing of this, our great institution. This is a high priority topic for our governments and it comes at an important juncture for global discussions on inequalities and how to counter them, including in the context of the ongoing devastating pandemic, which has seen pre-existing inequalities exacerbated.

The Working Party completed its deliberations in seven sittings. These deliberations were guided by the findings of Report IV(Rev.) entitled *Inequalities and the world of work*, which was presented to the Conference at this 109th Session. The first two sittings were devoted to a general discussion based on the three points for discussion adopted by the Working Party. The Governments, as well as the Employers' and Workers' groups, discussed the evolution of inequalities between and within countries in the last two decades, their key drivers and action that could be taken by constituents and by the Office. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them very much for their extremely enriching interventions, and particularly the regional groups.

From Monday to Friday of the second week, the drafting group met to provide the Working Party with a set of draft conclusions of our general discussion. The drafting group comprised eight members from each of the Employers' and Workers' groups and seven members from the Government group. The Government members were Namibia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Colombia, the United States of America, Slovenia and Sweden. There were nine observers from the Government group, four from the Employers' group and three from the Workers' group.

The drafting group worked on the basis of a tentative text provided by the Office. Discussions in the drafting group were lively and at times difficult, with some points of great contention. Nevertheless, they were conducted in a constructive spirit, displaying an expressed will and commitment to arrive at a meaningful outcome. The drafting group found convergence on the draft conclusions, except on points that were bracketed on issues that required more in-depth discussion or that the drafting group did not have time to address.

On Saturday, 4 December, 169 amendments to the text were submitted.

The Working Party met again from Monday to Friday of this week to discuss the amendments and to modify the draft conclusions accordingly. Special thanks go to the Government members of our Working Party that remained engaged and committed throughout, especially during times in which the debate was particularly lively – and really, a heartfelt thank you for finding bridges on which to build consensus. This speaks to the maturity of our institution. I am sure that the Working Party's conclusions will be an important document of reference for this Organization – as well as for its tripartite constituents – well into the future.

Let me turn now to present orally the report of the Working Party. The report provides the reader with an overview of the trends and drivers of inequalities within and between countries. It also sets out the actions required to prevent and counter those inequalities. It summarizes our statements, subsequent discussions and the lively amendment process, along with the eventual reasonable results. I remind delegates from our Working Party that the report will be available as of 14 December, and they can submit corrections to their own interventions in the report up until Friday, 14 January 2022.

I would like to sincerely thank our Chairperson for having fostered a constructive, friendly atmosphere throughout the Working Party's and the drafting group's sittings. She showed remarkable composure in the face of some heated debates, and was very impressive in her capacity to lead us in a focused and passionate manner. She guided us towards consensus – both in front of and behind the scenes – and she always remained available to speak to groups behind the scenes. She reminded us again and again of the important responsibility resting on our shoulders to address an issue that is of increasing global significance and central to many global debates.

I should also underline the role of the two Vice-Chairpersons from the side of the Workers and Employers. Their collaboration and their willingness to compromise to find common ground ultimately resulted in our Working Party finalizing its work.

I believe these conclusions will be of great importance in guiding the Governing Body and the Office – and all of us – in our efforts to reduce inequalities in a changing world of work for years to come.

I hereby, therefore, submit the report, proposed resolution and conclusions of the Working Party for adoption.

Mr Matthey

Employer (Switzerland), speaking on behalf of the Employer Vice-Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work

Inequality is a very important topic. The ILO has been addressing the different facets of insecurity in the world of work for decades. We have witnessed diverse developments and trends with regard to inequality, and of course there have also been important successes and achievements, but these have not been sufficiently clearly reflected in the conclusions. Extreme poverty has hugely declined in the past few decades. Global net wealth inequality has constantly decreased since 2000, as has global income inequality. These are very important developments that are, in large part, due to global trade. As the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has highlighted repeatedly since her appointment, global trade plays a crucial role in sustainable development, employment creation and economic growth.

The added value of this general discussion and its outcome document is to better connect the dots and better focus the work of the Office on inequality. The Employers' group is happy that we were able to agree on joint conclusions. The conclusions rightly highlight that: employment creation is key to reducing inequality; addressing inequality requires an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises that increases productivity and narrows the productivity gaps across enterprises; investment in sustainable enterprises, the workforce, research and development, technological improvements, innovation and the real economy is essential; access to training and lifelong learning is a precondition for ensuring equal opportunities in employment, facilitating successful labour market transition and helping to achieve gender equality and social inclusion, and that access requires improvements to the quality and relevance of education, training and skills development; formalizing the economy is a necessary condition for reducing poverty and inequalities, advancing decent work, and increasing productivity and the sustainability of enterprises; and it is necessary to promote a high and steady volume of international trade.

In the conclusions, the Office is called on explicitly to strengthen the work of the ILO on decent work and productivity and to promote equal opportunities, youth employment, and an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises. It is also called on to engage with international financial institutions and other relevant organizations with regard to emergency support for employment, business continuity and labour and social protection, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable and those hardest hit by the pandemic.

These negotiations have not been easy, partly because inequality is a multifaceted term that is often used in very different contexts. Let me stress here three points.

First, while the Employers' group did not block the use of the term "insecure work" in the outcome document of this general discussion, I need to be very clear that our position on this term has not changed. We do not accept the term as valid or helpful. It is not defined and is mainly used in a derogatory manner.

Second, many colleagues in our group are deeply troubled that the International Labour Conference is again not able to recognize the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, nor able to recognize the fact that this group of people is particularly vulnerable as a result of inequalities. It was especially concerning that yesterday, on Human Rights Day, we had to listen to arguments questioning the rights of these people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stresses the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. The Employers' group will not accept the questioning or undermining of this fundamental principle.

Third, only two years ago, in the last session of the International Labour Conference, we adopted the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. The purpose of this Centenary Declaration is to make the Organization fit for the twenty-first century and to ensure its relevance in the fast-changing world of work. It was deeply disappointing to see the lack of importance given to this important document just two years after its adoption and that the Employers' group had to fight for it to be properly reflected. The Employers' group will continue to promote the Declaration as the correct and proper framework to guide the Organization through this centenary.

With these clarifications, the Employers' group would like to thank the Office for its great work, the Chairperson of the Working Group for her endless efforts to try to reach consensus, the Worker Vice-Chairperson and all the delegates for their passionate work the last week. The Employers' group will continue to strongly engage in the work of the Organization to address inequality in all its forms.

Mr Dimitrov

Worker Vice-Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work

Let me first extend my thanks to Mr Colin Jordan, the Reporter of the Working Party; Mr Moussa Oumarou, the representative of the Secretary-General in this discussion; Ms Manuela Tomei, the deputy representative of the Secretary-General; Ms Rasha Tabbara, the coordinator of the Working Party; as well as the ILO staff members that have been working hard day and night.

Of course, I would like to underline the valuable work that Ms Anousheh Karvar, Chairperson of this Working Party, delivered to us during the discussions. We all recognize her ability to look for consensus and her leadership in bringing us to the end of this very difficult exercise.

I would also like to thank my counterparts from the Employers' group, Ms Delphine Rudelli and Mr Blaise Matthey; our colleagues from the International Organisation of Employers (IOE); all the Government delegates and also the spokespersons for the different regional groups; the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV); and the Worker members of the Working Party and the drafting group, who supported us from all over the world, attending virtually from many time zones.

While we have been discussing the conclusions of this Working Party, the World Inequality Lab has released new data. The global divide is at the highest level, the researchers found,

since the height of the imperial era. The average income of the top decile is 38 times higher than that of the bottom 50 per cent. They note that average national incomes tell us little about inequality, obscuring the reality of low incomes. There is an extreme concentration of wealth, even more so than income. Gender pay gaps remain serious, and women's share of income has grown at an unacceptably slow rate. This is shocking, and confirms our view that there is a global inequality crisis.

The conclusions recognized that the current inequality crisis is putting at risk the very aims of the Declaration of Philadelphia. The social contract entails that workers should be able to live from the work they produce, and the value added that they create and the societal value of labour should translate into living wages for them and their families. The alarming levels of working poverty and people in insecure forms of work without any protection and without enough money to make ends meet show that the social contract is broken. It is our solemn and moral obligation to engage in a new social contract based on social and environmental justice for social peace for the world of work today and for that of the future.

The ILO must play a part in addressing the inequalities that arise and are reinforced in the world of work. For workers who face discrimination on all grounds, this was an essential discussion. We look forward to the ILO working actively to tackle all forms of horizontal and vertical inequalities, keeping in mind how the two interact. And we hope that, in the future, the International Labour Conference will recognize persons targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and protect them from discrimination. The conclusions reached provide a strong and comprehensive basis for the International Labour Organization and the Office to take action to decisively reduce inequality. We look forward to this urgent effort.

We made significant progress on several areas that are reflected in the text, including on the role of macroeconomic policy, the global decline in the labour share of income and the need for actions that have been sidelined, including sustainable industrial policies. The text upholds the relevant and enduring goals of the Declaration of Philadelphia for full employment, minimum living wages and multilateral engagement by the ILO. The conclusions highlight the importance of gender-responsive, forward-looking employment policy under the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), and the Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169). The Workers' group looks forward to taking part in these processes at the national level and in international discussions on employment and inclusive economies.

Full employment must return to the centre of policymaking. We have lost our way, as the goal of full employment and decent work has fallen off the agenda in favour of austerity and deregulation, with grave consequences for workers and the world. Today, we need to take a new path towards sustainable transformation with fair technology transfer for a just transition, job creation and formalization.

Throughout the discussion, we described how collective bargaining is a key part of reducing inequalities and fairly sharing the fruits of progress, including by addressing the decoupling of productivity and wages. The conclusions recognize this. Collective bargaining – especially that which is centralized and sectoral – has proven to be the best tool to reduce wage inequality and remains a top priority for the Workers' group. Importantly, the conclusions recognize that the value added that is generated along the supply chain – which translates into gains and usually remains concentrated at the top level of the chain in a multinational enterprise's headquarters – should be distributed with fair wages through transnational and coordinated collective bargaining along the supply chain. The conclusions will lead the Office

to work on the declining labour share of income and on collective bargaining and inequalities, particularly in the first edition of the forthcoming flagship report.

On important issues such as domestic workers, violence and harassment and many, many others, this discussion, together with the second recurrent discussion on social protection (social security), has enabled us to establish a strong basis on which to quickly achieve universal social protection.

At the international level, we underline the conclusions on trade and development and on international financial institutions. The ILO has a mandate to evaluate financial, economic, trade and related policy in the light of the goals we have all agreed upon. The Workers' group hopes that this will help to forge a new multilateralism for sustainable development, full employment, decent work and shared prosperity. Building a new multilateralism for a better world was the intention when the ILO gathered in Philadelphia and when Governments gathered at the Bretton Woods Conference. Let us return to that spirit.

The conclusions indicate the importance of fiscal space to tackle inequality with redistributive measures through taxation, social protection and quality public services. The need to address debt sustainability, illicit financial flows and the role of corporate wealth and financial taxes is rightfully noted. The fiscal stimulus gap, which has affected the ability of many countries to react to truly massive job and income losses during the pandemic, threatens to exacerbate inequalities.

Despite the dire circumstances today, we must remember that this discussion was identified as necessary before COVID-19. Inequality has been a danger and a barrier to social justice for too long. These conclusions, therefore, should serve as a lasting guide for the ILO and its constituents.

We look ahead to upcoming meetings related to global supply chains and platform work. The conclusions make important observations about how global supply chains and integration relate to the current state of inequality – both the negative effects that have arisen from failures and the potential for better outcomes.

There was broad agreement in the Working Party on the importance of minimum wage fixing consistent with the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), and accelerating the transition from the informal to the formal economy under the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204). For those workers in the informal economy, for those who have no other option than working in insecure forms of work – particularly for those who are engaged to work through a digital platform – the scope of the employment relationship should be broadened and duly respected. Labour and social protection should be extended to all.

Inequality is a political choice. Let us make the political choice to fight inequality.

Ms Karvar
Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party:
Inequalities and the world of work
(Original French)

I would like to take the floor, in my capacity as Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work, to share with you the three lessons that I am taking away from these 18 days of intense discussions, which have resulted in the proposed conclusions that we are submitting to the International Labour Conference for adoption today.

As everybody knows, we held long, intense, contradictory and sometimes heated discussions, which were focused mainly on the first two parts of the text you have before you. The Working Party and its drafting group took the time to set out their differences of opinion on the description of inequality in the world of work, in all of its complexity, and on the underlying causes of the inequalities that we need to fight against. They did so with passion and determination, while at the same time never losing sight of the objective of reaching a final agreement that is essential if action is to be taken.

Although this negotiation was long and difficult, it was also much needed, because it is in the light of this shared analysis of the phenomenon and its contributing factors that you are able today to appreciate the relevance and robust nature of the proposals we are putting forward to mitigate the phenomenon. We found common ground through lengthy discussions and significant effort, but not without the frustration that is inherent in seeking compromise. It is on this common ground that we are able to pin the reasonable hope that the Working Party's conclusions will not just be more of the hot air that large organizations are so good at producing. That is the first lesson.

Now, it is certainly because the issue of inequalities in the world of work is cross-cutting and multifaceted that we ended up reopening a debate on virtually all of the controversial issues that the ILO has addressed in recent times. Neither the founding texts, nor the normative instruments, nor the declarations or texts adopted just a few weeks or months ago were able to help us. We reopened the debates on these controversial issues, which we discussed again at length, and then we closed them, sometimes under new terms and configurations. Should we take exception at that? No, we should not. Should we fault any of those involved for being inconsistent? No, we should not. I think what we need to do is to agree collectively that certain compromises are in their very nature unstable and provisional. We need to accept that these compromises must be the subject of periodic reviews to take into account the changing balances of power in the world of work and the geopolitical tectonic plates that alter the balance of powers on the planet and from which the ILO cannot shy away. This is the second lesson that I learned in these discussions and that I am sharing now for you to consider.

Over the past 18 days, I was able to see that the Workers', Employers' and Government representatives worked with determination to negotiate, step by step, the proposals for action in Part III of the conclusions. And they did this against the backdrop of the urgency that the issue of inequalities in the world of work requires in general, and in the light of the current pandemic. Despite the frustration inherent in seeking compromise that I think everybody, myself included, felt – sometimes bitterly – everybody worked tirelessly in order to achieve a quality programme of action. However, you all know as well as I do that with this text, which the Working Party can be proud of, nothing has yet been done; everything remains to be done. Because what good would a relevant and robust plan of action be if governments, employers and workers in the parts of the world that need it most do not have the technical and financial resources in order to implement it? What good would it be if the Office did not have the room for manoeuvre needed to carry out the priority tasks that are assigned to it in these conclusions? What if any of the ILO Member States do not meet their obligations to report on implementation? Let us start simple. I would like here to illustrate my point with the example of the questionnaire we all received on the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). This is supposed to feed into the General Survey that will be prepared by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in December 2022, to be discussed by the ILO's supervisory bodies in 2023. We should fully invest in this questionnaire, as this will enrich our substantive discussions,

which are quite legitimate, on the characteristics of discrimination and the most vulnerable groups in the context of our practices and the outcomes in this regard. This is the third lesson that I want to draw from our discussions.

At the conclusion of these passionate and interesting negotiations that I had the honour of chairing, allow me, please, to extend my thanks to each and every member of the Working Party and its drafting group, that hard core group which had a seemingly impossible task and which carried it out brilliantly. And we should not forget the members of the Secretariat who demonstrated their commitment, professionalism and good humour, and all of this made everything easier for everybody.

It is to them now that I would like to say the following words. On a personal note, I would like to say that, like them, I might have had doubts about the outcome of our work. How often did I hear one group or another draw a red line or even call for a vote as a weapon of last resort in order to put an end to a disagreement? I always believed them. I always took them extremely seriously in what they were saying. However, I must say that I never really believed, I am sorry to say, those who, in the heat of our debates or in the turmoil of our disputes, actually said that they might walk away from the negotiations.

We removed the red lines one at a time. We did not need to have to resort to a vote. We remained united, respecting our differences throughout, and we will remain united and different, because the world of work is placing its hopes for better days in us.

The President

The discussion on the outcomes of the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work is now open.

Mr Bello III Secretary of Labour and Employment (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the Africa group and the Asia and Pacific group

It is historic that the International Labour Conference convened at its 109th Session to address the wide chasm between the rich and the poor within and among countries, and between the developed and the developing world. For more than two weeks, the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work met almost daily, and sometimes for extended sittings. Parties argued forcefully and exchanged diverse and even conflicting opinions and interests. But we must commend the Chairperson of the Working Party, Ms Anousheh Karvar, for her skilful leadership, and the members of the Working Party, not only for their hard and dedicated work but also for generously demonstrating their willingness to step back to accommodate the interests of others. No doubt, this positive spirit was driven by the shared vision of the world of work, where the benefits of development are equitably shared within and among countries.

While significant strides have been made to abate inequalities, the pandemic reversed these and aggravated existing roadblocks to progress, striking hardest the most vulnerable groups and communities, as well as the developing nations which were not prepared to surmount the unforeseen and absorb the strong blow it delivered. We acknowledge the growing consensus among ILO and other UN bodies that global economic growth must be inclusive to advance Sustainable Development Goal 10, that is, to reduce inequality within and among countries to ensure that no one is left behind.

This 109th Session of the International Labour Conference will boldly put inequalities under a microscope and identify their drivers. We affirm that reducing inequalities requires tripartite efforts from governments, workers and employers. It relies also on global solidarity and cooperation, concerted international action or response, and the strengthening of multilateral dialogues and systems. These are indispensable if we are to increase the capacities of ILO Member States, especially the developing ones, to facilitate sustainable enterprise development that will create opportunities for decent work through massive generation of quality jobs, and the transition of the majority of the world's workers from informality to formal economic units.

The United Nations has said that inequality will be reduced and economic growth will be inclusive with the creation of a fairer international system, improved global financial markets, and the stronger voice or representation of developing countries in international decision-making. In the crafting of the draft conclusions, these points were taken into consideration.

The challenge therefore before us has always been the advancement of social justice through decent work, which inequality reduction can promote. Let us once again affirm our commitment to respond to the challenge through the adoption of the conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work, which outline a comprehensive and integrated ILO strategy to tackle inequalities in the world of work. We, the Governments of the Africa and the Asia and Pacific groups, strongly support the adoption of the proposed resolution and conclusions.

Ms Forero

**Government (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries
(Original Spanish)**

My delegation has the honour to make this statement on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC). GRULAC would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts of all those involved in the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work and would like to mention in particular the leadership of its Chairperson, Ms Anousheh Karvar, who led the negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Although the process was at times complex, dialogue and a collective interest in reaching consensus prevailed. We believe that the text adopted by the Working Party is balanced and reflects the concerns of all constituents with regard to tackling the challenge of inequality as an issue that requires urgent action and that has specific causes in the world of work that can be addressed through concrete strategies.

This exercise enabled us to discuss issues that are highly relevant to our region and which will enable us to tackle the issues of labour informality, gender inequalities and discrimination against vulnerable groups more effectively.

Our group is pleased to have been able to provide inputs to the conclusions during the negotiation process, in particular on issues concerning the need to implement a transformative agenda for gender equality, one that includes tools to close the pay gap and leads to the development of evidence-based public policies to tackle gender-based discrimination.

GRULAC regrets that it was not possible to include an explicit reference in the conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work to the numerous groups of people who are subject to discrimination, particularly in the context of the world of work. The fact that it was not possible to retain the language agreed on in June at the current session of the International

Labour Conference undermines the progress achieved in this regard through the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

Finally, it is important to state that, having taken a significant step forward by adopting this text, the challenge before us now is that of implementing its recommendations so that all Members of the Organization work together to reduce inequalities in accordance with the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.

Ms Ayesha

Government (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of a group of countries from the Asia and the Pacific region

I am speaking on behalf of like-minded countries from the Asia and Pacific group (ASPAG) including Bangladesh, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, the Philippines and Pakistan.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the Honourable Minister Silvestre Bello III of the Philippines, the Chairperson of the Government group.

Today, the world of work is faced with complex social, economic and public health challenges. People around the world are increasingly dissatisfied with the unequal benefits of globalization. Inequalities are widening and deepening in all spheres. Stagnant and declining incomes, millions of job losses – especially for youth – and stark vaccine disparities are stoking legitimate fears, especially for people in low-income countries. The global trade slowdown, unsustainable debt burdens and lack of productive capacities and investments have exacerbated the already existing development divide between those who have benefited from globalization and those who continue to feel left behind. The vision set out in the Sustainable Development Goals for peace and prosperity can only be realized by meaningfully addressing anomalies in international economic, financial, trade and taxation regimes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has gravely affected the world economy. The poorest and most vulnerable have been hit the hardest, especially in developing countries. Even before the pandemic, developing countries had little fiscal space to manoeuvre. Many countries entered the present economic crisis with debt burdens already at record levels. The pandemic and its economic fallout have pushed even more countries towards higher debt burdens, fiscal squeeze and liquidity crunch. Since the onset of the pandemic, domestic revenues have plummeted, millions of jobs have been wiped out, the volume of international trade has declined, foreign direct investment flows have plummeted and tourism revenues have dropped. In short, the availability of financing for development, both domestically and internationally, has reduced substantially. Recovering from the pandemic-induced economic recession requires bold actions that are responsive to the enormity of development deficits.

We are satisfied that the 109th Session of the Conference has deliberated on the important subject of inequalities, discussed its drivers and charted out a set of actions to address them, entrusting the ILO with a key role to work on this agenda. We have affirmed that tripartite efforts are critical to reducing inequalities. Achieving this goal would require global solidarity, dialogue, enhanced international cooperation and assistance by addressing structural anomalies in the global economic, trade, financial and taxation regimes. Meaningful progress would also be contingent on the level and quality of enhancement of the capacities of ILO Member States, especially developing ones, in building sustainable enterprise development for greater job creation, decent work and assistance in facilitating the transition of the majority of the world's workers from informality to formal economic units.

In short, creating and enabling a fair globalization is more urgent than ever. It must benefit everyone everywhere and leave no one behind.

We commend the members of the Working Party for their hard and dedicated work driven by a shared vision of the world of work where the benefits of development are equitably shared within and among countries.

With these words, we support the adoption of the conclusions of the Working Party.

Mr Devčić

Government (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, and the European Free Trade Association country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

We warmly thank the Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work for leading the discussions in an effective and efficient manner throughout the last two and a half weeks. We thank the Office for its support and guidance. Cordial thanks to the interpreters and translators for facilitating the Working Party's work by making the discussions accessible to all ILO constituents. We also thank the social partners and all other participants for their valuable and engaged discussion in working towards achieving consensus on the conclusions.

Today's final conclusions demonstrate a tangible step forward in achieving the target set out in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which calls for all Members to work individually and collectively, on the basis of tripartism and social dialogue, and with the support of the ILO, to further develop its human-centred approach to the future of work.

While inequalities in the world of work are complex and multifaceted, we believe they have a profound impact on the nature and future of work and that there is an urgent need to address these challenges to ensure a fair, inclusive and secure future of decent work with full, productive and freely chosen employment for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the immediate need for swift action to reduce inequalities, as its impact has not only shown the unequal capacity of countries to absorb such external shocks but also how it has exacerbated pre-existing decent work deficits, increased poverty and widened inequalities.

It is evident from the discussions over the last two and a half weeks that the main drivers of inequalities in the world of work are multidimensional and associated with an abundance of interrelated and mutually reinforcing international and national structural and systemic causes. During the discussions, it was evident that groups have different values and priorities, particularly in respect of persons targeted based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. While our position was not reflected in the conclusions, we believe that reaching a common understanding was important and hope that our regional position will pave the way for further consideration on this matter.

We welcome the actions identified by this Working Party and believe that these coherent actions are fully in line with the principles as set out in the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient and Sustainable Development Goals 1, 5, 8 and 10. The EU and its Member States acknowledge and support the pivotal role the ILO plays in assisting with reducing inequalities in the world of

work. As outlined in the conclusions, this will be achieved through strengthened multilateral cooperation together with the generation of sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth with decent work for all. In addition, equal opportunity and access to quality education and training, the fostering of a fair share of the fruits of progress, accelerating the transition from an informal to a formal economy, and ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination through the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion will be key to its success. We welcome the actions identified in the conclusions and we hope that these conclusions will advance efforts to provide equal opportunities and treatment for all in the world of work.

Ms Antoniou

Government (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), speaking on behalf of a group of industrialized market economy countries

I am speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Japan and Israel.

As we made clear in the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work, our Governments are disappointed that the adopted text makes reference to neither lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals, nor sexual orientation and gender identity. We strongly believe that it has long been time to recognize this group at the ILO and the discrimination they face in the world of work.

When we speak about LGBTI individuals, we are referring to real people who face discrimination in workplaces around the world, from income disparity to violence and harassment and to discrimination in applying for jobs, among others.

The ILO has the mandate to speak out in the name of social justice in the world of work. By not recognizing particular groups who face discrimination, we are not fully committing to the ILO's core mission of achieving social justice.

On 18 November, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), in a second resolution on strengthening the role of the UN in enhancing periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization, adopted language on non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This was significant. It was the first time that sexual orientation and gender identity language had been approved by consensus in the UN system. It is disappointing that we were not able to achieve such equivalent progress at the ILO.

While, in the spirit of compromise, we agreed to the Chairperson's text instead of our preferred wording, we hope this discussion will further stimulate consideration and progress towards ILO recognition of LGBTI individuals in the very near future, and we are pleased with the reference to those who are vulnerable to discrimination on all grounds covered by international labour and human rights standards in point 8.

We thank the distinguished delegates, Employers, Workers, the Office, the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons for a fruitful discussion in general, and look forward to future progress on the issue, as well as others going forward.

Mr Spatari

Minister of Labour and Social Protection (Republic of Moldova)

Allow me first to offer my congratulations on the successful conclusion of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference. As a Government representative of the Republic of Moldova, I would like to bring to your attention one mechanism that can and should be more actively used to fight inequalities and injustice in the labour market. I am

speaking about the statutory minimum wage, a mechanism that in my country has not been sufficiently and efficiently used in recent years. Indeed, adequate minimum wages, statutory or negotiated, are a powerful tool to reduce inequalities, as laid out in the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131).

As a new Government – we have been in office for only four months now – we are asking ourselves: what is the fair value of the minimum wage? The answer to this question is political rather than economic, and depends primarily on the answer to another question: what do we want to achieve with the minimum wage? Indeed, the minimum wage has an economic content, but it also has an important social and symbolic dimension. Another question: what is the minimum value of a person's time and effort? It is true that in a developed society the minimum wage tends to ensure a decent minimum living; this is unfortunately not true in many developing countries, and certainly not in the Republic of Moldova. In our country, the minimum wage represents only 30 per cent of the average wage and allows for a widespread continuation of the practice of under-declared work, a situation in which a significant part of remuneration is earned informally.

To solve this issue, we commit as a Government to: restart tripartite dialogue with trade unions and employers' organizations to develop short-term and medium-term plans to more dynamically increase the minimum wage in order to attain the target of 50 per cent of the average wage, as recommended by the new European directive on adequate minimum wages; eliminate unjustified discrepancies between the minimum wage in the public and private sectors, taking into account that today our country actually has two minimum wages – a lower one for the public sector and a higher one for the private sector – a practice that we should discontinue; promote social dialogue, information and consultation of workers at the company level in order to support wage evolutions more in line with the productivity, economic evolution and strategy of companies; and introduce a mechanism to assess the standard of decent living, as opposed to the subsistence minimum which is currently used in the Republic of Moldova.

We strongly count on the support of the social partners in our country, of foreign investors and of the international organizations to achieve all these objectives.

I would also like to encourage the governments of other developing countries to take more decisive action to fight inequalities, including through the setting of statutory minimum wages.

Mr Podewiltz

Government (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Africa group

Namibia is proud to make these remarks on behalf of the Africa group. At the outset, the Africa group registers its strong support for the conclusions of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work. The general discussion on inequalities has been particularly important to Africa as it battles the global COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating impact of vaccine inequity, a notorious form of inequality. And as the incontrovertible evidence confirms, Africa lags behind other countries in the most important measures of income, human well-being and industrial development. The debate on inequalities has put a spotlight on the relative power of relationships between countries and the divide between the global North and the global South, the former colonizers and the formerly colonized countries, the richer and the poorer countries, and the rich and the poor within nations. These divisions reflected themselves in the debate on inequalities in the Working Party, but produced a rich and constructive global dialogue on the topic because of our mutual commitment to the important goal of social justice that unites us as Members of the tripartite ILO.

The conclusions reflect the multifaceted character of the causes of inequalities and emphasize the need for an integrated ILO agenda to address the different dimensions of inequality in the world of work. We are satisfied that the conclusions include the necessary elements to articulate and to implement a strong tripartite agenda. Africa is proud to have made constructive contributions to the debate of the Working Party and to its conclusions. The conclusions recognize that poorer countries risk being left behind for decades to come because of pre-existing structural weaknesses in their economies, and lack of fiscal space required to foster recovery from COVID-19 and to propel national socio-economic development.

The conclusions identify major drivers of inequalities of particular significance to developing countries. These include the impact of high international debt, as the developing countries are channelling a high and increasing share of national revenues into debt service, thereby reducing funding that could support employment creation, sustainable enterprise development and social protection measures.

The conclusions identify other important drivers of inequality, including massive informality, unemployment, decent work deficits and unfair global supply chains. Most importantly, the conclusions spell out the variety of ways in which the ILO can assist Member States and social partners in tackling inequalities, and specify the role the ILO can play at the global, regional and national levels to advance an overall agenda for eliminating inequalities within and beyond the world of work.

During the debate, Africa has observed that the different countries and constituents have varying ideas of consensus-building within the ILO. Africa recognized that some of the Member States attach particular importance to the inclusion of language on equalities that reflects their national or social values and beliefs, or political priorities, while other Member States disagree with equal zeal, in accordance with their national, social or political values and beliefs. Despite our success in achieving consensus in these conclusions, we have listened carefully to some Member States and constituents who promised yesterday, and are likely to reiterate today, as they have done, that they will continue to insist on debating in other ILO forums, until their views prevail, the particular contentious issues concerning discrimination that divided us in the Working Party on inequalities; that is certainly their prerogative. However, Africa is concerned that insistence on inclusive language that does not enjoy international consensus could hamper the work of the ILO and can divert attention from more important core issues within the broader topics, which may cause some Member States to choose to disassociate themselves. We ask Member States to take this into account.

Africa has valued greatly the tripartite cooperation that resulted in the achievement of consensus in the Working Party. However, African Member States and other Governments were surprised when presented with prior agreements between certain constituents towards the end of the debate that effectively precluded or limited full and transparent debate. We are committed to transparent tripartite social justice as the best means to reach strong conclusions in the ILO discussions, and encourage our commitment to this proven manner of working.

In closing, the Africa group extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Chairperson, who has ably and with patience and commitment steered us to reach an excellent outcome in our deliberations. We equally thank the staff of the Office for their usual excellent and tireless support. We thank the interpreters and technical staff who enabled us to make such a success of the challenging virtual format. We are confident that the Office will be able to elaborate on an effective ILO agenda to reduce inequalities in the world of work based on the conclusions

to be adopted by the International Labour Conference. We convey our solidarity and respect to the Governments, who worked together well during this meeting, and to the Employers and Workers, who dedicated themselves to achieving a consensus in the interests of social justice. We also convey our thanks to the individual Member States of the Africa group, and to other States that worked together closely to ensure that a pro-development and pro-employment agenda remained an underlying theme of deliberations and conclusions. Africa hereby urges, then, the adoption of the resolution and the report of the Working Party on inequalities.

Mr Pakseresht
Government (Islamic Republic of Iran)

My delegation expresses appreciation to the members of the Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work for their dedication to the principle and spirit of social dialogue and tripartism. We witnessed once again how this unique feature of the house functions and benefits in times of divergence and division. We view the consensus achieved during the discussions on inequalities as a valuable asset that can be leveraged to take practical steps and produce tangible results, while also believing that we must prioritize the various types and qualities of inequalities and begin with the most widely realized ones.

However, my delegation would like to draw the attention of distinguished delegates of this session of the Conference to a new and emerging form of inequality between countries that has emerged in recent decades due to economic sanctions imposed by powerful countries on targeted people and societies. These sanctions impair the normal functioning of economic structures and, based on widely accepted facts and figures, exacerbate and widen inequalities within those countries. We regret that this critical source of inequality was not addressed in the document and we do hope that the issue will be duly noted by the Conference and will be dealt with in future discussions on the matter. With this, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the conclusions of the Working Party.

Ms Ayesha
Government (Pakistan)

My delegation is delivering this statement in our national capacity, and we wish to draw the attention of the Chairperson and the Reporter of the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work to the views, expressed by our delegation in our capacity as Coordinator of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Group during the plenary of the Working Party with regard to the matter of the listing of categories, of individuals and groups considered as vulnerable. It may be recalled that we rejected amendments to the draft conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work on point 8 (A.53, A.81, A.90, A.92, A.196) and point 23(e) (A.71). It is requested that our views expressed during the negotiations in the Working Party on the subject of the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups be adequately reflected in the official record.

Resolution concerning inequalities and the world of work: Adoption

The President

If there are no further requests for the floor, we shall now proceed with the adoption of the proposed resolution, which contains conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work, that the Working Party is submitting to the Conference, the text of which is contained in *Record of Proceedings* No. 9A(Rev.1).

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference adopts the proposed resolution?

(The resolution is adopted.)

The President

On behalf of the Conference, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the members of the Working Party and to the Secretariat. The conclusions that we just adopted will guide us in our common endeavour to attain justice for all. Congratulations! The Conference as a whole thanks you for your hard work and dedication, which allowed you to reach consensus on such a complex matter under extraordinary circumstances, especially since, as has been noted by many of those who took the floor this afternoon, this is the first time that this issue has been tackled as such by this Conference. It is really an important achievement.

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)