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Outcomes of the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning

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Saturday, 11 December 2021, 1.55 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Presentation and discussion of the outcomes of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning

The President

We now turn to the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning and its proposed resolution, which contains the Working Party's conclusions, the text of which can be found in *Record of Proceedings No. 10A*. The summary of the Working Party's proceedings can be found in *Record of Proceedings No. 10B*.

It is my pleasure to recall that the Officers of the Working Party are: Ms Kigenyi, Chairperson; Ms Sephomolo, Employer Vice-Chairperson; and Ms El Amri, Worker Vice-Chairperson; and the Reporter is Mr Vieira.

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

Mr Vieira

Reporter of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning

It is a great honour for me and for the Government of the United States of America to present to the Conference the report and the outcome of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning. I am proud to report that the Working Party succeeded against considerable odds in agreeing on the proposed resolution and conclusions concerning the general discussion on skills and lifelong learning.

The Working Party held seven plenary sittings in a blended mode, with almost all of the delegates joining virtually, except for a small number from the Employers' and Workers' groups. Considering the opportunities to be seized and the challenges to be addressed in the context of the future of work and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Working Party focused its discussion on four points: First, what are the key challenges and opportunities for skills and lifelong learning in a changing world of work, further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? Second, how can key elements of skills systems, including policies, governance, skills needs anticipation, financing and delivery, be shaped and, where needed, modernized, while addressing the changes and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? Third, what are the roles and responsibilities of governments and social partners for realizing the transformative potential of skills, lifelong learning, training and education for all? And fourth, to strengthen the ILO's global leadership on skills and lifelong learning, what should be the core elements of an ILO skills and lifelong learning strategy that makes use of all means of action, including research, standards, technical assistance and development cooperation?

The Working Party's discussion was organized in three parts. In the first week, it held two sittings centred on the four points for discussion, after opening speeches from the Chairperson and the representative of the Secretary-General. During the second week, a drafting group, comprising seven representatives each from the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups, met over five sittings and produced draft conclusions. However, the group did not reach consensus on many of the points and clauses. During the last week, the whole Working Party held five sittings to discuss and revise the draft conclusions. It ultimately managed to

reach consensus and finalize the proposed resolution and conclusions. It was not an easy task, as the positions and views of the constituents differed significantly on some of the crucial issues. However, we did reach consensus.

The proposed resolution and conclusions are structured in four parts. Part I provides a succinct overview of skills and lifelong learning in a changing world of work, further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It calls for the strengthening and transformation of skills development and lifelong learning systems so that they can become more relevant, inclusive, resilient and responsive to the changes in the world of work. Part II comes up with guiding principles for inclusive, responsive and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems. It underscores the importance of formulating skills development and lifelong learning policies in consultation with the social partners and aligning them with employment policy frameworks and relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Part III suggests measures to promote inclusive, responsive and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems. Lastly, Part IV recommends future ILO action. It calls on the ILO to develop a coherent, inclusive and gender-responsive ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022–30 that strengthens the ILO's global leadership on skills and lifelong learning and provides enhanced support to constituents in skills development and lifelong learning systems. It asks the Director-General to present the strategy to the 346th Session of the Governing Body for approval.

With delegates from different time zones attending late at night in Tokyo and early in the morning in Buenos Aires, we can truly say that we worked around the clock. It was not easy to coordinate group positions in cyberspace. We all missed the human interaction that would have made it so much easier and speedier to define and refine the proposed resolution and conclusions on skills and lifelong learning. Differing views and opinions were frequently expressed. There were times when it seemed impossible to reach a consensus, yet we persevered. We set aside what divides us and came together to find solutions. Ultimately, we succeeded in reaching agreement because of the consensus that skills and lifelong learning are key to facilitating a human-centred approach that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient and contributes to a just transition to the future of work. It is also a key enabler of human development and full, productive and freely chosen employment for all. The Working Party succeeded because it drew on the full power of the ILO's tripartite approach. I am sure that I can speak for everyone in attendance when I say that we were amazed by the commitment and ability of the spokespersons to find solutions. With the proposed resolution and conclusions, we are giving the ILO a clear mandate to pursue its leadership role on skills and lifelong learning in the international system. This means that the ILO can continue to be a source of inspiration and hope for millions of people around the world.

Before closing, I want to acknowledge, on behalf of the participants in the Working Party, the contributions of some of the committed colleagues who ensured the success of our ambitious endeavour. First, we extend our sincere thanks to the Chairperson of the Working Party, Her Excellency, Ambassador Eunice Kigenyi, for her supremely diplomatic and insightful management of the discussions. We are grateful to the two Vice-Chairpersons – for the Employers' group, Ms Lindiwe Sephomolo, and for the Workers' group, Ms Amal El Amri – for their total commitment to ensuring that the proposed resolution and conclusions on skills and lifelong learning respond to the concerns and aspirations of employers and workers around the world. We also wish to thank the Government members of the Working Party who shouldered the responsibility of speaking for their regional groups, and the other Government members, for their engagement and constructive inputs. We likewise express our gratitude to the members of the Secretariat for their invaluable support, under the able leadership of Ms Martha E. Newton, representative of the Secretary-General, and her deputy,

Mr Sangheon Lee, who was assisted by Mr Srinivas Reddy and other experts. We particularly thank the interpreters, technicians and other unsung heroes who enabled us to conduct our deliberations with relative ease, given the challenging circumstances.

Ms Sephomolo

Employer Vice-Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning

For the last two weeks we have been discussing skills and lifelong learning, an important topic for employers, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid changes that are taking place in the world of work. Exchanges were not always easy. However, the Employers are delighted that the negotiations led to a balanced resolution and conclusions that reflect the Employers' main concerns and the need for the appropriate technical and core human social skills for formal and informal lifelong learning.

On behalf of the Employers, I would like to thank the President of the International Labour Conference and the Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning, Ambassador Eunice Kigenyi, for her facilitation of the Working Party's plenary sittings. It certainly was not an easy task, especially in this hybrid setting. I thank the Chairperson for her fairness, patience and guidance. I also thank the Worker Vice-Chairperson of the Working Party, Ms Amal El Amri, and the various Government regional coordinators for their inputs to the process. I would like to thank all the members of the Employers' group for their support under the challenging circumstances of this hybrid Conference, and also to both the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) for their invaluable contributions to our work.

I truly believe that the text we are about to adopt is not only balanced but, most importantly, it is practical and aspirational. We strongly believe that the concrete action points, as agreed in the text, will give effect to the ILO by enabling it to be the global leader on skills. All of us, the tripartite constituents of the ILO, will reap the benefits of the investments in the medium and long term resulting from linking the ILO programme and budget to skills development and lifelong learning. There will be more skills specialists, including through the Decent Work Country Programmes, to help the 180-plus Member States of the ILO. Policy guidance, technical advice, and skills anticipation and governance will enable our education and training systems to be further developed to ensure that all individuals have the right skills and mindset to attain full, productive and freely chosen employment now and in the future. It is especially crucial that the skills are aligned with labour market needs.

Our group is also pleased to see that the important role of productivity growth is recognized in the very first point of the conclusions. Beyond the cliché and misconception that productivity growth is about getting more from the workers for less, productivity growth enables enterprises to use their savings to invest in workers' skills development and acquire machinery and equipment that is fostering knowledge accumulation and paying better salaries, which will contribute to enhancing further growth. Productivity growth, therefore, is also a key factor in reducing poverty and is strongly linked to development.

Our group is particularly pleased to see that this text highlights the importance of the following: the ILO becoming a global leader on skills development and lifelong learning; allocating the necessary human and financial resources through the ILO programme and budget; recognition of core skills, such as problem-solving, communications, teamwork and leadership; recognition of informal, non-formal and formal learning; the importance of digital skills; aligning training and education to labour market needs to ultimately reduce the growing

skills shortages; joint, shared and differentiated responsibilities for all governments, employers and workers to promote skills and lifelong learning; helping those in the informal sector to transition to the formal economy; addressing motivational barriers and promoting the openness to learn; and the need to work with other multilateral agencies on the skills agenda. The ILO needs to enhance actions that assist Members in strengthening skills and lifelong learning through social dialogue. For the realization of those concrete objectives, effective policy frameworks must be developed for skills development and lifelong learning.

In conclusion, it has been an honour for me to represent the Employers' group in this general discussion and to share the perspectives of the private sector on skills and lifelong learning. We look forward to seeing further progress and developments from the ILO on this very important subject in the years to come, and its efforts to harness the opportunities of the future of work.

Ms El Amri

Worker Vice-Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning (Original French)

I address Mr Omar Zniber, President of the International Labour Conference, Mr Guy Ryder, Director-General of our institution, and the representatives of the Governments, Employers and Workers, as the linchpins of our Organization.

The discussions that we have had in our Working Party have shown that skills and lifelong learning are of vital importance for workers all over the world. We did not think that the issue would be divisive. However, and exacerbated by meeting in this hybrid format, our discussions were difficult, contentious and far from reflecting consensus. In this hybrid format, we still managed to overcome certain misunderstandings yesterday and at last to agree on a set of conclusions that, we believe, will provide relevant guidance to ILO constituents and to the Office in support of the Organization's strategy on skills and lifelong learning, at a time when the world of work is facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the pandemic and other global drivers of change.

This situation calls for collective action to build for the future and respond to the challenges that existed prior to the pandemic, and that it has exacerbated, such as the urgent need to achieve a carbon-free economy and to leverage the potential of digitalization and new technologies for the benefit of all.

The ILO strategy, based on the conclusions of our work, must ensure that skills and lifelong learning are at the heart of just digital and climate transitions. We believe that the adopted text makes this clear, rightly addressing the recognition of the right to education and training and the need to eliminate child labour as fundamental rights and principles. Without these rights and principles, our goals would be much more difficult to achieve.

The references to the Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140), the Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195), and the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), are particularly welcome, as is the important reference to collective bargaining, which is how training is usually organized, in a way that corresponds to the needs of both workers and employers.

Tripartite cooperation and social dialogue in the context of the development and implementation of lifelong learning also have an important place in the text. We welcome the

references to the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (Centenary Declaration) and to the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, which helped pave the way for this debate. We would have liked to see conclusions that were more targeted and clearer with regard to the responsibility of employers in respect of the funding of training. It is clear that the responsibilities referred to in the instrument must be shared and differentiated respecting this principle. Workers should not be required to pay for their own skills development.

The conclusions also address the important issue of universal access to lifelong learning. This can only be effective if we break down the barriers that are leading to discrimination for various categories of workers, and in particular workers in the informal economy. We would have preferred to see a clear reference to platform workers, but they are nevertheless covered by the text, specifically point 5, which refers to persons in fragile and vulnerable situations, which is clearly their case.

We also welcome the clear message contained in the conclusions regarding all workers in insecure forms of work having effective access to skills and lifelong learning. In that regard, research by the Office to highlight pathways for workers in forms of work such as part-time work, fixed-term contracts and working through private employment agencies to effectively access skills development and lifelong learning is a priority for our group.

Formal qualifications and decent work for educators and trainers are essential and are referred to in these conclusions. This issue is important not only in the formal economy, but also for transitions from informal to formal work. Solid technical and vocational education and training systems, appropriate apprenticeship funding – today insufficient at the global level, decent work for those providing the training, with the recognition of the role of workers' organizations in sharing skills and learning, are imperative to ensure that systems keep the promise of decent work for all. The analysis of skills needs, the use of the latest technologies, and the provision of advice and guidance are well presented in the conclusions.

The text also recognizes the persistence of the digital divide and the need to overcome it. Almost half of the world's population does not have access, or only has limited access, to the internet, stopping those people from benefiting from current technological progress.

The conclusions also refer to productivity and how to improve it. In this respect it is important to underline that a good number of points specify that productivity should go hand in hand with full, freely chosen employment and decent work. With regard to productivity gains, we recall the discussion that took place in the Governing Body regarding the fact that productivity and how to improve it must be part of a global strategy to ensure decent work and decent wages for workers.

While the Workers' group perhaps understands better than most the differences that exist between countries, we would recall that the DNA of the ILO is to promote standards and principles. However, we feel that some parts of the text put too much of an emphasis on differences between countries instead of on the need to ensure the highest standards everywhere. Paid educational leave, well referenced in the text, is an example of this.

As for the Centenary Declaration, which promised a transformative agenda for gender equality, given the segmentation that is typical of our labour markets and apprenticeship systems in this respect, the conclusions of the discussion will help to fulfil this promise, although we would have liked to see some stronger and firmer language in this regard. The references to workers who face discrimination and exclusion, including indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, and persons in fragile and vulnerable situations, bring real hope that the

exclusion of so many of them from skills and learning opportunities will be overcome as a result of ILO action.

We welcome the fact that the proposed conclusions give prominence to robust and well-funded systems, supported by qualified and quality teachers. The acknowledgement in point 2 of the fact that increased investment in skills development and lifelong learning is not a cost but an investment in the future must guide the policy response at all levels. We would like to repeat, as we said in the Working Party, that it is an investment that should be the responsibility of employers and that it is also in their interest. Tripartite processes inevitably involve compromise, and while we do see some weaknesses, we think the conclusions we reached contain many strong points.

I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Working Party, Ms Eunice Kigenyi, who was so very patient throughout this process. I would also like to welcome the commitment of the Employer Vice-Chairperson and spokesperson, Ms Lindiwe Sephomolo, and the Government members who worked with us in our efforts to guarantee skills and lifelong learning systems that are accessible not only to the privileged and the well placed, but to all members of all societies all over the world. This should be a central element to further the recommendations contained in these conclusions during the Governing Body's deliberations on the strategy to be adopted.

To conclude, I would like to thank my own group for the trust they placed in me in asking me to guide them in this discussion. I would particularly like to thank the Worker members of the drafting group and the teams from the International Trade Union Confederation, Education International and the Bureau for Workers' Activities. Allow me also to thank the Office and the interpreters, as well as the regional spokespersons.

With these comments, I am happy to recommend, on behalf of the Workers' group, these conclusions for adoption in plenary by the International Labour Conference.

Ms Kigenyi

Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning

I have the honour, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning, to present to you some observations on the proceedings and the outcome of the Working Party's work. Let me highlight a few points to complement the excellent account of our work that you have just heard from the Reporter, Mr Philip Vieira, and from the Vice-Chairpersons.

Allow me to start by recalling that the last general discussion on skills occurred in 2008 at the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference, which adopted the resolution concerning skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development. Since that time, many things have happened. Technological change, digitalization and climate change have accelerated and brought new challenges and opportunities and imposed new priorities for skills development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015. The same year marked countries' renewed commitment to fight climate change in the Paris Agreement. The ILO initiated the global discussion on the future of work, and in 2019 adopted the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work with a human-centred approach.

The role of skills development in achieving the human-centred approach in these multifaceted transformations and in reaping the benefits of a decent future of work for all is of no doubt.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has required new goals for skills development and lifelong learning, recognizing the role of reskilling and upskilling measures in overcoming the current crisis and building forward better.

And so it was time to revisit the subject of skills and lifelong learning and to agree on the following: key challenges and opportunities for skills and lifelong learning in a changing world of work; key elements of modern skills systems; the roles and responsibilities of governments and social partners; and the role of the ILO as a global leader on skills and lifelong learning.

We were presented with a rich, informative, well-written pre-Conference report, *Shaping skills and lifelong learning for the future of work*, which was the result of extensive research and consultations both within the Office and with the constituents. The report provided a picture of megatrends and their implications on skills and lifelong learning needs, discussed working solutions and innovative approaches to skills development systems, including governance and financing mechanisms, and sought guidance from the Conference on the way forward towards an ILO strategy for inclusive and future-ready lifelong learning that is responsive to labour market needs.

The data presented in the report demonstrated that, in spite of a steady increase in years of schooling, gender and country disparities prevailed, skills mismatches persisted and adult learning remained underfunded. It further underlined the growing importance of digital skills, skills for the green transition, and core skills. The report demonstrated that, in order to make the systems of skills development and lifelong learning future-ready and to facilitate transitions to the labour market, skills needs anticipation, good governance and social dialogue are crucial. It showed that recognition and validation of skills and prior learning, including informal and non-formal learning, facilitate the utilization of skills and reduce skills shortages in the labour market. It pointed to the need to increase investment in lifelong learning and improve the inclusiveness and relevance of skills development, supported by a multi-stakeholder approach and social dialogue.

The dynamic discussion of the Working Party showed that, despite unanimous agreement among all tripartite partners on the renewed importance of skills development and lifelong learning as key enablers of sustainable development and full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all, there was no unified agreement on the operational matters and elements of a modern and good-quality system of skills development and lifelong learning.

During our deliberations we were cognizant that agreeing on the key principles and elements would be challenging, given the difficult context of the changing world of work that is affecting different countries and regions in a different way, and at the same time the high expectations from skills development and lifelong learning by all.

Taking into account the range of issues raised during our deliberations, the different perspectives offered, and the array and wealth of national and regional circumstances that were debated by the Working Party, looking back I submit to you with gratification that the three weeks of our work have been extremely productive, constructive and rewarding. Our conclusions are strong, substantive, actionable and forward-looking. They have been integrated into a comprehensive framework for action that all three parties – Governments, Employers and Workers – could support and adapt to their specific needs, taking into account the diversity of their national contexts. Our guidance to the Organization and to the Office is strategic, with clearly identified expectations. I believe in this area, too, we have succeeded in striking the right balance between the need for continuing, deepening and strengthening the

work in critical and relevant areas that is already under way, and the need to take up new and emerging issues.

We were tasked with discussing the challenges and agreeing on key elements of good-quality skills systems and key roles for the tripartite constituents and the Office. In all modesty, I think that we have done an excellent job in fulfilling this task. This was made possible through effective social dialogue and consensus-building around all issues. This extended to many tough questions where there were different opinions and perspectives.

In this respect, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the members of the drafting group, which started its work with tentative conclusions prepared by the Secretariat, based on the two days of general discussion. The concise tentative conclusions were just a basis and it took many deliberations of the drafting group to arrive at the draft conclusions. The drafting group itself was a testimony to social dialogue, where all three sides – Governments, Employers and Workers –brought their constructive proposals and views.

I would like to thank the Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Lindiwe Sephomolo for the Employers and Ms Amal El Amri for the Workers, for their passion, vision and commitment. I would also like to thank the Government members for their useful contributions and thoughtful reflections throughout. My thanks also go to the more than 200 delegates who attended and participated actively for their full and positive engagement.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the Secretariat: the representative of the Secretary-General, Ms Martha Newton, and the deputy representative, Mr Sangheon Lee, and a special thanks to the team of senior advisers and experts for the excellent preparation of this Working Party discussion, the comprehensive background report that provided an excellent basis for discussion, and their competent support during the deliberations. Last but not least, I thank the coordinators, Ms Lisa Wong and Ms María Recort Ruiz, who provided continuous, smooth and efficient support throughout the entire three weeks of our work, and who worked long hours to assist the Working Party in producing the final outcome.

The work of our Working Party has now ended, but the real work is just beginning. The Conference called upon the Organization to develop a coherent, inclusive and gender-responsive ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022–30. It also called upon the Director-General to present the strategy to the Governing Body with an estimate of the resources required to implement it. We, the ILO constituents, are of course committed to continue engaging and supporting the formulation and implementation of the strategy.

I would like to end by quoting a few lines from our conclusions. These words clearly reinforce the significance of the work of our Working Party and place the responsibility on all constituents and the Office to ensure that the conclusions are implemented: “Increased investment in skills development and lifelong learning is not a cost but an investment in the future. It is key to facilitating a human-centred approach that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient ... [R]ecalling that the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195), states that Members should recognize that education and training are a right for all, and taking into account national circumstances, governments should work in cooperation with the social partners towards ensuring access for all to lifelong learning ...”. The conclusions call on the Office to support, among others, capacity development of the ILO constituents and to implement “initiatives to assist governments who, in cooperation with social partners, develop and implement inclusive, responsive and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems”.

The President

The discussion on the outcomes of the work of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning 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

We congratulate all tripartite constituents who worked together tirelessly to come up with a thorough set of conclusions on pertinent policies, systems and frameworks for inclusive, responsive, and resilient skills development and lifelong learning.

The conclusions encapsulate the vision of the international community as firmly expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, and the ILO global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

The future of work is characterized by an abundance of technological advancements, chief among which is the imminent digitalization of work. This offers several advantages for the global workforce, but also brings forth some disruptions and inequities. It is undeniable that disruptions and inequities associated with an increasingly digitalized labour market have been exacerbated by the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to a sturdy social protection mechanism that leaves no one behind, countries of the world need robust policies, systems and frameworks for skills development and lifelong learning to equip their workforces with the skills, capabilities, and qualifications necessary to move forward and successfully navigate an increasingly challenging world of work. Indeed, inclusive, gender-responsive and flexible and innovative learning options for skills development and lifelong learning are key to addressing the disruptions and inequities in the global labour market. We are therefore very pleased to note that this was fully recognized in the conclusions. Specifically, we would like to welcome the emphasis in the conclusions on: the integration of skills development with social protection; the provision of assistance to strengthen the capacity of social partners at national and regional levels to contribute effectively to skills development and lifelong learning systems; the integration of education and training strategies with active labour market policies to facilitate skilling, reskilling and upskilling; the provision of flexible learning pathways in national qualification frameworks that support the portability of skills of workers in both the formal and informal economies; and the implementation of a robust system for the recognition of partial and full qualifications, including micro-credentials, acquired through all forms of prior learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning.

We are happy to note that the conclusions also emphasize the importance of creating and strengthening systematic and coordinated approaches based on social dialogue and tripartite and multi-stakeholder cooperation in formulating policies, strategies and programmes on skills development and lifelong learning. We therefore encourage Member States to include, as a priority, skills development and lifelong learning at the country level in Decent Work Country Programmes. This will ensure sustainability and the provision of technical assistance by the International Labour Organization.

Finally, the conclusions fittingly provide the foundation for the development of a coherent, inclusive and gender-responsive ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022 and beyond, while renewing the joint commitments of the ILO tripartite constituents to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, we, the Governments of the Africa and the Asia and Pacific groups, fully support the adoption of the conclusions.

Mr Essah

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

Nigeria is pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Africa group, and aligns itself with the cross-regional statement made on behalf of both the Asia and Pacific and the Africa groups by the Secretary of Labour and Employment of the Philippines, Mr Silvestre Bello III, who is the current Chairperson of the Government group. We congratulate the Secretariat; the Chairperson of our Working Party, the distinguished Ambassador of Uganda; the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons; all regional spokespersons; and the observers for their excellent cooperation, constructive engagement and demonstration of flexibility in ensuring the smooth running of this second part of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference to deliver acceptable conclusions on inclusive, responsive and resilient skills development and lifelong learning.

The outcome of our deliberations is an expression of our collective resolve to address the pressing skills and lifelong learning challenges, at a time when the world of work is undergoing profound transformations due to technological advancement as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear that our renewed commitment to a better future of work by the adoption of the proposed conclusions builds on the positive momentum created by the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. In this regard, the implementation of these conclusions will be critical to achieving sustainable development and social justice, while ensuring economic prosperity and decent work for all.

The Africa group believes that one of the strongest ideas emerging from this Working Party is the need to lift the barriers that negatively affect the equitable access of the most vulnerable groups to skills development, especially those in the informal economy, and we hope that the implementation of these conclusions will offer lifelines, opportunities and possibilities to all people, especially in developing countries.

We also highlight the importance of cooperation among all of us: governments, employers, workers and all related stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels. The Africa group looks forward to further engagement with all, especially the ILO, in providing the required policy framework and technical support, including resource mobilization, global partnerships and intensified promotional campaigns for the ratification of relevant international labour standards to realize the ideals of these conclusions.

Africa is more determined than ever to take advantage of its demographic dividend to build a pool of young, skilled workers through increased investment in quality technical and vocational education and training institutions to reduce unemployment, as highlighted in the African Union vision document, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. We will continue to accelerate the development of our abundant human capital, to invest in science and technology and innovation, and to increase access to tertiary and continuing education, by capitalizing on the digital revolution and global knowledge, reaching out to large numbers of people and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously, by developing relevant and high-quality curricula to bridge the skills gaps in our economy.

It is in the light of the above that Africa will strengthen its capacity-building institutions in collaboration with the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin. This way, the continent will be in a position to produce the highly skilled personnel needed in the ever-changing labour markets.

The adoption and transmission of these conclusions to the Governing Body for implementation will be instrumental in the efforts towards a sustainable recovery, which is dependent on the establishment of a robust pool of skilled workers and the mainstreaming of skills and lifelong learning into ILO policies and programmes. We firmly believe that these conclusions reflect our resolve to build back better and to foster a stronger, fairer and more inclusive society. Africa therefore endorses the adoption of these proposed conclusions.

Mr Gao

Government (China), speaking on behalf of the Asia and Pacific group

The Asia and Pacific group (ASPAG) aligns itself with the cross regional statement delivered by the Philippines. First, allow us to add our voice to the congratulations on the adoption of the proposed resolution of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all members of the Working Party for their efforts and hard work during the past few weeks on this important topic. In particular, we would like to convey our highest appreciation to the Chairperson of the Working Party, her Excellency Ms Eunice Kigenyi, whose great leadership and diplomatic skills helped us to negotiate the difficult task at hand and achieve our objective. Our cordial thanks also go to the spokespersons for the Governments and the social partners for their spirit of compromise and determination to reach consensus on a strong call to action for the ILO and its constituents to redouble their efforts in the area of skills development and lifelong learning. Last but not least, we would like to express our appreciation for the incredible work accomplished by the Office, in particular the technical staff and the interpreters. Without your support, we would not have been able to achieve all that we have achieved.

ASPAG supports the Conference's adoption of the Working Group's proposed resolution. It firmly believes that skills and lifelong learning are powerful tools for supporting a robust recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and paving the way forward towards achieving social justice, decent work and sustainable development in the world of work. We welcome the recommendations for future ILO actions and look forward to a constructive and comprehensive discussion at the 346th Session of the Governing Body on a coherent, inclusive and gender-responsive ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning. Finally, ASPAG would like to take this opportunity to renew its commitment to engaging and cooperating with all ILO constituents in joint efforts to further this important agenda.

Mr Solano Chacón

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

Costa Rica is making this statement on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC).

GRULAC commends the commitment and willingness shown in the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning to highlight that the challenges and opportunities surrounding this issue require a human-centred approach, which is essential in order to drive

the growth and development of human talent in economies and labour markets affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the sittings of the Working Party, it was established that measures to be taken in the future should not only be framed by social dialogue, decent work and shared responsibilities among governments, employers and workers, but also be aimed at closing gaps in access to education, the digital divide and gender gaps and at removing the obstacles faced by different population groups, with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups.

To this end, a holistic and systemic approach must be adopted so that skills and learning are matched to the needs of the labour market, taking into account the views of employers and workers in order to ensure that training is effective and relevant and that all working people have equitable and equal opportunities and decent work.

GRULAC recognizes that the challenge posed to us by the future of the world of work centres on the promotion of more productive, environmentally sustainable, inclusive and resilient economies and societies. We trust that the ILO will continue to support Member States and the social partners in efforts to create a global strategy that promotes fair, equitable and efficient skills development and takes into account the different populations, the diverse social realities and the models of productive development in our countries.

It is clear, at the conclusion of this enriching stage of our discussion and assessment of the different views on this issue, that learning and education should be seen as an essential right for the development of life itself and must therefore be provided in a way that respects all fundamental human rights and access to decent work.

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 (EFTA) country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

We warmly thank the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning as well as the Office for their tireless work over the last two and a half weeks. We would also like to thank the interpreters and translators for their excellent efforts in facilitating our work.

We wish to convey our appreciation to the social partners and all other constituents for their constructive and engaged participation in this global dialogue and in working towards achieving consensus on these conclusions – even more so in this exceptional virtual format. We recognize the utmost importance of this session of the International Labour Conference taking place and the continuation of these working parties, even if they are delayed or reorganized due to the pandemic.

We believe that the conclusions concerning skills and lifelong learning adopted by the Working Party in today's sitting represent an important step in advancing the discussion on this issue in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – notably the targets set out in Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5 and 8 – and our joint commitments under the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, adopted in June.

At the conclusion of this 109th Session of the International Labour Conference, we reaffirm our commitment to these objectives and wish to express our strong belief that investment in skills and lifelong learning is an investment in people and, by extension, our future. The EU and its Member States acknowledge and support the pivotal role the ILO plays in assisting Members in building and improving skills and lifelong learning systems, making them more and more inclusive and accessible for all. We welcome the actions identified in the conclusions, which urge the ILO – and reinforce its leadership role in this respect – to develop a coherent, inclusive and gender-responsive strategy for 2022–30, extend its collaborative efforts across the multilateral system and expand its capacity-building efforts with and for Members.

We hope that the adoption of these conclusions in this final plenary today serves to underscore the fundamental importance of developing and investing in robust, resilient and adaptive skills and lifelong learning systems that are accessible and inclusive for all, including vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities. We hope that these systems will thus enable people to navigate the many transitions – including digital and green transitions – that they may encounter throughout their lives. We look forward to resuming our work when developing the ILO skills and lifelong learning strategy for 2022–30, as well as in the context of the upcoming standard-setting discussion on apprenticeships in 2022 and 2023.

Ms Lara Povedano
Minister of Labour and Social Security (Costa Rica)
(Original Spanish)

The Government delegation of Costa Rica would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Secretariat to bring together the different views from around the world on tackling the challenges and opportunities that exist in respect of skills development and lifelong learning. This is in itself a challenge, given the different national realities and economic circumstances, particularly right now, in the light of the negative repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis.

We strongly support the measures proposed to strengthen skills development systems and lifelong learning, as this is a prerequisite for the development of inclusive public policies that will generate opportunities in conditions of equity and equality, thus eliminating gender discrimination and strengthening the capacities of educators and training institutions.

It is essential to make education and lifelong learning a fundamental right of workers, particularly for those facing inequality, such as women, people with disabilities, young people, migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, to mention a few.

We agree that there is a need to reconfigure skills development systems in a way that guarantees coherence between training supply and skills demand in the current labour market. We acknowledge that informality in the labour market presents us with additional challenges in this regard. Therefore, we appreciate the emphasis that has been placed on the role that could be played by the ILO in providing support to governments in order to tackle adequately the transition to the formal economy – which is so essential – as well as the digital divide and the adoption of new technologies in a way that does not have a negative impact on vulnerable groups, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises or businesses that operate in areas that are disadvantaged in terms of connectivity or from a territorial point of view.

We believe that the final conclusions prove how relevant it is to place productive employment and decent work at the heart of the social and economic recovery. This requires the coordination of employment policies with development and productive transformation policies.

At the close of this important international forum, we would like to emphasize the call to put people at the centre of policies and measures for economic recovery, which in turn entails strengthening, adapting and modernizing skills development and training systems, adopting a resilient, sustainable, inclusive approach and harnessing the benefits of social dialogue. Thank you very much, and congratulations to all those involved in preparing this global agreement.

Resolution concerning skills and lifelong learning: 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 the general discussion on skills and lifelong learning, that the Working Party is submitting to the Conference, the text of which is contained in *Record of Proceedings* No. 10A.

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. Congratulations on this important outcome that prepares the ground for our Organization's strategic action to align skills and lifelong learning with the Sustainable Development Goals. The Conference as a whole thanks you for your commitment and tireless efforts to bring to a successful end the work of the Working Party.

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)