



# 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting

Singapore, 6–9 December 2022

## ▶ Report of the meeting

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## Election and appointments

1. The 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting of the International Labour Organization (ILO) was held in the Republic of Singapore, from 6 to 9 December 2022.
2. The Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Director for the Arab States welcomed participants, thanked the host Government and opened the Regional Meeting.
3. On behalf of the Government group, a Government representative of the Philippines put forward a candidate for the position of Chairperson of the Regional Meeting, and the Meeting unanimously elected H.E. Dr Tan See Leng, Minister for Manpower of Singapore, to this post. The Meeting unanimously elected Ms Arti Ahuja, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment of India, as Government Vice-Chairperson; Dr Robert Yap, President, Singapore National Employers Federation, Singapore, as Employer Vice-Chairperson; and Ms Mary Liew Kiah Eng, President, National Trades Union Congress, Singapore, as Worker Vice-Chairperson.
4. In accordance with the *Rules for Regional Meetings, 2021*, the Meeting appointed the members of its Credentials Committee as follows: Ms Alison Durbin (Government, Australia), Mr Paul Mackay (Employer, New Zealand), and Ms Clare Middlemas (Worker, Australia).
5. The Meeting established a Drafting group to prepare the conclusions of the Meeting, composed of five Government representatives, five Employer representatives and five Worker representatives, with the following members:
 

<i>Government representatives:</i>	Australia, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, and Qatar.
<i>Employer representatives:</i>	Mr Scott Barklamb (Australia), Ms Sonya Janahi (Bahrain), Mr Srinageshwar (India), Mr Vajira Ellepola (Sri Lanka), and Mr Hobart A. Va'ai (Samoa).
<i>Worker representatives:</i>	Mr Felix Anthony (Fiji), Ms Elly Silaban (Indonesia), Ms Ryu Mikyung (Republic of Korea), Mr Richard Wagstaff (New Zealand), and Mr Hasan Abdulla Alhalwachi (Bahrain).
6. The Meeting suspended the application of certain provisions of the *Rules for Regional Meetings, 2021*, in accordance with article 8 of the *Rules*.<sup>1</sup>

## Special opening address by Her Excellency, Ms Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore

7. *Her Excellency, President Halimah Yacob of Singapore*, said her Government had been a member of the ILO since the country's independence in 1965, and she had served in the ILO Governing Body herself for many years. The Government was honoured to chair an ILO Regional Meeting for the first time. The region had enormous potential and rising influence, accounting for more than half of the global population and more than a third of the global economy. The Asian middle-class was growing and the workforce's access to education was on the increase. Digitalization was reshaping Asian economies as smartphone use spread. The economic environment was uncertain due to a high inflation driven by rising food and energy prices. Nevertheless, economies had proven resilient and capable of adapting in the

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<sup>1</sup> Article 8 of the *Rules* was suspended with regard to the functioning of the Drafting group on the conclusions of the Meeting, in order to allow it to fulfil its function efficiently and decide on its own modalities, and article 10 on the right to speak was suspended with regard to the presidential address, the four thematic plenary sessions and the two special plenary sessions, to allow greater flexibility in the organization of their work.

face of past crises. Hence, it was her belief that they would emerge stronger from the ongoing challenges.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic had been the most challenging crisis in recent times, bringing an unprecedented economic slowdown and labour disruptions to Singapore. The country had experienced its worst recession since its independence, with steep falls in employment numbers, worse than those witnessed during the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Nevertheless, the Government had taken decisive steps and unemployment rates had since recovered to pre-COVID-19 levels. This had been helped by high levels of trust between Singapore's tripartite constituents, built over many years, which had ensured efficient and effective strategies and coordination were put in place. Such strategies included the expansion of the Jobs Support Scheme, which had allowed to keep unemployment rates low; the availability of training opportunities through the United Jobs and Skills package; as well as the drafting of guidelines to help employers implement measures to preserve jobs.
9. Tripartism and social dialogue would remain the key pillars of future economic and social policies, as they would be crucial to improve the situation of lower-wage workers, increase the pace of digitalization and support the evolving nature of work. Lower-wage workers were disproportionately affected by economic upheavals and high inflation. As far as increasing the pace of digitalization was concerned, the momentum acquired during the pandemic would continue to grow. This would require workers to learn new skills and businesses to adjust their operating models and redesign jobs. The Government, in collaboration with national social partners, had put in place various programmes to provide such support for businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises. Likewise, workers were benefitting from opportunities to develop their digital skills and benefit from life-long learning opportunities. Lastly, regarding the evolving nature of work, the changes brought about by the pandemic included a search for greater flexibility and a more balanced life.

## Opening statements

10. *The Chairperson of the Regional Meeting* welcomed delegates and reminded them that this year's Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting would be focusing on a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. He noted that the pandemic had seen many countries in the region face an unprecedented economic slowdown and labour disruptions, leading to significant concerns in terms of unemployment and stagnant wages. As the world emerged from the pandemic, it had to face other difficulties – inflation, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical uncertainties – that made achieving a human-centred recovery even more challenging. The ILO had an integral role to play in the recovery efforts by setting out a clear, global strategy that would unite countries with a common purpose and vision, anchored on the principle of tripartite collaboration and social dialogue. Like many countries, Singapore had sought guidance from the ILO on how to best respond to this crisis, focusing on saving jobs while protecting workers' livelihoods and businesses. By collaborating with its social partners, Singapore had been able to introduce measures to save as many jobs as possible and support workers whose jobs could not be saved. The Government of Singapore had expanded its development programs in order for workers to acquire new skills and prepare for new opportunities that would arise. The focus of the ongoing dialogue with social partners was to find ways to transform businesses and adapt to a new economic environment.
11. *The Chairperson of the Regional Meeting* thanked the *Employer Vice-Chairperson* and the *Worker Vice-Chairperson* for their strong support over the years. There was no better time or platform than the Regional Meeting for tripartite representatives to engage in dialogue and

chart a path towards navigating the uncertainties that lay ahead. He was confident that the Regional Meeting would help forge a clear path towards a human-centred recovery and looked forward to fruitful plenary discussions.

12. *The Director-General* of the ILO welcomed delegates to the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting and thanked the Government of Singapore for hosting the event. He praised the region for improving its record on the ratification and implementation of international labour standards, with an additional 50 ratifications since the last Regional Meeting. He also pointed out that Bangladesh had joined the list of countries to have ratified all eight fundamental conventions, before the addition of the two occupational safety and health Conventions at the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2022).
13. He referred to disadvantaged groups that were often left behind in the region, such as casual workers or micro-entrepreneurs in the informal economy. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he called on constituents to address the situation by strengthening labour market institutions and by extending to these workers the labour and social protections that could make their lives more secure. He recalled the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other subsequent or concurrent crises on social progress in the region. The pandemic had also disrupted education, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of young people who were not in employment, education or training. Many companies, especially small and micro-enterprises, had been forced to cease operations or were facing significant difficulties. The ILO's mandate to ensure decent work, workers' rights, business viability and workers' access to healthcare and income security was therefore more relevant than ever. Social justice should guide the outcomes of this Regional Meeting, as it was fundamental for building just and sustainable societies.
14. *The Director-General* referred to his report to the Meeting, entitled *Renewed social justice for a human-centred recovery*, and identified seven points on which the region should focus: economic growth inclusivity in Asia and the Pacific; gender equality; social protection systems; enabling environments for enterprises, fuelled by innovation and effective employment policies; climate-related natural disasters and the urgent efforts required to ensure a just transition to a green economy; labour market duality and the transition from the informal to the formal economy; and labour migration governance.
15. He reiterated that the common goal should be to get back on the pre-crisis track and build forward better from the COVID-19 pandemic. That meant prioritizing decent work and social justice as the driving forces for a human-centred recovery, and promoting increased investment in labour market institutions built on the foundations of social dialogue. He cited examples of countries that had scaled up support to households, workers and enterprises through the mechanisms of labour market institutions, and how countries with stronger labour market policies, institutions and social protection had successfully counteracted some of the shocks brought about by the crisis. He recognized, however, that investing in strong labour market institutions had fiscal implications and that the current constraints could last many years. Nevertheless, he called on constituents to honour their commitments to the *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*, in order to make progress on the ILO's decent work and social justice mandate. To do so, constituents needed to reinforce their partnership with the multilateral system and work together through a Social Justice Coalition to find common ground on the regional priorities for action. That was essential to achieve the human-centred future of work outlined in the *Centenary Declaration* and to drive a recovery based on an inclusive and transformative job-rich growth. He recalled the ILO's role as a champion of fundamental principles and rights at work and highlighted three areas for progress connected to the ILO's Decent Work Agenda: strengthening good governance, including through the ratification and application of international labour standards; supporting

constituents on the creation and implementation of strong and effective gender-responsive policies and institutions of work; and focusing on policy coherence, while significantly increasing investments in social justice in Member States. He assured constituents that the ILO stood ready to provide support in that regard. He concluded by stating that he fully trusted that constituents could work together to strengthen labour markets, increase productivity and ensure everyone benefited from shared prosperity.

16. The *Employer spokesperson* referred to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had devastated economies, societies, people and enterprises. The devastation had led to a very different world, facing multiple new economic, social and political challenges. His group was looking forward to seeking solutions that were realistic, practical and impactful, through outcomes that would guide the ILO's action in the region. He stressed the need to ensure the full implementation of any agreed commitment, which would entail aligning the Programme and Budget for both ILO Regional Offices with the outcome document. He called on constituents to be guided by the 2019 ILO *Centenary Declaration* and the 2021 ILO *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*. His group looked forward to producing a concise and action-oriented set of conclusions that would serve to promote the effectiveness of ILO action, address its gaps and to better shape region-specific future action. In order to set economies and societies on a sustainable growth path, several challenges needed to be addressed, including growth-oriented recovery; enterprise development, productivity and skills; demographic shifts, especially aging; the availability and sustainability of social protection; promoting economic participation and equality for women; pervasive informality; and climate change and disaster preparedness. He identified several priorities in that regard from the Employers' group's perspective: addressing the decline in productivity growth and its negative impact on workers and enterprise sustainability; recognizing gaps in skills, and how effective and demand-driven skills development and lifelong learning would benefit governments, employers and workers by advancing and promoting employability, sustainable development, productivity growth and economic prosperity; recognizing the pervasive nature of informality, and efforts needed to promote and deliver a smooth and sustained transition from informal to formal work; recognizing that the private sector was instrumental in creating jobs, and promoting conditions and enabling environments to support the growth and sustainability of enterprises. He added that constituents needed to work with the multilateral system and initiatives, including the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection, and the Global Coalition for Social Justice.
17. The *Employer spokesperson* highlighted three underlying principles that were essential to the employers: recognizing that strong and representative workers' and employers' organizations played an important role in building and sustaining inclusive societies, and were fundamental to achieving social justice and decent work; recognizing that investments in enterprises and in the labour market institutions were key to maximize their contributions; and recognizing that tripartism and social dialogue should be at the heart of ILO-led initiatives, policy reforms and development in order to build trust and cooperation. The speaker concluded his remarks by quoting the late Singaporean Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew: "A nation is great not by its size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, the discipline of its people and the quality of their leaders which ensure it an honourable place in history." His group looked forward to constructively engaging in the various sessions throughout the week and to a successful Regional Meeting.
18. The *Worker spokesperson* stated that her group fully supported the call for a *Renewed Social Justice for a Human Centred Recovery* and pointed out that new and emerging challenges – climate change, the pandemic and the geopolitical situation – had devastated the lives and livelihoods of people in the region since the last Regional Meeting (Bali, 2016). Jobs were lost

during the pandemic and inequalities had deepened in the region. Her group was in favour of a new social contract with governments and employers, particularly at the national level, that would be based on the ILO values reflected in the *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2021. Such a social contract would focus on decent jobs for all; respect of rights for all; fair and minimum wages; adequate and easily available social protection; equality, inclusiveness and no forms of discrimination. She regretted the lack of information in the Director-General's report on the devastating effect the pandemic had had on unions. The report should have addressed capacity-building initiatives for workers in greater detail. It lacked analytical work on trade union involvement in collective bargaining processes, as well as on efforts to improve legislation. She further regretted that governments had imposed laws that weakened workers' rights during the pandemic, and that labour courts had failed to address workers' related predicaments. The speaker recalled that the ILO supervisory bodies had identified several cases in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States in which freedom of association rights and principles were seriously and persistently compromised. While occupational safety and health had been included in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work, the Workers' group would still welcome a ratification and implementation strategy for the relevant instruments, as requested at the last Regional Meeting. Indeed, the year 2022 has been marked by conflicts between authorities and trade unions, notably in Bangladesh, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

19. *The Worker spokesperson* identified effective labour inspection as essential for the protection of workers and employers' rights in their workplace. The pandemic had exposed gaps in this area. Furthermore, while the report indicated that numerous actions were being taken by governments to tackle child labour, the pandemic – and the higher poverty rates it had created – had actually led to an increase in child labour. The Workers' group was concerned that the Sustainable Development Goal on child labour would not be achieved by 2030. The speaker added that the pandemic had exposed the lack of effective social protection systems in the region. The Workers' group supported the call for universal social protection and stood ready to work with the Office to strengthen its work in that regard. The implementation of the "One UN" approach required a better collaboration with workers and trade unions at large, in order to effectively implement Sustainable Development Goals and other ILO programmes. She conveyed her group's reliance on the ILO to strengthen unions by actively supporting workers in exercising their freedom of association and right to organize. In that regard, her group had raised concerns over the *Better Work* programme, which took over the role of independent unions in matters of collective bargaining. The Workers' group supported the proposals made in the *Director-General's* report and was ready to work with the ILO on climate action; equality; non-discrimination; women's rights; the protection of migrant workers' rights; and enterprise development.

## General discussion on the report of the Director-General: Renewed social justice for a human-centred recovery

### Introduction of the report

20. *The ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific* introduced the Director-General's report, *Renewed social justice for a human-centred recovery*. The report highlighted the achievements and gaps in the work of the ILO since the Bali Declaration was adopted at the 16th Regional Meeting. An emphasis was placed on good examples of tripartite and bipartite social dialogue in the design and implementation of policy responses to protect workers and businesses and safeguard incomes during the pandemic, including in key sectors. The report also focused on achievements of workers' and employers' organizations in the



region, including to expand membership and adjust to digital transformations. The report took note of support efforts made, through labour market policies, to facilitate transitions people had to make over the course of their lives, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. Country-level outcomes to establish or improve services aiming at protecting migrant workers' labour rights were also discussed in the report.

21. Many countries worked to build labour market institutions, although more remained to be done in light of the region's challenges in implementing social dialogue and continued low ratification records of international labour standards. The report highlighted good practices in several areas, including freedom of association, the protection of the right to organize, and collective bargaining, while recognizing that sizable challenges remained. It also highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis had raised the profile of occupational safety and health. The inclusion of the two conventions on occupational safety and health as fundamental conventions would further help advance the agenda on workplace safety.
22. *The ILO Regional Director for the Arab States* presented the current regional labour market outlook and challenges ahead. Adding to the harsh effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on labour markets, the region continued to face longstanding structural barriers to decent work and inclusive growth. High levels of informal employment, working poverty, gender gaps, youth exclusion, as well as child labour and forced labour, persisted as a result of weak labour market institutions. The report concluded that the longstanding decent work deficits and the confluence of crises underscored the importance of collaborating on the roadmap set by the *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*.
23. She emphasized some of the priority areas for action in pursuit of a human-centred recovery in the region. These included strengthening the institutional framework to support transitions towards formality and decent work; strengthening the foundations for social and employment protection and resilience, including the expansion of social protection to all workers and the extension of labour protection; and revitalizing productivity growth and skills for more and better jobs. She concluded that despite the many achievements in implementing the Bali Declaration and the leadership shown in response to the pandemic, the challenges ahead were many. Through shared commitment and efforts, the region's Member States, with the support of the ILO, could renew social justice and decent work for all and guide actions for a human-centred future of work.

## Discussion of the report

24. The Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Development for Labour of Saudi Arabia, speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), acknowledged that the common challenges across the region were often due to inconsistent policies and to the inconsistent application of policies. The region would benefit from policy harmonization through collective action. Some of the progress achieved since the adoption of the Bali Declaration had eroded due to the COVID-19 crisis. Yet some progress could be seen again, for example in the area of social protection. He now urged countries to work together, with the ILO playing a leading role, to achieve a rapid recovery and pursue sustainable development based on national priorities. He stated that the GCC had set good examples during the pandemic, in efforts to protect all work. He praised the Regional Meeting as an opportunity to review challenges faced by countries, such as healthcare coverage and digital gaps, and as a platform to focus efforts on a human-centred recovery.
25. *The Minister for Skills and Training of Australia* stated that his country, as a proud founding member of the ILO, felt privileged to abide by the Organization's principles in working with social partners to advance the ILO's vision for a human-centred recovery. The Regional



Meeting came at an important time, given the many challenges the world of work was facing, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the environmental and social crises, and the skills crisis Australia was currently experiencing as one of the biggest challenges of the decade. To withstand such difficulties, the Australian Government had undergone various reforms through tripartite consultative processes. The recent Jobs and Skills Summit was one of the positive results brought about through tripartite planning to overcome the skills needs challenge. Furthermore, efforts were underway to protect workers' wages and safety at work, close gender gaps and plan for flexible training systems to support human resource needs in emerging industries. He expressed his confidence in the outcome of the Regional Meeting that would promote a collective response to common regional challenges and support efforts to make the future of work fair for all.

26. *The Workers' delegate from Japan* emphasized the harsh impacts the COVID-19 crisis had on the most vulnerable groups, including migrants, women and informal workers, caused in part by countries' weak social protection systems. Expanding social protection was therefore a priority for the region. Its numerous social issues stemmed from weak social dialogue practices and low ratification rates, especially of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98. He stressed the importance of strengthening efforts to improve ratification rates, as agreed in the Bali Declaration which continued to be relevant and whose implementation still needed to be monitored. Furthermore, while some countries had ratified core conventions, they continued to demonstrate abuse in the area of trade union rights, thus showing that ratifying conventions was not in itself enough to ensure progress on labour standards. In order to ensure an inclusive economic growth, countries would need to take appropriate action on labour rights, including for workers at all levels of the supply chain, with the support of the ILO. In order to keep the dialogue going on human rights and labour rights, it was important to continue holding regional meetings.
27. *The Employers' delegate of Bahrain* took issue with what he perceived as a double standard for the treatment of labour migrant-receiving countries. He emphasized that many countries with high percentages of migrant workers had now demonstrated positive records on the treatment of labour migrants in terms of wages and benefits, and wished for such progress to be acknowledged by the global community. He also called for some modifications in restrictions placed on countries showing improvements in the realm of labour rights, such as Qatar. He also emphasized how important it was for the ILO to remain independent from political pressures.
28. *The Minister of Labour of Qatar* noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had led to increased inequality, poverty and unemployment. It weakened social protection, increased informality, widened the digital divide and contributed to global instability. The Government of Qatar believed that social justice was the answer to these challenges. This meant a focus on equality and non-discrimination grounded in decent work, sustainable development strategies, and tripartite cooperation. The Government adopted several approaches, including social protection measures, to mitigate the pandemic's health and economic impacts. This coincided with legal reforms under Qatar's National Vision 2030, including through the implementation of international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work. The Government further introduced reforms to improve the livelihoods and working conditions of migrant workers, such as dismantling the state sponsorship or *kafala* system, facilitating job switching through a labour re-employment platform, ensuring fair recruitment through visa centres in labour-exporting countries, establishing a minimum wage and setting up an online complaint platform. The Workers' Support and Insurance Fund had up until recently distributed US\$ 320 million to cover unpaid allowances and wages and the number of dispute settlement commissions was increased from three to five. Qatar also adopted legislation to protect workers from heat stress while raising awareness

on occupational safety and health and strengthening its labour inspectorate. The Government remained committed, together with the social partners, to achieving social justice and decent work despite the current challenges.

- 29.** *The Minister of State for the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore* said the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to the shared goals of inclusive growth and decent work. Singapore's immediate priority had been to save jobs and workers' livelihoods. This led to setting up a tripartite National Jobs Council, which helped fill over 160,000 jobs and skills opportunities. During the pandemic, the Government helped hire an additional 47,000 workers through its Jobs Growth Incentive while retaining an estimated 165,000 jobs under its Jobs Support Scheme, helping employment rise in 2022 above pre-pandemic levels. Tripartism played a critical role, leading to an expansion of the country's progressive wage model for lower-wage workers, and recommendations to strengthen protections for platform workers. Post-pandemic, the Government remained focused on skills development, providing training subsidies for job seekers, existing workers, and those transitioning to new jobs. This was done in collaboration with employers and workers, based on a mapping of industries and jobs to anticipate changes in the world of work. Singapore's Centre for the Future of Work continued to engage with the ILO to foster tripartite dialogue on inclusive economic growth and decent work for all. The country remained committed to multilateral cooperation and tripartism to build a more resilient future of work.
- 30.** *The Minister of State for Labour and Employment of India* said the Regional Meeting coincided with India assuming the G-20 Presidency under which it was committed to tackle the economic slowdown and climate crisis. In a post-COVID-19 world, the path to economic recovery required the participation of all tripartite constituents. India's fast-growing economy and large young population was driving a technological and entrepreneurial boom. Yet, 90 per cent of the workforce remained in the informal economy, with its low-paying jobs and poor working conditions. Efforts to identify unorganized workers through the Government's *e-Shram* portal, along with extending health and social security coverage, were key to reducing inequality. India introduced an Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code in line with the ILO's inclusion of safety and health as a fundamental principle and right at work. The pandemic led to the proliferation of some jobs, while others declined as a result of technological change. This required identifying skills gaps and opportunities to properly plan for investments in skills development and help the workforce adapt to changes in the world of work. The pandemic showed the importance of labour migration to the global economy and the need to provide migrant workers with social security and safe working conditions. Women workers were particularly hard hit during the pandemic. A human-centred recovery should include improvements to female labour force participation, enhanced education and employment opportunities, reduced gender-based discrimination and the elimination of violence and harassment at work. Lastly, in light of the recent Conference of the Parties (COP 27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), it was critical to honour climate targets while ensuring a just transition for the benefit of all citizens. India was committed to pursue measures to ensure economic resilience and sustainable employment for all workers and enterprises.
- 31.** *An Employers' delegate from Saudi Arabia* highlighted three topics in the report of the Director-General, namely, social justice, sustainable development, and decent work. The report offered a coherent vision for constituents on how to promote sustainable development in times of crisis, which was also relevant for mitigating and overcoming future crises. Employers in the Arab States faced many challenges linked to the global economic recession as a result of COVID-19. In Saudi Arabia, social dialogue among the tripartite constituents was helpful in finding agreeable measures in response to the pandemic. In particular, the employers worked with the Government on a number of projects to identify

new patterns of work and new markets. This helped lay a new foundation for more sustainable development in the country. The Regional Meeting was an opportunity to draw lessons from the pandemic on how to confront crises and to strengthen the role of tripartite social dialogue.

- 32.** *An Employers' delegate from China* noted that the global economy was on a slow path to recovery. Countries in Asia and the Pacific needed to enhance cooperation and play a leading role in bolstering economic recovery and social development towards implementing the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The speaker welcomed the report of the Director-General and its focus on a human-centred recovery, which required contributions from all parties, including the business community. The China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) was committed to this approach and focused on three aspects. The first was promoting harmonious labour relations in enterprises as a means for businesses to overcome the pandemic. The CEC developed a guide for businesses on labour and employment in the context of pandemic prevention and controls in March 2022. It urged employers to prioritize employee safety and health, underscoring the importance of worker consultation. It also called on local employers' organizations to survey the needs of enterprises and help them make full use of the Government's labour and employment policies, while monitoring changes in the labour market and new forms of work. A second focus was on digitalization and high-quality enterprise development. The CEC established a committee to support this business transformation among its members, conducting online workshops that reached over 6 million participants. The third area of focus was on promoting low-carbon, sustainable growth. In light of the Chinese Government's carbon emission targets, the CEC established a committee to support employers in their efforts towards green enterprise development.
- 33.** *A Workers' delegate from the Republic of Korea* emphasized the need to face the challenges of digitalization, the climate crisis and demographic changes. It was important to enhance international cooperation to recover from the global crisis with an emphasis on inclusiveness, sustainability and resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic increased inequality to unprecedented levels and led to negative global real wage growth for the first time this century. Russia's aggression against Ukraine affected the livelihoods of those caught in the conflict, and the resulting energy and food crisis impacted people all over the world. While governments delayed action on carbon emissions, the climate crisis threatened the most vulnerable populations. The ILO *Director-General's* election pledge for a new social contract was desperately needed, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region where social dialogue was not fully realized, and fundamental principles and rights were denied in several countries. The speaker said that in the Republic of Korea, freedom of assembly was restricted during the pandemic, and gave examples of the detention of trade union leaders and Government actions in response to a truck drivers' strike, despite the country's ratification of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) and the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions called on the Government to meet its commitments under these Conventions. An inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery was not possible without fully recognizing freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The ILO's standards and supervisory system were central to this goal.
- 34.** *The Minister of Labour and Social Development of Bahrain* stated that, while his country had indeed been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, it had seen certain success stories that stemmed from the active humanitarian, health and economic initiatives adopted by the Government. In particular, financial support was provided to enterprises, thereby preventing the need for layoffs. In its national recovery plan, the Government placed an

emphasis on attracting job-creating investments in promising sectors; supporting workers through social protection, including unemployment insurance; ensuring safe and healthy conditions of work and living for all workers, including migrant workers; and helping national and expatriate workers alike to transition between jobs through employment services. The Government took its obligations to fight human trafficking and forced labour seriously and invested in institutions aimed at preventing abuse.

- 35.** *The Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Security of China* expressed support for the ILO and its role in supporting a human-centred recovery, adding that the Chinese Government was already working towards this shared objective. Noting that workers were the builders of a better world, an emphasis had been placed, at the recent 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, on furthering their well-being, safeguarding their interests and promoting a people-centred philosophy of development. In China, progress had been made towards reducing poverty and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development before the year 2030. Progress had also been made in the areas of job creation, worker income and labour law reforms within the world's largest labour and social security system. Despite changes in the world of work and the intricate international environment, China remained a driver of global economic growth. The Government would continue to work with the ILO towards making employment growth and labour rights a central focus of macroeconomic policies, thereby enhancing the inclusiveness of development. China would continue to promote harmonious labour relations and a fairer distribution of earnings, while ensuring that social security functioned as a safety net.
- 36.** *The Minister for Labour and Social Protection of Mongolia* shared concerns on the adverse effects of the pandemic on employment and standards of living. To preserve jobs and mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the Mongolian Government undertook several measures, such as granting subsidies on utilities, cash transfers and enterprise support measures, including low-interest loans and exemptions on social security contributions. The Vision 2050 policy, adopted by Mongolia in 2020, and the revised Labour Law, adopted in 2021, were examples of the Government's commitment to international labour standards; principles and rights at work, including safety and health, equal pay and the right to organize; social protection; and the objective of a human-centred recovery. He acknowledged the importance of sharing experiences on labour policies, poverty reduction and other areas discussed at this Regional Meeting and expressed gratitude for the continued support and technical assistance provided by the ILO.
- 37.** *The Workers' delegate of China* stated that efforts were being deployed to implement the Bali Declaration, and more recently to achieve a human-centred recovery as described in the report. She recalled the importance of building institutional frameworks to support the transition from the informal to the formal economy and to improve labour market conditions, especially to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions had been actively supporting recovery efforts through training and capacity building activities for industrial workers, following new forms of work and increasing their sense of protection. At the same time, collaboration and technical assistance initiatives had been established with other countries, such as Mongolia, Singapore and Cambodia. The 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party had provided a platform to communicate the country's dedication to social justice, workers' rights and the collaborative pursuit of a human-centred recovery for a bright future for all.
- 38.** *A Government representative of the United Arab Emirates* (Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Communication and International Relations) highlighted the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis on economic development, adding to other threats on the global social order, including climate change. Regardless, the United Arab Emirates were advancing on the road to social justice, having taken swift action to protect the health of all persons without

discrimination, to support small and medium-sized enterprises and to promote labour relations within industries. Given the Government's progress on social matters and its commitment to decent work, there was a growing sense of optimism for the future. The Government had supported a just transition while encouraging the green transformation at the national level, as well as in other countries where the United Arab Emirates were providing technical assistance in support of such transition. The Government had agreed to help developing countries achieve their green transitions and would host the COP 28 Summit in 2023.

39. *The Minister of Home Affairs of Brunei Darussalam* emphasized the importance of macroeconomic policies to promote a human-centred recovery that would not merely consist in a return to normal practices, but in enhancing inclusive growth and sustainability. The Government had taken action to counter the effects of the crisis while reducing some structural deficiencies to bring more stability for enterprises and workers through the following three pillars: promoting lifelong learning and skills development, through the Manpower Employment Council that encouraged private sector enterprises to upskill and reskill their workers, including through online means; developing digital solutions, including online employment services; and creating employment opportunities for youth, including through an internship programme which had benefited more than 7,000 youth since 2017. The Government had deployed efforts in support of workers' well-being, which included investing in social protection and active labour market policies, as well as in digital training to promote income continuity for small businesses.
40. *The Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour of the Republic of Korea* stated that, despite the labour market recovery in the country, there was still work to be done to respond to the challenges of the future of work, which would result in an increase in job and income insecurity for those impacted by changing employment structures and informality. His country had a comparative advantage in its development and use of digital technologies which was applied in public services, for instance in the integrated employment services system. Other areas of priority for the Government included action aimed at promoting safety and health at work, a fundamental right for which all partners needed to take a shared responsibility. In response to the intervention by the Workers' delegate from the Republic of Korea on the previous day, he said that production losses caused by industrial action were in the area of 32 billion dollars. Some workers were being treated unfairly as a result of the strike, including through income loss and a compromised safety at work. He emphasized the need for continued cooperation with the ILO and increased regional cooperation in areas relevant to the promotion of a human-centred recovery.
41. *A Workers' delegate of Singapore* welcomed the opportunity for tripartite dialogue at the Regional Meeting and stressed the importance of information sharing in order to shape a human-centred recovery. Despite challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, social partnerships in Singapore had grown stronger. The country's achievements towards increasing worker security included the creation of an advisory committee on platform workers in 2021, and the establishment of a task force bringing together workers' and employers' organizations to address the needs of professionals, managers and executives (highly skilled workers), which would go into effect in 2024. Social partners also worked together to form company-training committees that supported workers and enterprises in the areas of job design, reskilling and the green transition. She expressed support for the Director-General's call for a new social contract and Social Justice Coalition for a human-centred recovery that would benefit all workers.
42. *A Government representative from Nepal* (Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security) acknowledged the challenges faced by the world of work and identified the priorities set in the Bali Declaration and the *Global call to action* as the roadmaps for



recovery and resilience. One priority area currently pursued by the Government and supported by the Prime Minister's Office was the development of an integrated approach, through a tripartite discussion, to supporting the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Work was also underway to expand social protection to the self-employed and migrant workers, increase skills development and strengthen the labour administration system. As a pathfinder country of Alliance 8.7, Nepal reaffirmed its commitment to the elimination of child labour and forced labour. The country remained committed to social justice and welcomed the continued support of the Office.

43. *The Minister of Labour of Thailand* provided details on the Government's actions in support of job creation, especially for young people, and worker protection. During the pandemic, the Government worked as one to protect jobs and workers through the distribution of vaccines, and extended employment benefits and support to small and medium-sized enterprises. In spite of the low unemployment rate and the country's quick recovery, more needed to be done to ensure job security, including for informal workers. Priorities had been set through the Decent Work Country Programme, and the Government was committed to its continued cooperation with the ILO and the international community to promote a future of work built on decent work for all.
44. *A Government representative from the Philippines* (Undersecretary for the Department of Labour and Employment) said his country had experienced significant job and work-hour losses during the pandemic, leading to increased poverty and inequality. Several job-saving and social protection measures helped mitigate its negative impacts and, under a new government, the Philippines was pursuing a recovery focused on sustainable growth and resilience through innovation. The goal was to pursue a socio-economic agenda to make the Philippines a middle-income country by 2028. The speaker highlighted several national priorities, including the creation of decent work by promoting traditionally job-rich sectors; supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, the gig economy and the green economy to generate quality jobs; enhancing short-term and low-skilled emergency employment programs; and modernizing the agriculture sector. The Government was focused on revitalizing productivity growth and skills, particularly through technical and vocational education and training (TVET), even proposing the creation of TVET innovation hubs within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Lastly, he noted efforts to strengthen institutions to support transitions in the world of work and ensure social and employment protection. These efforts targeted enhanced employment services, improvements to labour laws such as occupational safety and health and migration, as well as strengthened social dialogue to ensure stakeholder-driven solutions.
45. *An Employers' delegate from Japan* noted that digital, industrial and climate transformations posed challenges to sustainable growth. Increasing productivity and labour force participation, while helping workers transition to growth industries, was crucial for Japan's economy. To this end, tripartite dialogue in Japan was focused on skills development and lifelong learning, flexible labour market institutions and social protection. To help build responsible supply chains, the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) developed tools in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These emphasized respect for human rights, social dialogue and the importance of occupational safety and health as a fundamental principle and right at work. Keidanren urged the Government of Japan to ratify the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) given the importance of this issue to Japanese businesses and the good practices they could share, including through continued collaboration with the ILO.
46. *An Employers' delegate from the Republic of Korea* recalled the tremendous negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy and labour markets, especially in Asia and the Pacific. Added to this, new global challenges from the war in Ukraine to supply chain

disruptions and inflation risks jeopardized the recovery. Since enterprises were key to job creation, the most effective way to promote a swift recovery was to create an enabling environment for innovation and sustainable growth. This required support for new industries and jobs. Yet current labour regulations were not well-suited to these new businesses and ways of work. Labour market and regulatory flexibility was thus required so that businesses and workers could adapt and harness growth opportunities. The Korean business community agreed with the country's recent ratification of three ILO fundamental Conventions. However, workers' rights should be strengthened in a balanced manner to secure business continuity and strengthen industrial relations in Korea. He referenced a recent truck driver industrial dispute in this regard and urged the ILO to consider the diverse and unique context of Member States and the views of all stakeholders.

47. *A Workers' delegate from Thailand* expressed concern about precarious employment in his country, resulting from the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers, particularly in the tourism industry. To survive, many businesses took decisions without regard for workers' livelihoods – cutting jobs, decreasing wages and benefits, or closing entirely. More than one million workers were laid off, many of them older workers with limited job alternatives. In the current recovery phase, employers were once again hiring workers, but often on a short-term or subcontracting basis. This led to lower wages and weakened job security – a trend that undermined efforts to achieve fair and sustainable employment. In response, trade unions in Thailand campaigned and secured legislation for preventing exploitative labour sub-contracting and to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. Yet, the implementation of this law remained inadequate. He called on employers to fully comply with it and to recognize the inter-dependence of business and labour.
48. *A Workers' delegate from Australia* emphasized the importance of high-quality public vocational education, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4. She welcomed recent federal and state government investments in technical and further education (TAFE). This was life-changing for many in Australia, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who were previously excluded due to the high costs of TAFE courses. These improvements came about through a Jobs and Skills Summit, proving that tripartite dialogue could deliver improved opportunities for lifelong learning, skills development, career pathways and workforce participation. While the report of the Director-General referred to skills and work in terms of productivity and economic benefits, these were also key aspects of the social contract between the Government and the community. Building and investing in the skills and capacity of national labour markets created greater economic and social opportunities across the region. TVET was central to this effort and governments should not use the pandemic as an excuse to undermine these services. Online courses were isolating and could not replace the value of in-person training, particularly given the significant digital divide in Australia and other countries in the Asia and the Pacific.
49. *An Employers' delegate from Nepal* noted that the *Director-General's* report highlighted the importance of resilience towards economic recovery and the need for increasing the coverage of social protection, skills development, business growth and sustainability. He hoped that the ILO would develop strategic initiatives and support for countries dealing with ongoing post-pandemic challenges. In the current environment, Nepal's economy faced significant obstacles related to a slow recovery, widening trade deficits and increased inflation. The private sector, in collaboration with government and workers, was nonetheless making efforts to stimulate business growth, create jobs, and extend social security coverage through formalization. The increased use of information technology and changes in the forms of work had resulted in job cuts, which necessitated a workforce with new skills. These transformations were impacting the informal economy and industrial relations in Nepal, and required new policies to build resilient and sustainable enterprises.



While countries in this region were diverse and at different stages of economic growth, regional meetings were beneficial for providing strategic direction and promoting economic growth.

50. *The Minister of Labour of Palestine* said that social justice and sustainable development were still elusive for millions of people, including for Palestinians who continued to live under occupation in disregard of international norms. When the Oslo Accords were signed in 1991, mediators had said that Palestine would become the next Singapore in terms of investment, job opportunities, technology, and income levels. Nevertheless, in 2022 Palestine saw an unemployment rate among the highest in the world, with corresponding high levels of poverty. Despite the Israeli occupation and its negative impacts on the Palestinian people and workers, the Palestinian Authority had strengthened collaboration with employers and workers, holding its first national social dialogue conference. Through this engagement, efforts were ongoing to establish new laws on social security and occupational safety and health. He called on the support of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly for the implementation of the new National Employment Strategy to create job opportunities, for which an international meeting would be held in February 2023.
51. *An Employers' delegate from Pakistan* agreed that, as stated in the report of the Director-General, the pandemic had seriously hurt economic growth, workers, and enterprise sustainability in the region. The slow growth in labour productivity and widespread informality were structural barriers to decent work and inclusive growth. He believed that the Director-General's three-dimensional strategy for achieving a human centred recovery was key. Pakistan was going through a period of rapid social and economic transformation and the Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP) was committed to support the Government in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through private-public partnerships. This included employer-led skills development councils, and efforts to implement fundamental principles and rights at work and those encompassed in the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in key economic sectors. Recently, the EFP worked with the ILO and its tripartite partners on gender equality, youth and women empowerment, climate change action, and Better Work Pakistan. These actions would contribute to efforts towards a human-centred recovery in Asia and the Pacific.
52. *A Representative of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)* noted that the Asia-Pacific region included more than half of the world's workers. Growth in this region was important to the world economy. However, it was unbalanced growth, and the rewards of growth had not been distributed fairly. The ITUC had just completed its fifth world congress, calling for a new social contract and economic paradigm, aligned with the Director General's initiative for a Social Justice Coalition. Workers needed good jobs, decent wages, respect and equality, rights at work and social protection. Social justice, grounded in social dialogue and rights at work, was key to tackling the threats of conflict, climate change and the pandemic. He welcomed the decision to add occupational safety and health to the ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work. He urged Member States to ratify and implement the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). He called for an end to attacks on trade unionists in the region, adding that workers needed freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and freedom of assembly and speech. The ITUC endorsed the Director-General's social justice vision and called on countries in the region to join trade unions in this initiative.
53. *A Representative of the International Social Security Association (ISSA)* said that the Association was united with the Director-General in advocating for social security and decent work. Social security and employment insurance had been central to reducing the economic, health and social impacts of the pandemic. Yet the crisis exposed gaps in coverage, the

difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable in society, and inequalities between regions. Following the pandemic, it was important to overcome the challenges to effective social security through collaboration with all stakeholders. The report of the Director-General highlighted key priorities in this regard, namely: extending social security coverage; expanding the risks against which people are protected; promoting innovation to enhance the delivery of benefits; and empowering people through rehabilitation, re-skilling, and investments in personal health. The ISSA looked forward to its continued collaboration with the ILO on these matters, including in this region.

54. *An Employers' delegate of Thailand* spoke to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis that impacted Thai workers and enterprises, as well as migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Government action enabled workers to isolate while receiving medication, safety equipment and food and beverages at no cost. Employers helped workers to overcome the crisis, including by exploring work-from-home arrangements for many of them. Lessons learned from the pandemic would take into account benefits and challenges of remote work, especially as the Government was preparing to study labour law reform regarding flexible working arrangements, as well as mechanisms aiming to address the particular circumstances of digital platform work.
55. *A Workers' delegate of Saudi Arabia* commented on the need to learn lessons from the pandemic, including how to enhance national and international cooperation for more decent and sustainable jobs. In Saudi Arabia, the Vision 2030 framework set out a strategy aiming to create growth that would benefit all through decent working conditions. Efforts had been made by the Government to create jobs and provide universal protection with various revisions of labour law and social policies, including improvements in contractual arrangements agreed to with social partners. The ratification of Conventions Nos. 95 and 120 and of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, served as further evidence of the Government's commitment to supporting workers and respecting labour rights. Recent efforts to promote women's roles had resulted in an increase in female labour force participation.
56. *The Minister of Labour and Employment of Bangladesh* drew attention to the turmoil brought to labour markets, equality, peace and stability as a result of the recent crises. Despite these challenges, the Government had managed to balance lives and livelihoods by protecting workers' salaries and providing them with medicine and safety equipment, especially to those working in export-oriented industries. Since the last Regional Meeting in Bali, progress had been made on labour issues in Bangladesh. The Government had revised labour law in 2018, adopted regulations on export-processing zones, ratified Convention No. 138, invested in the labour inspectorate system, removed children from hazardous work and simplified trade union registration processes. In that regard, the number of trade unions in the ready-made garments sector had increased significantly. Furthermore, minimum wages and a universal pension scheme had been introduced in the garments sector. She expressed her Government's intention to continue to strive for an improved labour market situation with an increased productivity and decent work in the country, and looked forward to a continued collaboration with the ILO.
57. *The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour of Samoa* shared the concerns raised in the Director-General's report regarding the many challenges the world of work was facing, in particular the need to develop education and skills in order to support the recovery of businesses, extend job prospects to marginalized groups and eliminate child labour. The second national employment policy in Samoa put people at its centre, focusing on worker representation to generalize their access to decent work. Work on labour legislation, and in particular on violence and harassment in the workplace, was underway as the country was preparing to ratify Convention No. 190. The country's priority areas included skills

development and the governance of labour mobility. He supported the ratification of the 1986 amendment to the ILO Constitution, which brought about important changes for Member States, especially by putting inclusion and equity into practice. Furthermore, given the urgency of the matter for Pacific Island countries, climate action, through the Climate Action for Jobs initiative, was of the utmost importance. He urged leaders to take their commitments to climate action seriously in order to bring about real outcomes that benefited all.

- 58.** *An Employers' delegate of Bangladesh* stated that, despite the gravity of the pandemic's impacts, the resilience people showed when given the right support had been inspiring. The recovery efforts required partners in the country to work together on institutional frameworks that prioritized productivity and skills development. Without putting people first, true development would remain elusive. In order to promote sustainable development, countries needed to do more to facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy, strengthen foundations of labour and social protection, and revitalize productivity growth and skills. Furthermore, there was a need for an exchange of good practices and experiences and for an increased political will for cooperation, including multilateral partnerships. In the pursuit of a human-centred recovery, all social partners had roles to play. Workers, in particular, needed to be ready to adjust to a world of increasing digitalization, and to recognize that the majority of businesses were small enterprises striving to survive. With mutual understanding and compassion, partners should be able to work together towards their common goals.
- 59.** *A Workers' representative from India* recalled this was the first post-COVID-19 Regional Meeting, as well as the first one after the ILO's Centenary in 2019. Fundamental principles and rights at work needed to be achieved through the universal ratification of relevant instruments. The national and cross-border mass labour migration was a key concern requiring an appropriate legal framework. Workers in the informal and formal sectors needed to be provided with health protection. In light of this, Member States needed to put in place the recommendations contained in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). India's large workforce was present in the manufacturing, agriculture, platform and service sectors. The country had committed to a Decent Work Country Programme for 2018-22, so the time had come to establish a programme for 2023-27, for which the ILO was holding regular consultations and workshops with all stakeholders involved. There had been times when workers had not been adequately compensated for their work. Certain large industries and multinational corporations in India did not always equally observe labour standards. As a result, important decent work deficits had been observed during and after the pandemic, including for female workers who had been victims of sexist assaults and other forms of harassment. Thankfully, India's Government had recently introduced a 26-week paid maternity leave nation-wide. Governmental assistance was required in certain sectors affected by the pandemic in terms of social welfare. Lastly, he congratulated the continuous efforts of tripartite constituents and the ILO in Asia and the Pacific in favour of decent work.
- 60.** *The Minister of Manpower of Indonesia* recalled the impact of the pandemic on the world of work, particularly on people in vulnerable situations. Due to the great diversity in the socio-economic and cultural contexts of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, recovery efforts and results had been uneven, among and within countries. Asia and the Pacific needed to respond to the challenge by advancing cooperation, solidarity, social justice and the spirit of humanity. Indonesia's G-20 Presidency in 2022 had focused on the employment sector's recovery through capacity development, updated skills strategies, stronger labour and social protection, entrepreneurship promotion, support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and disability inclusion. During its upcoming chairing of the ASEAN in 2023, the

country planned to prioritize a focus on a human-centred recovery in the world of work. In line with the Bali Declaration of 2016, Indonesia had taken concrete steps to ease the impact of the pandemic and promote a human-centred recovery. Those steps included stimulus packages, fiscal incentives, social safety nets for formal and informal workers, the expansion of labour-intensive industrial programs, the promotion of tripartite social dialogue, and the protection of Indonesian migrant workers. Important regulatory reforms had also been introduced. The four key priorities for countries in the region to boost productivity and realize a human-centred recovery should be: continued investments in skills development and lifelong learning; strong frameworks to support the transition to formality and decent work; strong foundations for social and employment protection; and the strengthening of multilateralism to promote a human-centred agenda. No country could overcome global challenges in the world of work on its own. Indonesia stood ready to collaborate with other countries in Asia and the Pacific through social dialogue and welcomed a new era of social justice.

- 61.** *The Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare of Iran* thanked the Government of Singapore for hosting the meeting. The Director-General's report highlighted that the uneven recovery of the countries in the region posed a grave threat. Countries were exiting the crisis asynchronously and disparities within and between countries were widening. The COVID-19 crisis had revealed structural deficits in decent work and inclusive growth which made national labour markets vulnerable to shocks and crises. Furthermore, it had reaffirmed the importance of focusing on these structural deficits in the mid-term and long-term ILO agenda, while taking into account the unique economic and cultural contexts of Member States. The sanctions imposed on Iran had heightened the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic had damaged Iranian businesses and led to millions of job losses, particularly in the service sector. The country's COVID-19 high council had developed a set of measures aiming at mitigating the impact of the crisis by providing people with free, all-inclusive vaccination (five different vaccines were developed by young Iranian scientists), supporting vulnerable groups, protecting micro, small and home businesses, ensuring business continuity and protecting employment. A substantial remedy package had been allocated to unemployment insurance, which had been supplemented by cash benefits and in-kind support for targeted households in 2020 and 2021. There had been a 57% increase to the minimum wage to better balance wages and living costs and boost purchasing power. The specific challenges of the world of work in Asia and the Pacific, home to 60% of the world's workforce, needed to be accurately represented in ILO decision-making bodies. Likewise, the revision of the current status of regional representation in the ILO would be a requirement for renewed social justice in the region.
- 62.** *A Government representative of Pakistan* (Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development) welcomed the Global Coalition for Social Justice. A human-centred approach would accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals through collective efforts and an optimal use of resources. The recovery from the pandemic had been asymmetrical. Developed countries had been able to save jobs thanks to their easy access to information and communication technologies, which in turn had fostered flexibility and inclusion. On the other hand, the digital divide, illiteracy, inadequate skills, the ever-increasing debt burden and negligible relaxation measures applied by international financial institutions on repayments had led to a massive loss of employment opportunities and disruptions in the supply chains in developing countries. This, in turn, had affected workers and small and medium-sized enterprises in the informal sector. The ILO needed to orient its action and advocacy efforts towards making progress on universal social protection that would leave no one behind; youth employment; gender equality; a just transition towards digital and environmentally sustainable economies; formalization; fair labour migration; building labour market resilience in fragile settings; and decent work in

supply chains with a focus on inclusivity. South-South cooperation needed to be promoted and the capacity of institutions of work strengthened through research, study visits and thematic knowledge exchanges. The country also called for an Asia and the Pacific-wide migration policy which would improve workers' conditions and promote decent work and secure jobs in the region. Universal health protection was an excellent measure to ensure the fundamental right to basic health services and progressive health coverage. It was imperative that trade policies enhance the participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the economic activity. Regional and global trade of goods and services, as well as investment agreements, needed to contain provisions for effective safeguards against supply chain disruptions.

- 63.** *A Workers' representative from Viet Nam* recalled that this Regional Meeting was the first to be held since the adoption of the ILO *Global call to action* adopted at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2021). She hoped the Meeting would adopt meaningful policies to improve living and working conditions for all workers across the region, while promoting social justice and decent work worldwide. The human hope for social justice had become particularly important in the development of national strategies. The consequences of the pandemic had shed light on the sustainability shortcomings of the economic growth model. It was therefore urgent to promote and renew bipartite and tripartite dialogue mechanisms in joint efforts towards a human-centred, inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery. During the pandemic, the Government had approved a number of recommendations formulated by trade unions which had greatly benefited workers in various ways, thus confirming the role and responsibility of trade unions. This included the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements which enhanced compliance with the State's regulations and policies, hence benefiting all parties involved. The ILO's technical support had helped unions build their representatives' capacity. The Organization should continue to implement programmes to strengthen the role and presence of trade unions in international institutions and facilitate tripartite cooperation nationally, regionally and internationally.
- 64.** *The Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour of Japan* expressed his country's support for the Global Coalition for Social Justice initiative. He welcomed the timely discussion on the economic and social impact of the pandemic and the establishment of a roadmap towards a human-centred recovery. The slowdown of Japanese manufacturing industries during the pandemic had brought to light worldwide economic interdependence. Therefore, it was essential to ensure that national labour market infrastructures were resilient. Japan had been working to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by taking flexible measures based on a robust labour market infrastructure. The first pillar of these measures was the unemployment insurance system. The second pillar was vocational training, which was helping those forced to leave their jobs to acquire the skills necessary for new employment opportunities. The third pillar was a comprehensive regional employment service organization with a nationwide network. It was also important to improve productivity and skills among workers. Society as a whole needed to invest in human resources so that workers could respond flexibly to the structural changes in industry stemming from rapid technological progress. Japan invested in human capital through vocational training and re-education. As the largest contributor of voluntary contributions to the ILO in the region, Japan would continue to make every effort to achieve decent work in the region, while also placing value on dialogue with social partners.
- 65.** *An Employers' representative from India* had recorded far better growth figures over the last few quarters. The credit went largely to the pragmatic support provided by the Government to all constituents during these trying times. This support included the distribution of two million vaccines, the delivery of rations to people at their homes, and a systematic handling



of small and medium-sized enterprises. The pandemic had exposed the fragile social protection that existed in society. The Indian Government had implemented stimulus packages to provide immediate relief to the vulnerable section of the society. The world needed to support these vulnerable groups too. He thanked the ILO for the various tools and guides it had prepared to help employers' organizations respond to their members' needs at a time of crisis. He recalled the Council of Indian Employers had also taken various initiatives with the ILO's support and named a few of them. Furthermore, India had successfully completed the simplification, rationalization, and codification of complex and old labour laws into four labour codes. This had been done through extensive tripartite consultations and an implementation plan was underway. Member States needed to collaborate in order to attain the ILO's objectives. The speaker reiterated the importance and relevance of regional meetings.

66. *The Secretary of State for Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia* recalled that delegates had gathered in Bali in 2016 to call governments, workers' and employers' organizations in the region to do more to promote inclusive growth, social justice and decent work. She thanked the *Director-General* for the report and stated that a time-bound roadmap should be established to ensure that all people benefited from the changing world of work, the continued relevance of the employment relationship and adequate protection for all workers, and to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment and decent work. She noted the significance of strengthening multilateralism for shared growth in a world facing multiple crises. Dialogue and action-oriented cooperation should be fostered with a view to addressing existing and emerging regional and global issues, particularly recovery efforts from the pandemic, with the aim of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite disruptions caused by COVID-19, her country had taken a number of measures to improve workers' living standards: increasing minimum wages in textile, garment and footwear industries through tripartite dialogue; promoting harmonious industrial relations through social dialogue; creating inclusive employment opportunities with a focus on gender and disabilities; expanding social protection by including informal workers; promoting technical and vocational training to increase productivity; promoting occupational safety and health to create a healthy working environment; and strengthening labour protection through labour inspection, law enforcement, and cooperation with development partners. It was essential to repair the damages caused by the pandemic and address pre-existing problems in the world of work. Recovery policies needed to foster investment and behavioural changes that would reduce the likelihood of future shocks and increase resilience. Cambodia stood ready to work with the ILO and the region to promote regional cooperation and collaboration, and to achieve a fully inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economic and social recovery, thereby creating decent work for all and addressing inequalities as set out in the *Global call to action*.
67. *A Workers' delegate from Nepal* thanked the organizers of the Regional Meeting. He highlighted the numerous challenges workers had to face as a result of global crises, including job insecurity, low wages, gaps in social security and rising costs of consumer goods. He stated that an effective tripartite mechanism was needed at the regional and national levels to address these challenges and build a just, inclusive society with strong workers' rights. In order to overcome poverty and job insecurity, strategies and programmes should be promoted to enable productive investments and the expansion of social protection. In Nepal, his organization had been engaged in bipartite and tripartite social dialogue with stakeholders to develop measures that would effectively address labour and employment issues, such as safety and health, employment and income security, and social security. He called for several initiatives to be implemented, such as: a joint platform for trade unions in the region to share experiences and good practices; structural reforms for social justice and inclusive societies; respectful labour and employment policies and

programmes; universal social security programmes; plans to complete the transition from the informal to the formal economy; and the alignment of policies with Sustainable Development Goal 8 on employment, decent work for all and social protection. He asked social partners and governments to commit to effective social dialogue, solidarity and support, and looked forward to a successful Regional Meeting.

68. *An Employers' delegate from the United Arab Emirates* thanked the organizers of the Regional Meeting. He stated that the United Arab Emirates occupied a pioneering economic position at the regional and global levels. He noted that trade activity had been on the rise, which demonstrated the level of productivity of his country's industrial and trade sectors, as well as their capacity to adapt to regional and global changes. He made reference to the measures put in place by the United Arab Emirates to alleviate the impact of COVID-19, both for individuals and businesses. The country had managed to achieve economic recovery through 33 diversification initiatives focused on: supporting the labour market; promoting the country's trade capabilities and productivity level; supporting digital transformation; and promoting the green economy, food security, priority sectors and small and medium-sized enterprises. He reminded delegates that the United Arab Emirates would be hosting the COP 28 Summit in 2023, and that he was looking forward to the adoption of measures that would stimulate economies and promote sustainability and development.
69. *A Workers' delegate from the Philippines* welcomed the opportunity to discuss with social partners and governments. He was looking forward to the ILO's High-Level Tripartite Mission to the Philippines in 2023, whose aim was to investigate possible violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining conventions. He called for an end to these violations so that Filipino workers could fully exercise their right to organize. He added that precarious work, as expressed mainly in labour *contractualization* in the Philippines, stood in the way of the full exercise of freedom of association. He was also concerned, as shown in the Director-General's report, that inflation had seriously eroded the real wages of Filipino workers. Trade union repression, *contractualization* and low wages resulted in serious violations of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98. He hoped that the Regional Meeting would achieve meaningful and concrete measures towards ensuring freedom of association and preventing these violations.
70. *A Government representative from Sri Lanka* (High Commissioner, High Commission of Sri Lanka) stated that the *Director-General's* report was timely in the context of multifaceted challenges faced by her country in the post-COVID-19 phase. The report had identified the two sectors that had been impacted most by the crisis, i.e. the garment sector and tourism, both of which Sri Lanka relied heavily upon. Although her country had been able to manage the impact on the garment sector, tourism had collapsed completely in 2020 and had been recovering ever since. Migrant workers had been highly affected by the pandemic, which in turn had impacted the national economy. The Government of Sri Lanka had initiated discussions on establishing unemployment benefits and health insurance schemes for workers in the private sector. Despite the challenging economic situation, the country was facing, the Government had formed a tripartite taskforce consisting of major trade unions and employers to manage matters related to workers. This arrangement led, inter alia, to the successful payment of workers in the private sector, thereby preventing them from falling into poverty. The minimum wage in Sri Lanka had been reviewed in 2021, and was expected to be further reviewed in 2022, taking into account the current economic situation. The country had also adopted legislation for the retirement age of workers in the private sector as a response to demographic changes and longevity. Furthermore, it had quadrupled compensation for work-related fatal accidents, and doubled the maximum compensation for termination. She added that her country was at the forefront of the elimination of child labour. In that regard, the Government had raised the minimum



employment age from 14 to 16 years old, and protected children from certain dangerous jobs.

71. *A Workers' delegate from Pakistan* regretted that many countries in the region had not implemented measures to protect workers during the pandemic. Moreover, income inequalities had deepened throughout this period, often at the expense of workers. Little progress had been made to reduce poverty since the signing of the *Declaration of Philadelphia* in 1944. The region had a relatively low ratification rate for conventions related to collective bargaining and the right to organize. The region needed to make significant progress on the issues of child labour and poverty through social dialogue. He regretted that laws on social protection in many countries were insufficient. He also raised concerns regarding climate change and its implications for Pakistan and the region as a whole, and called for immediate action in that regard. Lastly, he reminded delegates of the importance of tripartism, and called for constituents to promote it throughout the region.
72. *A Workers' representative from Palestine* thanked the organizers of the Regional Meeting. He stated that workers lost the most during the pandemic in terms of livelihoods, jobs and income. He called for change in policies and laws in order to promote social justice and decent work. He described the struggle faced by Palestinian trade unions, despite their ongoing engagement in tripartite dialogue. With the help of the ILO, they had been able to raise the minimum wage, draft a bill for a new labour law, and adopt a national plan for employment. He added that his organization was closely following the preparation of the Director-General's next annual report to the International Labour Conference on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, as it painted the picture for what could be expected in terms of social justice and decent work in Palestine. This report and others needed to be translated into actions that would help alleviate the suffering of Palestinian people and workers. Palestinian trade unions counted on the ILO's support.
73. *A Workers' representative from Mongolia* stated that human dignity and global cooperation were at the centre of this Regional Meeting. More than ever before, a dialogue between governments and social partners was needed. Mongolia had been conducting this social dialogue, in an effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. Deep inequalities were at the root of unemployment and poverty. The region was home to the largest migrant population in the world, and social partners needed to work together to protect that population which was often made up of young people. Migrants generated wealth and contributed to their local economies. He regretted that, for migrant workers, risks were high in terms of occupational safety and health, while income was low. He called for a new social contract that would make way for a more inclusive, human-centred sustainable development in every country. He also called for solidarity and collaboration between countries in the region, especially in the transition to the digital economy.
74. *A Workers' delegate from Indonesia* appreciated the progress made since the last Regional Meeting in Bali. He noted, however, that those achievements needed to be assessed in a new context, with a world of work that had changed dramatically in a short amount of time. The COVID-19 crisis had affected countries in multiple ways, and the emphasis on social dialogue in the Bali Declaration still held true for recent challenges. He asked that countries which had resorted to social dialogue to tackle COVID-19-related issues share best practices with their counterparts. He reminded delegates that digitalization was still considered a challenge for many countries in the region, and had led to a healthy competition between countries to prepare for digital transformation. While jobs would inevitably be lost in the transition, the key to complete it successfully was to overcome challenges while minimizing the impact of change. Post-pandemic economic growth would be affected by various factors, such as the state of the global economy, the social protection component, productivity, job creation, and the way recovery policies were aligned with other policies. He

looked forward to breakthroughs by the tripartite constituents in that regard during the Regional Meeting.

- 75.** *A Workers' delegate from Sri Lanka* praised the social dialogue mechanisms which had been in place in his country for more than 30 years. They had enabled social partners to find solutions to the numerous economic and social issues the country had been facing, including the COVID-19 pandemic. A historic tripartite agreement had been signed, allowing the country to save thousands of jobs. He regretted, however, that the National Labour Advisory Council had not been convened for months, and stated that a complaint had been lodged with the ILO by the trade unions, as social dialogue appeared to have come to a halt in the post-pandemic era. He acknowledged that certain structural reforms were necessary to face the different crises, but that these issues needed to be discussed with the stakeholders before being put into practice. Sri Lanka had not yet ratified Convention No. 190, despite a one-year campaign by the trade unions. The campaign would continue until the Convention was ratified and implemented.
- 76.** *A Workers' delegate from the Islamic Republic of Iran* stated that his country and its social partners sought to create job opportunities to reinvigorate the country's labour market after the COVID-19 pandemic. He praised the Government's measures, which helped the country's health and medical sector by creating hundreds of jobs. He regretted, however, the sanctions imposed on Iran, which hindered its ability to recover from the crisis. He praised the work of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and was looking forward to its findings in that regard, which should take the form of legal and technical solutions. He recognized that the pandemic had affected the attainment of decent work in Iran, but was hopeful that strengthening the role of social partners would help the country make progress in that area, with a focus on justice and human-centred development. He commended the role played by trade unions in the approval of Convention No. 98 by his country's Parliament, as well as in the expected raise in the workers' minimum wage after years of struggle. A "specialized committee of migrant workers" was being set up in the country.
- 77.** *An Employers' delegate from Qatar* highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises had exacerbated inequalities, increased poverty and unemployment, weakened employment protection and increased informal work. Now that most countries were in a recovery stage, reforms to labour laws and regulations needed to be introduced to ensure a timely response to the impact of the crises. He commended Qatar's recent reform, which better protected workers' wages and occupational health, and allowed them to change employers in an easier manner with the abolition of the sponsorship system. He praised tripartite dialogue and the technical cooperation provided by the ILO to achieve this result. He thanked countries and international companies for sending workers in order to complete infrastructures and sports facilities, allowing the country to successfully host the largest sports event in the world, thereby proving that the region was able to contribute positively to the international development agenda.

### **Thematic plenary session: "Integrated policy agenda for a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient"**

- 78.** The Regional Meeting held a thematic plenary session on the theme "Integrated policy agenda for a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient". The discussion was led by a tripartite panel, chaired by the Government Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms Sharanjit Leyl, a Singaporean journalist and news presenter. The panel was composed as follows:
- Mr Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Skills and Training, Australia;

- Mr Ali Bin Samikh Al Marri, Minister of Labour, Qatar;
  - Mr Leatinuu Wayne So’oialo, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour, Samoa;
  - Mr Farooq Ahmed, Secretary General, Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF);
  - Ms Karen Batt, Australian Council of Trade Unions (Pacific) (ACTU);
  - Mr Bambang Brodjonegoro, academic and independent expert, and former Indonesian Minister of Finance, Minister of National Development Planning and Minister of Research and Technology.
- 79.** *The Government Vice-Chairperson* introduced the *Moderator*, Ms Sharanjit Leyl, and handed the chairing of the session over to her.
- 80.** *The Moderator* introduced the labour market situation in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States and described the COVID-19 crisis’ negative impacts on both regions. Although gross domestic product had rebounded, economies remained below pre-COVID-19 trajectories, with a two-track recovery and more advanced economies recovering faster. She asked the panellists how far we had come from the COVID-19 crisis.
- 81.** *Mr Al Marri* recognized that COVID-19 had had dire ramifications on labour markets globally. Different countries and sectors were hit differently, making their recovery look different. In Qatar, some sectors, such as the tourism, gas and oil industries, were seeing better days as they were recovering faster than other sectors. However, economies with large informal sectors were experiencing more difficulties. He stressed the need for social dialogue and tripartite cooperation to ensure a stable recovery.
- 82.** *Mr O’Connor* stressed the importance of a strong ILO presence in the region. There had been varying degrees of response to the crisis. In Australia, some industries, such as aviation, had almost closed down during the crisis but were now quickly recovering. The Government had intervened in the labour market with the largest subsidies in history, investing billions to protect businesses and employment. Yet there was still a long way to go for a complete recovery. The pandemic had taught several lessons, including the need to rely more on domestic and regional supply chains and markets to mitigate dependencies.
- 83.** *Mr So’oialo* explained that Samoa had been severely affected, losing its national airline as a result of the crisis. As a small nation of 200,000 people, it was largely dependent on multilateralism and needed to strengthen partnerships with the private sector and continue labour exports. Tripartite dialogue was important in this context.
- 84.** *Mr Ahmed* noted how widespread the COVID-19 crisis had been, with its effects extending far beyond those of the 2008 financial crisis. Just as some recovery was being registered, the Russia-Ukraine conflict had created havoc. Developing economies with large informal job markets were suffering. The formal sector was recovering, albeit with limited new opportunities. Platform work was on the rise but was associated with a lack of social protection and high job precariousness.
- 85.** *Ms Batt* explained how the COVID-19 pandemic had triggered multiple crises leading to joblessness, excessive inequality and poverty. An additional 85 million people had been pushed into extreme poverty. Women, youth and marginalized populations, whose working conditions and social protection were already lacking before the pandemic, had been hit hardest. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals had experienced setbacks and the road to recovery would be long, as the rising inflation was worsening an already dire situation. Since the 2021 *Global call to action* called for “building forward better”, moving forward from this crisis could not be combined with underfunding social protection, undermining workers’ rights, and the rising threat of the climate crisis. The economy needed

to work for the people, and it was essential to ensure people were at the centre of any recovery programme.

86. According to *Mr Brodjonegoro*, the global recovery was volatile. In 2021, global growth was over 6 per cent, but in 2022 it had been only around 3 per cent, with the next year projected to decelerate to 2.7 per cent. The initial shock and slowdown were followed by an uptick in demand, which was met by disruptions on the supply side and a shortage of a skilled workforce. Now with weakening global demand, layoffs were to be expected.
87. *Mr O'Connor*, responding to a question on stimulus packages and lessons learned, explained that the Australian Government implemented fiscal stimulus in a contracting economy and increased expenditure to support businesses and employment through borrowing, which had led to significant public debt. Initiatives had been put in place for employers to maintain employment, as well as for job seekers. In hindsight, support aimed at businesses should have been more selective, only targeting those really in need. Furthermore, workers on the frontlines, including in the health sector, were among the ones contributing the most to the economy and needed to be elevated, as many were neither well-paid nor had secure jobs. He stressed the importance of creating a favourable environment for business, enacting legislation to make work more secure and strengthening bargaining for workers to better share the dividend of economic wealth. He recognized the need for investing in higher education, in technical education and training, in the local domestic economy, and for creating skilled migration pathways.
88. *Mr Ahmed*, elaborating on lessons learned and how tripartite constituents could collaborate more to provide decent and sustainable jobs, explained that the multiple crises had adversely affected the progress towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. He stressed the importance of effective social dialogue for better recovery processes and solutions. Private sector-led growth was essential and governments needed to create environments that would enable it, by displaying integrity and good governance with democratic values, and by introducing incentives for investment and innovation. He called for skilling and labour mobility policies and recognized the importance of implementing the *ILO Centenary Declaration and Call to Action for a Human-centred Recovery*.
89. *Mr So'oialo*, when asked what needed to be done to sustain and enhance intra-regional and multilateral cooperation around shared objectives for a human-centred recovery and towards the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, explained that the Samoan Government was working on strengthening the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management in order to strengthen the voice of the region and improve regional and multilateral cooperation, so as to better respond to regional and national emergencies. He was appreciative of Australia and New Zealand for protecting their closed borders during the pandemic. He explained that Samoa was focusing on community-based development for viable livelihoods, shared prosperity and leaving no one behind, especially women.
90. *Ms Batt*, in response to a question on how social dialogue could help improve policy coherence, started by acknowledging that social dialogue could be improved in the Asia-Pacific region. She pointed to the imperative of having well-functioning democracies for social dialogue to flourish, something the Asia-Pacific region still needed to strive towards. In that regard, the region was ranked second to last in the world in terms of workers' rights, as violations to their human and trade union rights had been on the rise since the pandemic. During that time, workers had also been subjected to police brutality, arbitrary arrests and killings. Much of these exactions had occurred under the guise of national security and COVID-19 prevention measures. Moreover, many amendments to the region's labour laws were passed, severely undermining the protection of workers' fundamental rights. Meanwhile, the region's ratification rate of fundamental conventions remained weak and

workers were often excluded from policymaking processes. Furthermore, public sector workers were not granted certain worker rights, with only one country in the region having ratified ILO Convention No. 151. Governments needed to play an important role, not just as regulators and legislators, but also as employers whose workers should be given the same rights as their counterparts in the private sector. They were also large procurers with significant leverage on worker rights along the supply chain. Governments were called upon to fulfil their obligations under fundamental ILO Conventions.

91. *Mr Al Marri*, referring to how governments could take advantage of the post-pandemic recovery to ensure that international labour standards, tripartite cooperation and best practice upscaling were made integral to building back better, highlighted that many of the challenges countries had faced during the COVID-19 pandemic were in fact structural issues that existed before the crisis. Healthcare provision, for example, was lacking in many countries in the region, and tackling this issue moving forward would require a close collaboration between the public and private sectors. Informality, while not necessarily a prominent challenge in Qatar, was certainly a wider issue that affected many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, translating into poor working conditions. It could only be tackled through a tripartite effort to boost job generation in the region, and should also be complemented by concerted efforts by governments to support private sector employers in retaining jobs. Many governments in the region had made mistakes while dealing with the pandemic. Border closures had a negative impact on labour markets, for example when vaccine rollout suffered from unequal access around the world, highlighting the importance of regional and global cooperation to deal with the global impacts of the crisis. There was a need for countries to share lessons and to work together in paving the way out of the crisis. Qatar was fortunate as a series of labour market reforms had been launched before the COVID-19 pandemic, playing an important role in helping the country navigate the crisis. The reforms included the dismantling of the *kafala* system, the establishment of a fund to protect and support workers and improvements to labour mobility, and had been especially important when borders were closed.
92. *Mr Brodjonegoro*, in response to a question on the use of demand-side policies to enhance a job-rich and human-centred recovery in a context of limited fiscal space, stated that governments in the developing world had several tools at their disposal to help them towards that goal. Those tools included more direct interventions through fiscal instruments, such as providing social assistance in the form of cash transfers to unemployed or laid-off workers. However, these programmes needed to be accompanied by up-skilling and re-skilling programmes. He affirmed that the survival of workers really hinged on one key aspect, namely productivity. Skilling could ensure a quick re-entry back into the labour force for workers receiving assistance, especially if they were changing professions. Tax incentives to support companies' cash flow and prevent them from laying off their workers had proven effective. Other indirect interventions were also required, especially when fiscal space was limited. Such policy tools needed to focus on the human side and make sure the economy created decent jobs while stabilizing demand by reining in inflation. Food prices should be at the very top of governments' priorities in the region. The young generation should not only be seen as a labour pool, but also as a source of entrepreneurship, innovation and job creation – and governments needed to harness that potential. These demand-side measures also needed to be supported by supply-side measures aiming at improving technical and vocational education, as well as training and skills certification.
93. *Mr O'Connor* highlighted the importance of the ILO as a vehicle and an avenue for a new approach to inclusive policymaking. He highlighted the important advances made in Australia in promoting a tripartite approach and collective bargaining. These advances allowed workers and employers to participate in decision-making and to share positive



outcomes which were beneficial to the economy, the labour market and democracy. He hoped that the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting would reaffirm the strong presence of the ILO in the Asia-Pacific region, which was one of the fastest growing regions in the world, and would be a driver of regional collaboration. Despite how differently countries across the world had experienced this pandemic, it remained a global challenge, and they needed to share lessons more closely on how to cope with the crisis. Inclusive institutions were crucial to giving everyone a say in decision-making, especially those marginalized groups who were at risk of being left behind. In doing so, better results could be expected from policies, which in turn would help promote peace, prosperity and democracy.

94. *Mr Al Marri* spoke about the role of the ILO as an important vehicle for fostering policy coherence, both within Member States and within the multilateral system. The ILO's work in Qatar since 2017 was highlighted to indicate the benefits of a solid collaboration with the Government and mutual support, particularly in improving the working conditions of migrant workers.
95. *Ms Batt* spoke of the need to call out unconscious bias in the world of work and regretted the rise in gender-based violence during the pandemic. Member States were called on to ratify ILO Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment, and Australia had pledged to do so. There were multiple and systemic forms of discrimination at the workplace, which needed to be addressed through social dialogue and tripartism. In this regard, particular attention needed to be paid to the needs of certain groups of workers, including migrant workers and those in the informal economy who faced onerous decent work deficits.
96. *Mr Ahmed* proposed a list of measures to address inequalities and discrimination at the workplace, including the need to tackle them through regional cooperation and policies targeting reduced economic vulnerability and increased diversification, which were particularly relevant to Arab States. It was also imperative to be cognizant of demographics – particularly the needs of aging and young populations in addressing inequalities and discrimination – and to frame responses accordingly. To address gender imbalances, it was important to target stereotypes and change mindsets; to undertake awareness campaigns; to promote mentorship, women's entrepreneurship, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) pathways, employment opportunities in small and medium-sized enterprises, pathways for women to re-enter the workforce, and network opportunities; and to place a gender lens on policy making, which needed to be grounded in social dialogue and tripartism.
97. *Mr So'oialo* spoke about the United Nations Secretary General's Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, stressing it, as well as local sectoral strategies, as means to mitigate the danger of a two-track recovery.
98. *Mr Brodjonegoro* spoke of the need to maintain domestic consumption, and to upskill and re-skill the workforce to ensure sustained productivity growth. The digital economy presented opportunities, but these opportunities needed to be harnessed through agile and adaptive labour market policies.
99. Questions from the floor elicited further elaboration on measures that would increase the participation of women in the recovery, including pay equity; revaluing pay for jobs (especially those low-paying jobs where women predominated); investing in childcare; ensuring adequate minimum wages; and eliminating secrecy clauses in employment contracts (which prevented the disclosure of remuneration rates). All measures needed to be underscored by giving effect to rights at work and promoting social dialogue, which implied strengthening the role of social partners. The Office was strongly encouraged to enhance its support to and engagement with constituents.

## Thematic plenary session: “Institutional framework to support transitions towards formality and decent work”

- 100.** The Regional Meeting held a thematic plenary session on the theme “Institutional framework to support transitions towards formality and decent work”. The discussion was led by a tripartite panel, chaired by the Employer Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms Sharanjit Leyl. The panel was composed as follows:
- Mr Eaknarayan Aryal, Secretary of Labour, Nepal;
  - Ms Shayma Al Awadhi, Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Communication and International Relations, United Arab Emirates;
  - Ms Florence Willie, Executive Director, Employers’ Federation of Papua New Guinea (EFPNG);
  - Ms Sonia George, Self-Employed Women's Association India (South Asia);
  - Mr Jean-Christophe Dumont, independent expert from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- 101.** *The Employer Vice-Chairperson* welcomed the *Moderator*, Ms. Sharanjit Leyl, and handed the chairing of the session over to her.
- 102.** *The Moderator* introduced the session by highlighting numerous gaps and challenges, including gender gaps, youth transition to the labour market, demographic transition, climate change and the green transition, formalization, and migration, all of which needed to be handled in an integrated manner in the post-pandemic recovery period.
- 103.** *Mr Aryal* explained, in response to the question of how a tripartite action plan to formalization was adopted in Nepal, that it was done through a tripartite consultation process in line with the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204). He explained the process of forming a tripartite committee in which other relevant agencies participated. The action plan intended to address some of the key causes of informality, such as social protection and sector-specific support to enterprises. He noted that the action plan and its implementation were intended to be a flexible process that could adjust to the emerging challenges and needs of the informal economy.
- 104.** *Ms Willie* highlighted that there were at least six interconnected transitions needed in the recovery process: (1) formalization of enterprises (94 per cent of all enterprises in the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific operated in informality); (2) greening and decarbonization, an area in which the Pacific countries are particularly vulnerable; (3) technological and digital transitions, which called for skills development as well as accessible network infrastructure; (4) demographic change, with implications for changes anticipated in skills and social programmes; (5) transitions from disasters and conflicts which might allow to build long-term resilience; and (6) governance of migration, including skills recognition, social security and taxation. Supporting the multiple transitions would require labour market institutions to be further strengthened.
- 105.** *Ms Al Awadhi* highlighted that the world of work has been drastically changing in the recent past, including through technological change, the fourth industrial revolution, and the impact of the pandemic. The pandemic had accelerated the adoption of a new work pattern with flexible policies in the economic and financial sectors. While meeting the technology and environmentally driven challenges may imply some job losses, it also could generate new opportunities in more green or technology-intensive jobs. Fulfilling these new employment opportunities required skills development through a lifelong learning



framework, including digital skills and enhanced competencies to survive in the private sector. She also highlighted some recently instituted or revised laws and policies that governed employment relationships in the private sector: Law 33, 2021, the youth self-employment policy, the unemployment insurance law, and social protection schemes.

- 106.** *Mr Dumont* noted that the pandemic had resulted in a considerable 30 per cent reduction of migration rates in 2020. It had rebounded by 23 per cent in 2021, but migration to some of the recipient countries in the region (for example Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand) had still not recovered. He highlighted that migration could be beneficial for both the migrants and their families, and the receiving economies, so long as it is well governed. He noted that migration is partly driven by population aging in the recipient economies. Some of the positive outcomes that migration could bring about included positive fiscal impact through migrants' tax contributions, and the skills possessed by the migrants. While migration governance had been improving, much more still needed to be done, as the pandemic highlighted the underlying vulnerabilities of migrant workers. These included the risk of being stranded in a foreign country, precarious housing conditions, and a lack of access to social protection. The pandemic had been an accelerator of change, including technological change and automation. Looking ahead to the near future, the adjustment processes in the labour market might entail more demand for migrant workers.
- 107.** *Ms George* shared her perspective on the issues and concerns of informal workers. Understanding informality required a holistic contextualization, as set out in the broad frameworks of Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) and the Bali Declaration. She highlighted the multiple dimensions of informality, including lack of access to the social protection system, lack of labour rights, including minimum wages, access to skills, occupational health and safety, rights of women and children, protection from unlawful dismissal, freedom of association and collective bargaining. She recalled the need for a more inclusive tripartite mechanism that redefined the roles of the governments and the social partners, such as the social solidarity economy which could be one institutional mechanism for formalization. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the underlying vulnerabilities of the workers in the informal economy, particularly women and youth, and they continued to be disproportionately affected. New forms of informality were emerging through the gig and platform economy. She recalled the vulnerabilities of the migrant workers who at times become informal workers in the destination countries, including in domestic work.
- 108.** *Ms Al Awadhi* highlighted the importance of both sending and receiving countries to protect migrant workers. Her country had launched the Abu Dhabi Dialogue in 2008: a voluntary platform to facilitate this dialogue, involving eighteen sending and destination countries across the Asia-Pacific and Arab regions, with her country acting as its permanent secretariat. To support the dialogue, research had been undertaken to address related challenges and opportunities. The governance of contractual agreements among Member States had and the joint recruitment policy in the region been strengthened with the aim of promoting transparency in migration-related policies. She mentioned reskilling and upskilling, as well as mutual recognition of skills, as other key initiatives that aimed to support women's entry in the technology-based sectors.
- 109.** *Ms Willie* said increasing economic and institutional resilience of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises would involve lower registration costs, easier access to finance, agile labour market frameworks, transitions to the green economy, better access to both domestic and international markets, incentives for the micros, small and medium enterprises to grow, and innovative ways to address informality. She highlighted three approaches that may be needed: a bottom-up, differentiated approach to leadership

development; an inclusive approach to increase employment in the formal sector; and a strengthening of social protection systems that were modern and sustainable.

- 110.** *Mr Aryal*, in terms of a sustainable formalization path through increased productivity of enterprises, highlighted the need to upgrade skilling mechanisms to make them demand-driven, the need to build a skills development ecosystem, and the continued need for structural transformation.
- 111.** *Mr Dumont* commented on the important roles that the governments and the social partners can play in the legalization programme of migrant workers (citing examples of IRE, FRA, CHL, ESP, etc.), dialogues between origin and destination countries on mutual skills recognition for better integration and re-integration of migrant workers, and preparation of an emergency fund to support migrant workers. In particular, he highlighted the importance of employers' partnership. He suggested that the workers could play an active role in promoting the voice of the migrant workers. In terms of better matching and recognizing their skills, he noted the importance of social dialogue at the national and regional levels.
- 112.** *Ms George* highlighted the social and solidarity economy as one mechanism which could be as instrumental to formalization as cooperatives had been. She highlighted other important institutional mechanisms, including collective bargaining, social security systems (which may need to be reformatted to meet the needs of the informal sector), worker representation in destination countries within the framework of the Global Compact on Migration, more inclusive governance processes, and shared responsibility among the governments and the social partners. Much of informal work was home-based, which called for more inclusive labour law reforms. In the post-pandemic recovery period, a new social contract was needed, involving greater protection informal workers, including in terms of occupational health and safety, the right to organize, and a collective bargaining framework.
- 113.** *Ms Al Awadhi* replied to a question by a worker representative regarding the management of a fund to support migrant workers by highlighting the newly instituted (December 2022) unemployment insurance schemes which will cover 50 per cent of the salary for three months of all insured workers. She noted that the coverage had improved through partnership with the embassies of migrant workers' origin countries.
- 114.** *Mr Aryal* replied to a question from a Government representative about policies to bring informal workers to the formal sector by saying that it would be important to have a plan on formalization and to involve local administrative units so that all workers could be declared or registered with the local government.
- 115.** *Ms Al Awadhi* replied to a request from a worker representative for further information on the migrant worker management system in his country by highlighting the new admission policies, which had abolished the previous sponsorship-based policies. The domestic labour law had also been recently revised to be more inclusive.
- 116.** *A Government representative of Iran*, speaking from the audience, highlighted the importance of the labour inspection system and dispute settlement mechanism to enhance the transition to the formal economy.

### **Thematic plenary session: “Strong foundations for social and employment protection and resilience”**

- 117.** The Regional Meeting held a thematic plenary session on the theme “Strong foundations for social and employment protection and resilience”. The discussion was led by a tripartite panel, chaired by the Employer Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms

Patchari Raksawong, Thai journalist and news presenter. The panel was composed as follows:

- H.E. Ms Sovan Vannaroth, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia;
- Ms Qian Xiaoyan, Deputy Director-General, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security;
- Mr Paul Mackay, Manager, Employment Relations Policy, New Zealand;
- Mr Shaher Saed, Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions;
- Ms Sophia Seung-yoon Lee, independent expert from the Republic of Korea.

**118.** *The Employer Vice-Chairperson* welcomed the *Moderator*, Ms Patchari Raksawong, and handed the chairing of the session over to her.

**119.** *The Moderator* introduced the panel members. She then introduced the topic, underlining a few of the gaps in employment and social protection. In that regard, she emphasized how most workers in these two regions are not covered by social protection and that the weakness of pre-pandemic employment and social protections had limited the capacity of countries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a need for comprehensive and adequate social protection, which could only be promoted through social dialogue.

**120.** *Ms Qian* stressed the importance of social protection as an economic buffer during crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. She described efforts by China to improve social security and achieve an inclusive and unified system of universal coverage. China had followed a step-by-step approach, gradually bringing new groups of workers into the system. The design of solutions was adapted to the different contexts and workers. In this regard, social dialogue played an essential role, with workers and employers helping to identify priorities and design solutions. China had 1.5 billion people enrolled in its pension system, 234 million workers had joined the unemployment insurance, and 290 million workers benefited from working injury insurance, representing an almost universal social insurance coverage. There were approximately 18 million platform workers in China. It was important to gradually offer them the same protection other workers benefitted from. To this end, the Government had issued an instruction on platform companies to guarantee their workers' basic protection, including the right to resting periods, to social insurance, and to employment injury insurance. Lastly, she recognized there was room for improvement, including adapting the systems to account for rapid labour market and demographic changes. Existing systems were not yet fully adapted to these realities, and it was important for countries to keep learning from the experience of other countries.

**121.** *Mr Mackay* emphasized the employers' commitment to support the ILO in implementing the United Nations' Secretary-General's Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection. He underlined the centrality of a strong skills and educational agenda. Enhancing work on skills was key, particularly digital skills. This helped address informality, promote gender equality, change the narrative on migration and promote comprehensive and sustainable social protection, all of which were critical elements for a just transition. He stressed the importance of the ILO's role at the multilateral level to reinforce policy coherence with the Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work and to advocate for greater social partner engagement. A just transition should not focus only on jobs. It also had to consider technology, climate change and demographic shifts. It was important to reflect on mitigating the potential negative impact of these transitions on people, including on how to create job opportunities and how to support the adoption of green technology, especially by small and medium enterprises. There are no good transitions without adequate skills,

which allowed workers and businesses to easily move between locations and sectors and take advantage of new opportunities. He concluded that social protection, skills development, and public employment services must be ready and available to support green transitions.

- 122.** *Ms Vannaroth* said that social protection was important to all workers and not only in the context of a crisis. She shared the results of an economic modelling exercise carried out by the United Nations Development Programme and her national Ministry of Economy and Finance. It showed that social protection measures implemented by Cambodia during the COVID-19 pandemic reduced poverty by four per cent and added one per cent to the gross domestic product. As was the case in China, the Cambodian government's social protection strategy followed a gradual approach, starting with workers protection under labour laws, mostly in formal enterprises. The Employment Injury Insurance Scheme was the first introduced in 2008. Later, in 2016, a Health Insurance scheme was added, including sickness and maternity insurance. More recently, a pension scheme was launched. She underlined the collaboration of Trade Unions and Employer's representatives in the process, with employers being the main contributors to the scheme. Cambodia had an ambitious plan towards universal coverage, which included the launch of the first National Social Protection Policy Framework in 2017 as a benchmark. It brought together social assistance and social security as the foundation for a further integrated social protection system. During the COVID-19 crisis the Government combined cash transfers for the poor and vulnerable households, funded by the state budget, with support to enterprises through wage subsidies for the hardest hit sectors, like the tourism and garment sectors. Cambodia's Ministry of Planning worked on identify poor households, which allowed it to provide support via cash-transfers as well as access to skills development.
- 123.** *Ms Lee* said the world of work was changing, with an increasing number of outsourced jobs and a multiplicity of employers. These changes added complexity and confusion to the definition of employment relations. An important group consisted of workers who, though classified as self-employed, did not have the autonomy that came with being self-employed. These were the so called "dependent self-employed. Such workers did not benefit from social protection, wage setting mechanisms, occupational safety and health or other labour law protection, since they were neither in traditional forms of wage work, nor were their conditions equivalent to those of the classic self-employed. As a result, even if all workers were legally covered by social insurance, some schemes (as was the case of employment insurance) only effectively covered 50 per cent of total workers. Research from Korea showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a much stronger impact on workers in precarious and low-income jobs. This led to increased inequality, poverty, and vulnerability. Social protection was not effective in protecting those who needed protection the most, such as workers in new forms of employment and with lower incomes. Lastly, she underlined how labour market institutions were too rigid to deal with new forms of employment, particularly the dependent self-employed. The lack of freedom of association and proper wage setting mechanisms also increased health risks by pushing workers to work harder and faster to guarantee a minimum level of income.
- 124.** *Mr Saed* noted significant shortfalls in social protection. He underlined the role of social protection in addressing vulnerabilities during a worker's life cycle. The COVID-19 pandemic had further demonstrated the importance of social protection in withstanding economic shocks and social upheavals, global health emergencies, the climate crisis, war and the impact of digitalization. The lack of effective social protection systems pushed vulnerable workers, particularly women and youth, into poverty. During the pandemic lockdowns, women had carried a higher care work burden and were exposed to higher risks of domestic violence. Many workers, including migrant workers, had faced the risk of dying. Lives and

livelihoods were also being destroyed by disasters related to climate change. Social protection was a human right and could be a lifeline for precarious workers. The primary duty of governments was ensuring protection for all. However social protection was not yet a reality, particularly for women and those in the informal economy, because of low levels of public spending in the region. He recalled the commitments made under the Bali Declaration to build strong foundations of employment and social protections. This included extending social protection and upgrading social protection floors; closing gender gaps through maternity protection and a better balance in care work responsibilities; providing protection to migrant workers and building resilience in crisis situations. If the Bali Declaration had been effectively implemented, the impact of the different crises on workers would have been drastically different. He called on the social partners, and particularly governments, to fulfil these commitments. He proposed a list of recommendations for countries in the two regions. Likewise, he encouraged ratification of the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). In addition, countries should implement the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) to ensure that basic social protection floors were guaranteed for all workers, irrespective of employment arrangements. Governments should also invest in gender-responsive social protection, including income support, that strengthened resilience to future shocks and helped overcome gender-based structural barriers. Countries should further build a robust and strong care economy by providing universal healthcare and expanded affordable care services for children, older persons, and other vulnerable sectors. At the same time, there was a need to increase the budget allocation for social protection and public services; and to mobilise domestic resources by implementing progressive national tax systems, imposing wealth taxes, and cracking down on tax avoidance by corporations and the wealthy. Building a universal, gender-responsive, and rights-based social protection system must be an inclusive process, based on social dialogue. He thanked the Government of Qatar for hosting the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in March next year. He called on all constituents to use that opportunity to give the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection a boost and specifically to establish an operational global fund to deliver social protection in the world's least developed countries.

- 125.** *Ms Qian*, in response to a question on the potential of technology, shared examples on how technology had been used by labour administration, social protection and public employment services in China. One such example was how it was essential to use online platforms for job seekers and employers to match labour supply and demand. The digitalization of social insurance services was essential to ensure that benefits were timely and effectively disbursed. She noted how an online platform in China allowed members to check their social insurance situation, submit claims and receive benefits. She explained how the central government provided all institutions with guidelines for the standardization and unification of services and procedures, to ensure that services and information were available in one location. To achieve this, it was important to ensure that the basic infrastructure was available, along with capacity development. She closed by underlining the need to help those with technological challenges, such as the elderly or people with disabilities.
- 126.** *Ms Vannaroth*, when asked to share the experience of Cambodia in wage setting, recalled the importance of piloting initiatives in one sector before applying them throughout the economy. When discussions on the establishment of a minimum wage began in 1997, tripartite mechanisms were not in place. Later, it was decided to start with the garment sector, which had the largest number of waged workers and where there was already a platform for collaboration with the social partners – a key factor in wage setting. Originally,



the platform used was the Tripartite Labour Advisory Committee, from which a tripartite working group on minimum wage setting was established. Departing from an ad-hoc negotiation process, the mechanism was then established within the Law on Minimum Wage, which created the National Council for Minimum Wage. This tripartite council was in charge of establishing the minimum wage annually, based on social and economic criteria established by law and considering the perspectives of workers and employers. The minimum wage setting process only applied to the garment sector, although employers were encouraged to use the minimum wage as a reference in other sectors.

- 127.** *Mr Mackay* replied to a question on what could be done to enhance compliance of micro and small enterprises with labour law and social security by recalling their prevalence in the informal economy. Bringing the global economy into a structured, supported and protected economy would be at the heart of solving that challenge. It was important to help connect those economic units to the opportunities arising from the participation in the global economy and support them in this process. In order to enhance micro and small enterprises' contributions to taxation and to social security, it was important to encourage and create conditions for them to grow. Businesses needed to contribute to the formal economy, but to do so they needed to increase productivity. To benefit in the longer run, these economic units needed support then. It was important to create conditions for further enterprises and workers to contribute. The larger the pool of contributors, the larger could the benefits be. Governments had to enhance education and promote access to digital skills and the internet. Increasing internet access was a channel of information for families and enterprises, creating new opportunities for them to grow.
- 128.** *Ms Lee* replied to a question on innovation by recalling the limitations of existing labour market institutions to deal with current transformations. There were lessons to be learned from the employment insurance experience in Korea and the government's objective of universal coverage. One such lesson was the importance of decoupling employment insurance from wages. This meant that receiving benefits should be associated with the reduction of income instead of a particular change in an individual's employment situation, in this case unemployment. The main challenge concerned the measurement of income. Technology could play an important role in this regard and the government was trying to develop a system that could measure income in real time. There was an urgent need to reform existing labour law protections, as they were not adequate to deal with new forms of work. There was a need to recognize these changes and to reflect them in the definition of employment relations. Above all, it was essential to ensure basic social protection for all.
- 129.** *A representative from Uniglobal* noted the importance of adapting social protection to demographic changes, particularly to the ageing population in Asia and the Pacific, underlining specifically the need to improve long-term care. The current design of social security systems was based on labour markets from the first industrial revolution and was not adapted to the current technological age. In his view, technology provided an opportunity to make social security more effective.
- 130.** *A Government representative of Iran* shared that, despite sanctions imposed on his country, the Government had been able to support businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic through an economic compensation package of approximately 2 billion USD to different sectors and businesses. Furthermore, it had supported 800 thousand workers through unemployment insurance.
- 131.** *A representative of the Self-Employed Women's Association*, representing informal workers, underlined the need to avoid a minimalist approach to social protection. Social protection needed to promote inclusion, be sustainable and comprehensive. Dualistic approaches,

which promoted different levels of protection between formal and informal workers, must be avoided, as well as focusing only on a minimum level of protection.

132. *The Moderator* concluded that countries in the two regions faced a crossroads and they had to choose which road to follow. The low investment road, with a focus on reduced costs and investment, would lead to low human development. By contrast, the high investment road would aim at inclusiveness and bring about mindset shifts towards building comprehensive, adequate and universal social protection systems.

### Thematic plenary session: “Revitalizing productivity growth and skills for more and better jobs”

133. The Regional Meeting held a thematic plenary session on the theme “Revitalizing productivity growth and skills for more and better jobs”. The discussion was led by a tripartite panel, chaired by the Government Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms Patchari Raksawong. The panel was composed as follows:
- Mr Muchtar Aziz, Director of Competency Standardization and Training Programs Development, Ministry of Manpower, Indonesia;
  - Mr Tian Feng, Second-level Inspector, Vocational Capacity Building Department, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, China;
  - Ms Sonia Janahi, Board Member of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI);
  - Ms Caryn Lim, CEO of the National Trades Union Congress’ (NTUC) Employment and Employability Institute (Southeast Asia), Singapore;
  - Mr Abdul Erumban, Assistant Professor at Groningen University, Senior Fellow of the Conference Board in New York and independent expert from India.
134. The *Government Vice-Chairperson* introduced *the Moderator*, Ms Patchari Raksawong, and handed the chairing of the session over to her.
135. The *Moderator* introduced the session by highlighting the numerous challenges to productivity growth and skills. The session was expected to offer solutions for revitalizing productivity growth and skills pathways as means of creating more and better jobs to promote a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. She noted that the discussion would be divided into two parts: the first one would focus on the acceleration of productivity and growth, while the second one would focus on skills development.
136. *Mr Erumban* provided an overview of the region’s performance in terms of productivity to set the scene for the session. He presented both convergence and divergence trends. He compared the labour productivity level in Asian economies to the global frontier, represented by the United States. While advanced economies, such as the Republic of Korea, Japan and Singapore, performed relatively high, emerging economies in the region performed relatively low compared to that frontier. He noted, however, that labour productivity in both advanced and emerging economies in Asia was growing, with emerging economies showing the fastest productivity growth rate in the world. Productivity was very high in the Arab States but relied solely on the oil and gas industries, rather than on technological advancements. In the last decades, no productivity growth had been registered in the Arab States; instead, there was an important erosion in their productivity level compared to the global frontier. *Mr Erumban* also noted a global slowdown in productivity growth that started just before the financial crisis. In addition to the latter, he



cited the following reasons contributing to the deceleration: the slow pace of technology adoption; demographic changes, with an ageing population in advanced countries; anti-globalization sentiments; and the mismatch between skills produced by the education system and skills required in the labour market. He highlighted a number of challenges and opportunities for productivity growth. Changes in demographics meant that advanced economies would have to address the falling working age population due to ageing, whilst emerging countries would need to capitalize on their demographic dividend by heavily investing in skilling youth. Informality was also a critical challenge which needed to be addressed by modernizing the informal sector. As for the Arab States in particular, he noted a lack of diversification and an excessive reliance on the oil sector, as well as a segmented labour market, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, with a high proportion of expatriate workers in the private sector, and local workers dominating the public sector.

- 137.** *Mr Aziz* highlighted the importance of human resources and the need for a competent workforce to attract investment and increase productivity, when asked how a country could work towards stimulating investment in higher value-adding and labour-intensive sectors, including agriculture and fishing. He described Indonesia's two-track strategy for collaborating with investors. The first strategy centred around Law No. 11 on Job Creation – the *Omnibus Law* –, adopted in 2020, which aimed to create quality jobs by putting in place an investment-conducive ecosystem. The second strategy involved identifying priority sectors or projects for investment, including national strategic projects, research and development and innovation activities, and technology-intensive sectors. Such priority projects demanded higher-skilled workers, who would have a positive impact on productivity levels.
- 138.** To encourage investment in higher value adding sectors, *Mr Tian* outlined several strategies: (a) attracting investment in technology-intensive industries; (b) supporting labour-intensive industries to invest in higher technology; and (c) investing in the low-carbon economy to create high-quality job opportunities. He summarized efforts to digitalize and “green” the Chinese economy and highlighted three main approaches to expanding employment: (a) stabilizing the economy by implementing measures to promote a reasonable rate of growth, with a focus on logistics and value chains; (b) protecting the market players during digital and green transitions, mainly through subsidies and delayed social security payments; and (c) promoting employment and improving workers' protection in the emerging economy with flexible jobs, upgrading traditional labour-intensive industries to create higher-skilled jobs, digitalizing services, stabilizing community service jobs, and enhancing agricultural employment by creating more developed food value chains. While implementing such strategies, the Government had worked closely with the social partners to support micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as self-employed workers. With these efforts, China had maintained a stable employment rate, almost achieving full employment. Urban employment had grown steadily by 13 million jobs per year in the last ten years, while job quality had improved with increased income and expanded social security. During that time, the services sector had been the major driver for employment creation, accounting for 48 per cent of all employment. University graduates, migrant workers and unemployed persons had benefited from the stable employment situation. He noted that a vital policy had been to develop a more comprehensive public employment service at the lower levels of administration (at the province and county levels).
- 139.** *Ms Janahi* replied to a question on policy measures, mechanisms and support needed by companies, especially micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, to foster productivity growth and translate productivity growth into more jobs. She began by sharing her perspective on productivity. Productivity meant sustainability, as workers strived to sustain their living, and businesses aimed to sustain their activities in the face of the financial crisis

and the pandemic. It was a misconception to consider productivity as cutting costs. Productivity meant enhancing skills through training and development, thereby creating a new “generation of employees” able to serve themselves, their community and their country. She noted that technology enhancement added value, while also creating challenges. Underlining a cultural aspect, she explained that even though businesses promoted digitization, people preferred to deal with people and to have human-based customer experiences. This cultural preference eventually limited productivity growth. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in the retail sector faced significant challenges in this regard. She reiterated that productivity should be understood in a more positive manner, as it related to development, job creation and training, and created more opportunities for workers to improve their living standards. Referring to the experience of Bahrain, she noted that the country had reduced its reliance on the oil industry and strengthened other sectors, such as education, technology, tourism, logistics, and retail and industrial businesses, including the green energy sector. It was important to know how to link these sectors to improve productivity and create more employment opportunities. The future of Gulf Cooperation Council countries was centred around economic diversification. Bahrain had focused on providing essential education, training and social protection, while acting as a leader in terms of free public education and health care provision. The latter was available to both locals and expatriates, with employers responsible for health insurance coverage. All these factors contributed to create an enabling environment for productivity growth.

- 140.** *Ms Lim* elaborated on the roles social partners could play to create more productive jobs. She highlighted some of the existing challenges for smaller companies, such as a lack of resources and know-how to increase productivity and transform their business, and a lack of interest in skills upgrading due to unclear expected benefits for workers. She highlighted her country's experience in overcoming such challenges, as the Singapore Labour Movement provided holistic support to companies and workers through initiatives led by the Company Training Committee (CTC), launched by the NTUC in 2019. Companies with a CTC charted the way forward for the next three to five years, with technology road mapping and investment plans in technology and skills upgrading. The Government had played a role in providing grants to fund these investments, as well as training, which could be customized to a company's training needs. Having a medium-term plan helped workers to understand their career and wage prospects if they participated in skills upgrading. She noted that an effective social dialogue and collaboration between the social partners were important to revitalize productivity growth.
- 141.** *Mr Aziz* responded to a question on promoting equal opportunities for skills and lifelong learning, highlighting that Indonesia was facing a double challenge, with a large population and many islands. Indonesia needed to ensure that all of its population could have access to skills development. A number of Government regulations were in place for that purpose, and three policies were described: the first one ensured access to skills development by all, in all communities, through employment-related regulations promulgated by the Indonesian Government in 2013; the second one took the form of a regulation adopted in 2016 concerning the national training system, which aimed at strengthening skills programmes, in some instances focusing on selected sectors; the third one was a Presidential regulation promulgated in 2022 to better organize skilling, upskilling and reskilling processes through face-to-face, online and blended learning methodologies. Every year, TVET institutions owned by the Government trained 200 to 300,000 people in priority sectors, including tourism, construction, information technology, and the green economy. The Government also cooperated with private and civil society training centres at the community level to allow the most marginalized to access skills and job opportunities.

Furthermore, an assistance was provided in the form of workshops dedicated to the operation of machinery and tools, as well as training sessions for instructors. Pre-employment training programmes had been successfully delivered online since 2020, with 96.8 million people registered. Among those who had completed these programmes, 51% were women and 3% were people with disabilities. Such programmes provided not only training but also social assistance, acting as a social safety net during the pandemic. Other training programmes, funded by the employment insurance, were launched in 2022 with the aim to help the unemployed to return to work. The Government had also established specific programmes for vulnerable people, women and people with disabilities.

- 142.** *Ms Lim* elaborated on the main challenges the region faced in terms of training opportunities for women and the youth. She highlighted the issue of access to education and training, noting the increasing number of people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). In 2021, they represented 24.6% of the population in the region, compared to 22.5% at the global level. The NEET proportion was almost three times higher for young women. This situation led to a negative transition into adulthood, and to fewer job opportunities thereafter. Women in less developed regions were excluded from main development programmes and initiatives. It was also worth noting that women and young people were over-represented in low productivity, low-paying and unprotected jobs due to structural inequalities and barriers. National employment plans needed to address this challenge and promote inclusive systems for skills development and lifelong learning. Socio-economic and employment policies needed to be complemented by targeted measures to overcome specific disadvantages, vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women and young people. With an increasing number of women entering the workforce in both the public and private sectors, there was an urgent need for adequate public investment in care facilities, and for the adoption of robust policies that would promote a more equitable share of unpaid care leave. Women would thus be able to free up time for training. In Singapore, the pandemic had changed the way people taught, worked and learned: flexible working arrangements had shown benefits for both workers and employers, and Singaporean companies were encouraged by tripartite partners to continue offering flexible working conditions. Online learning and working had become the “new normal”. To conclude, she stated that countries needed to strengthen their digital infrastructures to ensure an equitable connectivity for the most vulnerable and marginalized people. Social inclusion needed to be the key focus for any digital transition strategy. Gender-responsive, inclusive and family-friendly policies were key to helping women and the youth take advantage of technological advancements.
- 143.** *Ms Janahi* explained that industries could work effectively with governments on skills development. She first stated that TVET should not only be a government-led initiative; it required tripartite action, as it was a shared responsibility to develop employees’ capabilities. Governments needed to equip training centres, offer subsidies to attendees, and issue certifications. Employers and workers needed to promote productivity growth as a way to achieve better living conditions and career development opportunities through skills development. The Government of Bahrain had created a labour market regulation authority, headed by the Minister of Labour, which provided numerous training activities. The authority had partially been funded by employers to help workers obtain new skills and qualifications. She stressed the importance of collaboration between tripartite partners and noted that Bahrain provided a good example of it. She added that the majority of its workforce was skilled and certified, adding value to the economy and allowing it to move away from the oil sector through diversification.
- 144.** *Mr Tian* referred to the limited impacts skills development systems had on productivity, and stated that skills development systems and human resources were the most dynamic

factors in creating jobs and improving productivity. During the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, an emphasis was placed on the country's need to implement an employment-oriented policy to improve skills development and lifelong learning systems. While significant progress had been made in TVET and lifelong learning, China was still facing challenges in those areas, such as: (a) an insufficient supply of workers, as the country needed at least 15 million additional workers on an annual basis to keep up with technology transformations in all sectors and related skills development programmes for all positions; (b) a regional disparity in training resources and facilities; (c) a lack of training effectiveness, considering technological advances and labour market needs to build the skills required in the future; and (d) a lack of willingness of the workforce to participate in training and reskilling, especially among the youth. To overcome these challenges, the Government had taken the following actions: (a) a stronger integration and coordination with other authorities, trade unions, businesses and educational bodies to provide more inclusive training opportunities; (b) a campaign to promote TVET, using unemployment insurance to support training programmes and subsidizing them for small and medium-sized enterprises; (c) online learning programmes made available to the whole population, anytime, anywhere; (d) training programmes focusing on lifelong learning, with an emphasis on supporting unprivileged areas, namely Central and Western China where more than 200 training centres had been set up; (e) investments in improving TVET infrastructures to create enterprise-oriented TVET schools; and (f) further improving training quality to develop talents in the green and digital economies. In this regard, *Mr Tian* praised the cooperation efforts and partnerships between the private sector and TVET schools through the promotion of internships and apprenticeships.

- 145.** *Mr Erumban* referred to the potential of technology to contribute to productivity growth and skills development, and explained that every new technology came with challenges and opportunities. New technologies caused job displacement, along with the need to skill the workforce and prepare it to the transition. The current wave of technological advancement was considered difficult to manage due to its rapid spread and was generating a sense of insecurity in a time prone to what could be described as “creative destruction”. Policymakers needed to make sure that technology came as a complement to labour, and not as a substitute of it. The COVID-19 crisis had forced us to embrace technology, all the while shedding light on the increasing digital divide, with less than 50% of the population in Asian countries having access to the Internet. The private sector needed to collaborate with governments to provide solutions and ensure inclusive access to all. For many women, the pandemic had opened up new opportunities, for example through the globalization of services. Strategies aiming to increase productivity for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises needed to ease the access to finance and facilitate investments in managerial skills. Small enterprises that embraced technology had a higher productivity, increased wages and better customer satisfaction rates.
- 146.** *A Workers' representative from India* stressed a significant challenge when pursuing productivity growth in an economy dominated by the informal sector, as was the case in India. In these circumstances, productivity growth often meant giving employers too much power, leading to a deterioration of working conditions, or even to situations that could be assimilated to forced labour. Productivity growth should not be sought out at the cost of workers' conditions.
- 147.** *A Workers' representative of the Philippines* highlighted the need to take a wider perspective in pursuing productivity growth, by not just asking workers to do more, but also applying healthier, safer working conditions in businesses through occupational safety and health standards. He noted that sustainability also depended on enterprises using environmentally

friendly production processes. Thus, productivity needed to encompass skills and competencies development, as well as job creation in the climate and green sectors, in a framework of decent work. Productivity, sustainability, occupational safety and health, and green and climate jobs should be embedded in workplace training, and in the education and vocational training system.

- 148.** *A Workers' representative of the Philippines*, while noting enhanced efforts for job creation, highlighted the proliferation of informal workers as a result of the pandemic, which was compromising efforts deployed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on poverty eradication and decent job creation. He asked what programmes were taken up by governments or employers to address this issue and promote a transition from the informal to the formal economy.
- 149.** *Ms Janahi* responded by sharing the example of a virtual registration system of commercial activities that was set up in Bahrain. The system allowed to register any commercial activity, including informal work, with a simple home address, rendering it legal as a business and giving it a formal capacity. Registered businesses could then access training support, employment funds and register onto social security systems. The Government had also extended wage subsidies for native and national workers (70% in the first year, 50% in the second year and 30% in the third year) to reduce unemployment and encourage businesses to hire.
- 150.** *A Workers' representative from the Republic of Korea* asked to clarify the definition of productivity. *Mr Erumban* responded that productivity meant producing more with the same inputs, not producing the same with fewer inputs. The latter would imply cost cutting. The former entailed that productivity growth would be gained through technology advancements and skills development.
- 151.** *A Government representative of Iran* asked how to align the rate of technological advancements with their rate of adoption by businesses. She also asked how to overcome the cultural component in facilitating technology adoption by businesses. *Mr Erumban* acknowledged there was a gap as businesses wished to see how a given technology was adopted by others and what benefits it brought before making the decision to invest in it. *Ms Janahi* referred to the need to educate local communities on how technology and online presence helped local businesses flourish, develop, become sustainable and reach a global audience. They needed to be supported, with reduced costs through digital platforms.
- 152.** *A Government representative of Bangladesh* noted the diversity of the region, the critical importance of reskilling and asked how the region could better work together. As the session was coming to an end, *the Moderator* invited him and other delegates to approach panellists directly after the session.
- 153.** *The Moderator* thanked all the panellists for their excellent contributions and closed the session, noting that skills were a catalyst for productivity, a shared responsibility and that collaboration and partnerships were key for productivity growth and skills development, in order to create more and better jobs.

## Special sessions

- 154.** The Regional Meeting held two special sessions on the following topics: "Strengthening multilateral cooperation to achieve social justice and decent work for all"; and "Promotion and application of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States".



## Strengthening multilateral cooperation to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all

- 155.** The Regional Meeting held a special session on the theme “Strengthening multilateral cooperation to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all”. The discussion was led by a tripartite panel, chaired by the Government Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms Ruba Jaradat, ILO Regional Director for the Arab States. The panel was composed as follows:
- Mr Abdullah Abuthnain, Vice-Minister of Human Resources and Social Development for Labour, Saudi Arabia;
  - Mr Ranulfo Payos, Vice-President of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines ;
  - Ms Mikyung Ryu, International Director of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions ;
  - Ms Rodora Babaran, Director of Human Development of the Socio-Cultural Community Department, Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat;
  - Ms Wendy Walker, Chief of the Sustainable Development Thematic Group, Asian Development Bank;
  - Mr Yasser El-Gammal, Practice Manager for Social Protection and Labour in the East Asia and Pacific Region, World Bank.
- 156.** *The Government Vice-Chairperson* opened the session and handed the chairing over to the *Moderator*.
- 157.** *The Moderator* introduced key issues related to the topic of the debate. The economic and social crisis of recent years had been exacerbated by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters due to accelerating climate change, geopolitical tensions and armed conflict. Confronted with this complex situation, the multilateral system had struggled to adapt to a changing environment and to provide concrete and coordinated responses to many of these challenges. The United Nations Secretary-General, in his report “Our Common Agenda”, called for a more inclusive and networked multilateralism, a re-embraced global solidarity and a renewed social contract. The ILO Director General, in his vision statement, proposed the establishment of a Global Coalition for Social Justice to pave the way for strengthened global solidarity, policy coherence and concerted action.
- 158.** *Ms Babaran* highlighted ASEAN’s strategies to achieve a just transition while minimizing social disruption. There had been encouraging momentum in scaling up initiatives related to the green transition within ASEAN. Climate change was recognized as one of the key threats to ASEAN’S future growth and development. For the region to remain competitive, dynamic and prosperous, ASEAN countries had to strike a balance to support future growth while ensuring that natural assets continued to provide resources for growth and sustainable development. The ASEAN region had been among the most vulnerable in the world to climate change and addressing climate change had been high in ASEAN’s agenda. ASEAN leaders had reaffirmed their commitment to address climate change in the ASEAN Summit and in the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change. Economic gains for ASEAN members was climate change to be addressed were estimated at around US\$12.4 trillion, 3.5% yearly GDP growthy for the next 50 years, as well as 13 million new jobs by 2030. Being parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), ASEAN member states had set climate change mitigation and adaptation targets in their nationally determined contribution. To meet these targets, ASEAN supported their member states through policy coordination, resource mobilization, capacity development and research. The speaker provided a number of examples how ASEAN and its member states



strengthened cooperation to support country strategies aimed at achieving a just transition. Following the adoption of the *ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Green Jobs for Equity and Inclusive Growth of ASEAN Community* (2018), ASEAN and the ILO conducted a study on green jobs policy readiness in 2021 that provided recommendations to promote green skills and readiness. The ASEAN Economic Community also came up with a framework for circular economy in 2021, geared up toward resource efficiency, economic resilience and sustainable growth. The framework would be implemented in phases with the first phase covering the period of 2023-2030 and focusing on the agriculture, transport and energy sectors. Furthermore, in 2023 ASEAN would develop its strategy for carbon neutrality to outline sustainable long term carbon reduction. The first *ASEAN State of Climate Change Report* provided recommendations on regional coordinated actions towards an ASEAN Climate Vision 2050, which would serve as the basis for the development of an ASEAN Climate Change Strategic Action Plan. ASEAN also issued a joint statement on climate change conveyed at the COP 27 in 2022, calling upon parties of the UNFCCC to promote an inter-regional approach to climate action that was gender responsive and with utmost consideration of the plight of the most vulnerable groups. The ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework also emphasised that the return to business as usual would no longer be an option in the post pandemic world. ASEAN had been developing its climate finance strategy to assist member states in scaling up, mobilizing and accessing climate finance to support member states meet their climate goals. ASEAN had implemented innovative solutions to enhance city resilience through capacity building for city actors, adopt a technological approach to reduce their carbon footprint and promote a sustainable waste management. ASEAN hoped the international community could provide support with climate change adaptation, climate finance and climate connectivity and communication.

- 159.** *Mr El-Gammal* responded to a question on how the World Bank envisaged strengthening policy coherence among stakeholders to support labour market policies for socially sustainable crisis response. The World Bank had increased its funding in the last three years. In 2022 alone, the funding had reached US\$ 70 billion for Covid pandemic related projects. Countries with functioning social protection system and active labour market had been able to protect their population more effectively. A functioning system would be able to identify beneficiaries, enrol them in programmes, deal with interoperability between programmes on real time basis and identify who benefits from which programmes. The pandemic also showed how vulnerable people in the informal sector were. The World Bank engaged a lot on expansion of social protection programmes, particularly on social insurance, to the informal sector. A number of good examples on universal health insurance coverage were cited. Social protection and active labour market should be adaptable i.e. scaling up when crisis happened and scaling down when things got back to normal.
- 160.** *Ms Walker* mentioned that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had received unprecedented demands for social protection, with almost every single member country requesting support in terms of social assistance and active labour market programmes. As social protection systems in the region were nascent, spending coverage needed to be expanded, and the system's adequacy and benefits needed to be examined. The pandemic had shown that workers in the informal sector, migrants, women and youth were often not covered by the system. It was critical to strengthen financing and finding alternative sources of domestic resource mobilization to support the system. One area of social protection systems that lagged behind was that of labour market programmes, particularly on youth. It was critical to develop digital systems, skills and literacy, build capacity and improve access workers' access to social protection in order to increase the efficiency of social protection systems. It was also important for the system to adapt quickly. She cited an example of a retention programme which functioned through subsidies in the Philippines. There had also been an evolution in the region on integrated labour market support and

capacity building of labour market institutions. She referred to the Jobs Start Programme in the Philippines, which had also been replicated in Indonesia. The programme focused on improving employability of young people through one-on-one career coaching, technical skills training and paid internships. The programme had engaged more than 200 employers and reached more than 20,000 vulnerable youths in the Philippines. The next phase of the programme had just started, linking skills, jobs and social protection across institutions and sectors to better address the complex needs of different profiles of workers, especially those affected by the pandemic. It was important to pay greater attention the future of work, to workers in the gig economy and to migrant workers. In Tajikistan, the Asian Development Bank supported a project to build the capacity of migration and employment centres to better prepare workers for their migration journey. The region would need to face the challenge of climate change and rapid ageing, which would put new stress and demands on social protection systems. Lastly, she referred to the Asian Development Bank's Just Transition Platform, which provided strategic planning and solid data analysis, supporting the ministries of social protection, education and labour.

- 161.** *Ms Ryu* responded to a question on the experience of workers' organizations participating in the One UN processes to meet Sustainable Development Goals . She reiterated the importance of social dialogue to address various challenges during the crisis and recovery periods. The ILO's unique tripartite structure, where all three groups could participate on an equal footing, would be the best tool to facilitate social dialogue and to support multilateral cooperation to achieve social justice and decent work for all. Workers' organizations had faced difficulties in participating in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in the One UN processes because the UN Resident Coordinator system did not recognise workers' organisations as having the same status as Governments. There had been a complete lack of understanding among UN agencies and their staff at the national level of the structure and functioning of the ILO. The Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC), for example, had been completely left out of the inter-agency meetings and discussions held by the UN Resident Coordinator, at which the ILO Suva office had represented Fijian workers (instead of the FTUC). The ongoing One UN process would damage tripartism, as in many countries the governments did not engage with unions, which in many cases were granted the same status as any non-governmental organization. The speaker also referred to the importance of full coherence of national legislation with international labour standards. This should include labour safeguards to protect workers in projects funded with loans from the Asian Development Bank. Policy advice, strategies and policy-based lending on the part of the Bank should be aligned with international labour standards. The performance of Bank-funded projects should be judged by employment results and not only financial outcomes. There had been an agreement between the ILO and the Asian Development Bank to respect workers' rights, gender equality and combat child labour. However, the Bank had provided loans to Governments which did not respect unions, like the Government of Myanmar. As far as ASEAN was concerned, workers organizations were yet to be granted the observer status they had requested over 25 years ago.
- 162.** *Mr Abuthnain* spoke of what had happened during the pandemic and drew lessons from the crisis, including the importance of research on how the pandemic had affected our lives . Countries should also draw lessons from their own experiences in protecting workers and use them to prepare for future crises. The pandemic also showed that some jobs were much more vulnerable to such crises than others. Furthermore, the pandemic had shown that skills needed to be strengthened to allow workers to adapt to new jobs. Saudi Arabia had been able to support enterprises affected by the pandemic by providing a subsidy to cover 60% of lost salaries for approximately 400,000 workers. The subsidy had also covered workers in freelance work and around 60,000 workers in the informal sector. The

government also suspended levies applied to enterprises. Saudi Arabia had collaborated with the ILO on occupational safety and health issues. The Gulf Cooperation Council had a common strategy to analyse the experience of member states in dealing with the pandemic and came up with policies to address them.

- 163.** *Mr Payos* focused his intervention on how to strengthen multilateral cooperation to achieve social justice and decent work for all, which was crucial given the state of the world after the pandemic. The crisis was exacerbated by the disruption of food, energy, fertilizers and microchips supply chains caused by the turmoil in Ukraine and severe lockdowns in some parts of the world. The ILO could serve as a catalyst of change to alleviate workers' suffering. This could be done by strengthening collaboration with other multilateral institutions through the establishment of systemic and substantive relations. The ILO was the nexus that created a strong, complex and crucial links between trade, economic and social policies. There was a need to ensure coherence in crafting these policies. The ILO had become the UN agency of reference and was known for its impact and effectiveness in skills, employment, labour rights, social protection and social dialogue. The Organization should further strengthen its profile as the global policy leader and deepen its engagement with the United Nations Resident Coordinators in the interest of strategic and systemic partnerships. Tripartism should not only be a practice, but it should also be institutionalized by law. Tripartism and social dialogue should be the heart of ILO-led initiatives. Tripartism should be embedded in the work undertaken by the United Nations, including in Sustainable Development Goal activities, development cooperation programmes, research and publications. Furthermore, the ILO had an important role to play as a mediator. Likewise, the important role and contribution of social partners needed to be integrated in the UN common country analysis and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes. UN country offices should involve social partners, with the ILO acting as a mediator, from the very beginning of the processes. The UN could not reach its objectives without a proper engagement on the part of the private sector, and it needed to recognise that strong and representative workers and employers organizations would play an important role in building and sustaining inclusive societies. Investment in these organizations' capacities and those of labour market institutions would be key to maximize their contributions. Employers' and business member organizations had important insights, views and values. It was therefore important to promote the involvement of social partners in the UN reform process.
- 164.** *Mr Payos* provided an example of good and effective multilateral relationships in the framework of a programme called "Mentor Me" put in place in the Philippines. Through this programme, micro, small and medium enterprises, which were the backbone of the country's economy, in coordination with a multinational organization and the Department of Trade and Investment improved their ability to distribute their goods and to understand financial issues.
- 165.** *Mr Abuthnain* emphasized the importance of social dialogue to deal with labour market challenges. Saudi Arabia, with the ILO's support, had established a general authority for social dialogue. The success of any new policies introduced to the labour market would depend on their acceptance and ownership by workers, employers and the labour market as a whole. The government always sought participatory approaches, despite the difficult complexities emerging in the labour market. Social dialogue should be coupled with relevant policies. Saudi Arabia worked on new initiatives to document digital employment contracts and establish a system of wage protection and disbursement.
- 166.** *Ms Ryu* added that the ILO should assist the unions at the national level to establish a tripartite structure. The ILO should also ensure that UN agencies and their staff understand about its structure, supervisory system and international labour standards.

- 167.** *Ms Walker* said that that Asian Development Bank believed in the power of partnership, including with the ILO. Such partnership would focus on strategic evidence in social protection, work on care economy, women work and just transition. The ADB's safeguard policy statement had been reviewed and updated through extensive consultation, particularly with regard to labour, health and safety issues.
- 168.** *Mr El Gammal* made two concluding remarks. The first was on financing social protection and active labour market policies. During the pre-covid period, East Asian countries had lower spending rates on social protection compared to the global average. He urged governments to continue spending on social protection. The energy and food subsidy in the Arab States should be reformed in terms of resource channelling. The second point he made was that crises did not affect people equally. There should be targeted programmes and financing for vulnerable population groups, such as youth, women and migrants, who were affected much more than other groups.

### Promotion and application of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States

- 169.** The Regional Meeting held a special session on the theme "Promotion and application of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (the MNE Declaration) in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States". The session was chaired by the Worker Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting and moderated by Ms Githa Roelans, Head of the Multinational Enterprises and Enterprise Engagement Unit, Sustainable Enterprises Department of the ILO. The panel was composed as follows:
- Mr Nozomi Tomita, Assistant Minister for International Affairs, Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan;
  - Ms Thi Lan Anh Tran, Secretary General and Director General, Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), Viet Nam;
  - Mr Zahoor Awan, Former Secretary General of the Pakistan Workers Federation, Pakistan.
- 170.** *The Worker Vice-Chairperson* introduced the special session referring to the ILO Governing Body decision to include in every ILO Regional Meeting a tripartite panel discussion on the topic as part of the regional follow-up to the MNE Declaration. The aim of the session was to discuss the findings of the regional report prepared by the Office on the state of the promotion and application of the MNE Declaration in the region, based on responses received from the tripartite constituents to a questionnaire, and to provide a platform for exchanges of experiences among the constituents and for the formulation of recommendations on further promotion and application of the instrument in the region.
- 171.** The Moderator introduced the Multinational enterprises, development and decent work – report on the promotion and application of the MNE Declaration in Asia and the Pacific and Arab States. She recalled that the Bali Declaration included among the priorities for national policy and action, the promotion and application of the MNE Declaration to maximize the opportunities for decent work arising from investment, trade and operations of multinational enterprises. The report of the Director-General prepared for the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting recognized that the MNE Declaration was a key global instrument for the ILO's work on improving compliance with international labour standards in supply chains. She noted the growing share of inflows and outflows in the region via Financial Development Institutions. She likewise noted the strong intraregional trade relations stemming from the increasingly prominent role of MNEs in the region, and this despite the disruptions of supply chains by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to

contain the spread of the virus. She highlighted the increasing number of government initiatives that stimulated decent work outcomes of trade and investment. The Report indicated that tripartite constituents agreed on the relevance of the MNE Declaration to stimulate compliance with national laws and regulations, the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental principles and rights at work in business operations, training/skills development, wages and safety and health as well as freedom of association. The effective application of the MNE Declaration required social dialogue and the report documented the dialogue and consultation mechanisms at the national level as well as the international cooperation among home and host country governments, and among employers' organizations and workers' organizations, mainly through their international organizations and bilateral exchanges. Two member States had appointed national focal points for the promotion of the MNE Declaration at the national level and other had taken promotional initiatives. She highlighted a number of the development cooperation projects in the region that use the MNE Declaration as a framework of action or included components of it. The tripartite constituents recommended increased efforts to promote the MNE Declaration in the region, awareness-raising and capacity building, more practical guidance and country-specific action plans, more opportunities for exchange of experiences and home-host country dialogues through the establishment of regional and international networks and the appointment of national focal points.

- 172.** *Mr Tomita* shared various initiatives that the Government of Japan had taken to promote the MNE Declaration to stimulate good social practices among Japanese companies. The Government of Japan supported the UN *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* and launched a national action plan on business and human rights to promote respect for human rights in business activities, based on the three pillars of the state duty to protect, the business responsibility to respect, and access to remedy for victims. The formulation and implementation process of the national action plan had been handled through consultations with constituents which took the form of roundtables that allowed for dialogues and the exchange of views. The Government had also set up initiatives to stimulate and support companies to conduct due diligence in domestic and global supply chains. These had been joint initiatives between the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A joint survey had been conducted and as a result of many requests received, the Government had issued in September 2022 cross-industry guidelines on respecting human rights in supply chains, fully in line with the MNE Declaration, the UN Guiding Principles and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Guidelines for multinational enterprises. These Guidelines had been developed with inputs from the social partners and provided concrete and comprehensible guidance for companies on how they could respect human rights in their operations and supply chains. Japanese companies were not only required to ensure respect for human rights in their own operations but also needed to ensure that their business partners in Japan and abroad did likewise. The speaker also highlighted how the Japanese government had been promoting responsible supply chains, based on the principles of the MNE Declaration, through development cooperation projects in various countries in the Asia and the Pacific region that focussed on improving occupational safety and health, human resource development, social protection and labour management relations. This included, for example, the "Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations" project. This project aimed to improve the business environment for Japanese companies in Viet Nam's electronics industry. Within its framework, the government, employers, workers, and suppliers worked together to promote socially responsible practices based on the MNE Declaration. He noted the importance of supporting social dialogue and improving labour management practices as an important mechanism to achieve progress. Home-host country dialogues were held as part of the



project implementation, with the participation of tripartite Vietnamese and Japanese stakeholders. He stressed that the traditional mechanisms of social dialogue at the national level could be complemented by dialogue mechanisms involving major stakeholders. Such stakeholders should include, in particular, the headquarters of multinational corporations, especially when it concerned actions to address decent work challenges in supply chains. Support for social dialogue and improvement of labour management relations was needed to enhance competitiveness through a business environment that was conducive to the operations of Japanese companies in Asia while at the same time promoting respect for human rights in their own operations and in their suppliers' operations. He suggested four concrete actions to further promote the MNE Declaration: (1) enhancing governments' support for a conducive labour-management environment; (2) sharing technical cooperation knowledge and action; (3) promoting consultations among relevant ministries, agencies and social partners; and (4) presenting concrete action guidelines for companies that promote corporate accountability, tailored to the concrete situation in each country. He concluded by assuring that the Japanese government would continue to provide technical assistance to guide responsible corporate behaviour, in accordance with the MNE Declaration, based on dialogue with social partners, and continue its support for the ILO Helpdesk for Business on international labour standards.

- 173.** *Ms Tran* stated that Viet Nam was one of the most successful countries in the region when it came to attracting Financial Development Institution-based multinational enterprises. Big losses had been suffered during the pandemic due to disruptions in supply chains, skilled workers and raw materials. Companies continued to support the government and workers in terms of capital, maintained employment, and sustained economic growth. Viet Nam had experienced positive economic growth in 2020 and 2021, implementing 15 foreign trade agreements committed to sustainable development and sustainable business and to providing workers with better living standards, allowing them to move from informal to formal sectors. Multinational Enterprises could bring substantial benefits to home and host countries by contributing to the more efficient use of capital, technology and labour, and by making an important contribution to the promotion of economic and social welfare; to the improvement of living standards and the satisfaction of basic needs; to the creation of employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly; and to the promotion of social dialogue. Very often Multinational Enterprises were pioneers in the application of new technology in production and, as such, they played a leading role in orienting the skills market and technology transfer. She underlined the need to promote the involvement of companies, especially Multinational Enterprises, in skills development as a crucial element for further economic development in the region where many companies were facing the challenges of hiring and retaining skilled workers and a lack of relevant skills. She also noted the need to advance knowledge on occupational safety and health, increase productivity in multiple work arrangements and harness bipartite social dialogue. Through projects funded by the Japanese government with ILO technical support, Vietnamese employers, trade unions and governments had started initiatives on the application of the MNE Declaration in Viet Nam. As a result of this initiative, the government initiated a plan in 2021 to develop a national action programme to finalize policies and laws that promote responsible business practices in Viet Nam. The programme was to be submitted to the Prime Minister by 2023 for approval. The VCCI, as Viet Nam's leading employers' organization, had worked with various industry associations on promoting the implementation of responsible business practices in the global supply chains, notably by setting up the Viet Nam Electronics Industry Association, providing capacity building to the members of this electronics business coalition regarding due diligence requirements in supply chains and how to respond to them. That help had helped enhance awareness and voluntary enforcement of the Codes of Conduct, notably, the Code of Conduct on prevention and combat of sexual harassment in

the workplace and the Code of Conduct on Child Protection in Cyberspace. The VCCI and other business associations continued to conduct research on mechanisms to encourage members to undertake responsible business practices by assessing various indexes on sustainability, business integrity, promoting green and responsible investment. The speaker also highlighted that VCCI had initiatives to promote responsible business conduct in other sectors, including the textile & garment, leather & shoes, wood processing, electronics, seafood, and coffee processing sectors, and had established a multi-stakeholder sectoral platform for multinational enterprises, suppliers and tripartite constituents to hold annual meetings and discuss responsible business conduct in the value chain. The VCCI would also work together with the German government to set up a service hub for consultation and training on responsible business conduct in the global supply chain. She reiterated the merit of the MNE Declaration as an important instrument which stimulated and supported responsible business conduct with concrete recommendations addressed to companies and the ILO's tripartite constituents. In this regard the ILO Helpdesk for Business on international labour standards was an important tool for enterprises aligning their policies and practices with international labour standards and the MNE Declaration. This ILO tool should be better promoted and further strengthened to assist companies in conducting human rights due diligence and to enable responsible business conduct at both national and international levels. The ILO had many tools to offer for companies, such as the ILO-IOE self-assessment tool for enterprises based on the MNE Declaration, as well as other operational tools of the MNE Declaration, such as company-union dialogue facilitation and technical assistance.

- 174.** *Mr Awan* expressed his concern that a lot more needed to be done in the implementation of the MNE Declaration to effectively improve labour rights in the business operations of certain multinational enterprises in which workers were not properly protected. He pointed out that two thirds of global trade were controlled by multinational enterprises and that while they indeed brought important progress, 94 per cent of workers in the supply chains were in precarious positions; often on short-term, low-paid contracts where they were extremely vulnerable to abuse of their rights and not covered under labour laws. He also highlighted that export processing zones often were more favourable to the interest of multinational enterprises than to the inclusive economic and social development of the countries because of the abusive working conditions which often characterised them. The Workers group still supported the MNE Declaration, but had serious concerns regarding its effective implementation. Recognizing the MNE Declaration as a promotional tool, many governments and employer organizations made glowing statements on the way they were implementing the Declaration. Nevertheless, as far as workers were concerned no significant outcome could be reported on its proper implementation. A more concrete follow up would be needed, in particular on tripartite appointed national focal points and the company/union dialogue facilitation. The example of Pakistan and Nepal appointing national focal points was encouraging, but not enough. In 1975, the workers had recommended in 1975 that a convention should exist in relation to multinational enterprises so that its application in law and practice would fall under the ILO supervisory system, but that had not happened. He indicated that more collaboration should be sought with the OECD on its Guidelines on multinational enterprises. ILO Conventions 87 and 98 conventions should be properly enforced in all countries, including in operations of multinational enterprises as unionization and collective bargaining were needed to ensure workers get their proper share of the benefits of globalization and profits of multinational enterprises. The speaker indicated that a rethinking of the MNE Declaration at the national and international levels was needed to ensure that the standards highlighted in it and the ILO core conventions were effectively upheld in the operations of multinational enterprises.

- 175.** *Mr Zaki Ahmed Khan, Vice President of the Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP), spoke from the floor to share his Federation's experiences as a national focal point for the promotion of the MNE Declaration in Pakistan. The EFP had organised training for over 50 managers and workers on occupational safety and health, with a special focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, improving productivity for better competitiveness and respect fundamental principles and rights at work. EFP has also developed case studies on good practices for enterprises and launched a digital media campaign as well as tripartite-plus meetings in different provinces to promote the implementation of the MNE Declaration and ensure wider dissemination of its promotional tool.*
- 176.** *Mr Singh, speaking from the floor on behalf of ITUC, welcomed foreign direct investment in developing countries but indicated that the majority of multinationals did not honour international labour standards, denying workers freedom of association and minimum wage. He cited specific examples of multinational enterprises in India hiring contract workers but not allowing them to unionize. He indicated that the MNE Declaration should be honoured by all multinational enterprises.*
- 177.** *Mr Tomita responded that this special session was not a forum to bring up cases of individual companies, as these issues needed to be resolved through the ILO supervisory bodies and the Committee on Freedom of Association. He stressed the opportunities offered by the host-home country dialogues under the MNE Declaration and illustrated how that mechanism was used as part of the "socially responsible labour practices" project in the electronic industry in Viet Nam. He also underlined the role that the ILO regional and country offices could play in that regard.*
- 178.** *Mr Awan expressed appreciation for Japan's support and technical assistance in many countries in the region, including on the promotion of the MNE Declaration. He also welcomed the emphasis on social dialogue at all levels, including through the involvement of the Japan Federation of Employers' Association to help find solutions in relation to operations of Japanese multinational enterprises. He also asked that attention be paid to the need for a living wage in many countries in the region given that despite the spectacular rise in global income, one fifth of the world's population continued to suffer from hunger.*
- 179.** *The Moderator concluded the session thanking the panellists and delegates for sharing their experiences and formulating concrete suggestions for the further promotion of the MNE Declaration and its operational tools among governments, employers, trade unions and national and multinational enterprises.*

## Presentation of the report of the Credentials Committee

- 180.** *The Chairperson of the Credentials Committee recalled the importance of tripartite attendance at the Regional Meeting. Three delegations accredited to the meeting were not tripartite, and a total of 11 Member States failed to accredit a delegation altogether. This deprived those governments and their social partners of the opportunity to participate in the important work of the ILO at the regional level. For a regional meeting to benefit from a constructive interaction between representatives of governments, employers and workers from all Member States of the region, it was important that Governments complied with their obligation to accredit fully tripartite delegations. The overall proportion of women accredited to the Meeting as delegates and advisers was 35.8 per cent. However, titular delegates in all three groups were predominantly men, and five delegations to the Meeting were composed exclusively of men. While this figure represented an increase of 8 per cent with respect to the last Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting held in Bali six years earlier, it fell short of the goal of gender parity. The Credentials Committee was seized of three objections, one complaint and three communications. Member States were reminded to*

share the invitation to a regional meeting with social partners as early as possible and to consult with the most representative organizations of employers and workers, with a view to constituting their tripartite delegations to such meetings. The Governments were also requested to provide clear and precise information on the affiliation of non-Government delegates and advisers when submitting the credentials of their delegations, as this would facilitate the examination of credentials and objections.

181. The Meeting took note of the report of its Credentials Committee.

## Adoption of the conclusions of the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting

182. *The Chairperson* informed delegates that the conclusions of the Regional Meeting were presented under reference APRM.17/D/4. The draft conclusions had been published on the Regional Meeting webpage and on the ILO Events App. Printed copies had been made available to delegates in Arabic, Chinese and English. The text had been extensively reviewed and agreed upon by the Drafting group.
183. *The Employer spokesperson* thanked the Drafting group for the smooth way in which it carried out its work, and thanked the Office for setting an enabling environment for the debate to take place. The conclusions had been drafted in a timely manner and in the spirit of consensus. His group was pleased with the contents of the Singapore Statement, in particular as it related to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, productivity, a smoother transition from the informal to the formal economy, sustainable enterprises, skills development, social protection, and capacity building for employers' and workers' organizations. Despite the global crises and disruptions, the Employers' group considered the Singapore Statement to be a strong basis to address all these challenges, in that it provided guidance to harness opportunities for full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work. The group fully supported the draft conclusions as presented and looked forward to their implementation. He concluded his remarks by thanking the Chairperson of the Drafting group, as well as its government and worker members.
184. *The Worker spokesperson* stated his group fully supported the Singapore Statement. He praised workers worldwide for their commitment during the pandemic and through other global crises. He reiterated that workers needed their rights respected, as well as decent wages and working conditions. His group believed that the Singapore Statement, a vehicle for future change in the region, would make a difference for the workers and their families. He called on governments and employers to work together with his group at the national level and hold tripartite discussions to plan and implement the recommendations set out in the document. He requested the Office to ensure that these recommendations would be included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, to make the United Nations Resident Coordinators aware of the Statement, and to carry out education and awareness campaigns for UN local staff on ILO tripartism and the ILO supervisory mechanism. He stated that the Singapore Statement needed to be considered together with the Bali Declaration, and emphasized the need for universal and adequate social protection. He also called for a higher ratification rate among countries in the region. He reiterated his group's support for the continuation of Regional Meetings. She thanked the organizers for making this Regional Meeting a success, and his group for the trust it had placed in him as a spokesperson. He concluded by reaffirming his group's support for the adoption of the Singapore Statement.
185. The Meeting unanimously adopted the Singapore Statement.

## Closing ceremony

- 186.** *The Government Vice-Chairperson* recalled that much had changed since the 16th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting. The COVID-19 pandemic had been a challenge for all and reinforced the need for a human-centred approach to the recovery to ensure that the most vulnerable remained the focus of collective action. She reviewed a variety of measures taken by the Government of India to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable populations. These included an employment guarantee scheme, which had benefited more than 72 million households in a single year; re-employment and job-creation incentives for employers; wage advances for workers; collateral-free loans for street vendors; and a free national vaccination programme. As a result, the Indian economy had seen a strong job-rich recovery, further supported by the National Career Service Portal which matched labour supply with demand while offering skills development programmes. With 90 per cent of India's workers in the informal economy, the Government used its *e-Shram* registration portal to help extend protection to the unorganized sector. Recent reforms to simplify and rationalize India's labour laws would further extend labour and social security protection to informal, gig and platform workers. She urged constituents to regroup and rethink while looking back and moving forward. The pandemic had shown that the world was a family and needed countries to face such challenges together. There was a need to build a global coalition with social justice at its core in the future.
- 187.** *The Employer Vice-Chairperson* said that neither region was immune to the challenges presented by digitalization, demographic shifts, inequalities, de-globalization pressures and supply chain disruptions. Yet, tripartite social dialogue remained key to overcoming these challenges and to achieving a human-centred recovery that is sustainable, inclusive and resilient. There was a need to revitalize productivity growth through business transformation, skills development and formalization – ensuring that the gains from productivity were shared fairly. Employers were committed to protecting vulnerable workers and keeping workplaces safe and healthy. Together, the social partners could provide stewardship for sustainable development and social justice. The Employers' group supported the balanced Singapore Statement, which demonstrated the political will of the parties to reach consensus. He looked forward to clear and impactful actions by constituents and the ILO to implement the commitments from this Meeting. He hoped the ILO would also collect and disseminate good practices and policy recommendations that were instructive and implementable.
- 188.** *The Worker Vice-Chairperson* agreed that the Meeting had been a good opportunity for tripartite partners from Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States to exchange views and experiences on handling the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It showcased each country's work to rebuild their economies, provide better protection to workers and their families, and to rebuild sustainable enterprises – underpinned by a renewed commitment to social justice for a human-centred recovery. Tripartism and social dialogue had to be a strong pillar in this effort, and she thanked her Government and Employer counterparts from Singapore for their collaboration to improve the lives of workers. She looked forward to the ILO facilitating greater worker involvement in multilateral organizations while advancing the cause of workers in the region. She assured delegates of the Workers' group's support in this regard. Finally, she congratulated the drafting committee for its work in crafting a consensual set of conclusions. The Singapore Statement provided guidance to help make ILO policies and programmes more effective in meeting the needs of the tripartite partners in the region in the coming years.
- 189.** *The Chairperson* acknowledged that, to varying degrees, countries still felt the effects of the pandemic. This Meeting had been an opportunity to rethink the future of work for the



decades ahead. The report of the Director-General was timely, providing guidance on how to collectively embark on a human-centred recovery. This was the first regional meeting since the adoption of the ILO's *Global call to action*. To heed this call, several key factors needed to be considered. First was the foundational importance of tripartism and social dialogue. Employers had to recognize that businesses could not thrive when workers were not treated fairly; workers needed to engage with employers to help adapt to new ways of work; and governments played a crucial role in anchoring and balancing this relationship in the development of fair, implementable, and coherent labour policies. Secondly, while it was not possible to protect every job, workers needed access to skills upgrading and lifelong learning. He noted efforts deployed in Singapore to anticipate and develop the necessary skills across the economy, in coordination with the social partners. Thirdly, the economic recovery had to be inclusive to ensure that disadvantaged workers, including those engaged in new forms of work, benefitted from labour market opportunities while retaining decent work and adequate protections. He looked forward to seeing the Meeting conclusions put into practice and recognized that despite the diversity between countries in the two regions, there was unity in creating a decent future of work.

- 190.** *The Director-General of the ILO* thanked the Government of Singapore for its exemplary organization and able leadership in hosting the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting. The increased number of delegates compared to the 16th Regional Meeting in Bali showed the relevance of the ILO's mandate in these turbulent times. He nonetheless expressed concern over the inadequate representation of women at the Meeting and the need for improvement in this regard. This region was one of great diversity, including in the different paces of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some countries continued to pursue export-driven growth models but struggled to realize social gains in line with economic gains. Other countries faced political conflict, while others faced challenges as least developed countries or small island States. What tied these countries together was a commitment to social dialogue and a dedication towards the renewal of social justice and a human-centred recovery.
- 191.** *The Director-General* welcomed the Singapore Statement and its vision of the region's priorities for national action and ILO support in the coming years. He highlighted the continued consultations towards developing the Global Coalition for Social Justice, along with efforts to ensure greater policy coherence among multilateral, regional and national stakeholders. He appreciated the call to make both regions stronger through increased operational support. He further welcomed the commitment to develop institutional frameworks to support transitions to formality and decent work, to strengthen the foundations for social and employment protection and resilience, and to revitalize productivity growth and skills. There was a continued need to increase the ratification rate of the ILO's fundamental Conventions and their implementation, and to improve labour migration governance. Lastly, he acknowledged the interest in continuing regional and sub-regional dialogues and called on constituents to work with the ILO to find a formula for regional dialogues that increased their inclusiveness and effectiveness.