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International Labour Conference – 111th Session, Geneva, 2023

Date: 23 June 2023

Plenary sitting: Opening of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference

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Monday, 5 June 2023, 11.15 a.m.

Presidents: Ms Fuentes Julio, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and Mr bin Samikh Al Marri

Opening of the session

Ms Fuentes Julio

**Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)**

It is an honour for me to wish you a very warm welcome to this 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. My name is Claudia Fuentes Julio, I am the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Chile here in Geneva. Today, in my capacity as Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office for 2022–23, it is my honour to declare open this 111th Session of the International Labour Conference.

As you are aware, this session of the Conference marks a return to a fully in-person format of the Conference, even though some technological facilities introduced as a result of the virtual sessions held in recent years have been retained. It is therefore my pleasure to wish you all – Governments, Workers and Employers – a warm welcome to Geneva for this important session.

Election of the President of the Conference

Ms Fuentes Julio

**Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)**

I propose that we proceed with the work on this morning's agenda without further ado, starting with the nomination of the President of the International Labour Conference.

I give the floor to Ms Stasch, the Government representative of Germany and current Chairperson of the Government group, to put forward her group's nomination.

Ms Stasch

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

In my capacity as Chairperson of the Government group, I have been entrusted with presenting the nomination of Mr Ali bin Samikh Al Marri, Minister of Labour of Qatar, for the position of President of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. This nomination was made by the Asia and Pacific group, in accordance with the regional rotation in place with respect to nominations for the positions of President and Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

With a long record in public service, Mr bin Samikh Al Marri served in numerous capacities prior to his appointment as Minister of Labour of Qatar in October 2021. He served as President of the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and of the Permanent Arab Human Rights Committee at the League of Arab States. He has also been closely involved in initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions and the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions.

Mr bin Samikh Al Marri holds a PhD in Political Science, in addition to a master's degree in Political Science. Counting on his skills and experience, particularly after having served as Vice-President of the Conference in 2022, the Government group trusts that he will ably guide the work of the Conference and wishes him every success.

Ms Hornung-Draus

Employer Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

On behalf of the Employers' group, I would like to support the candidature of Mr bin Samikh Al Marri.

Ms Passchier

Worker Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

This item, at the opening sitting of the Conference, is normally just a formality. Allow me today, however, to make some brief remarks on behalf of the Workers' group. First, I want to express the commitment of the Workers' group to the important principle in this house that the constituent groups are fully autonomous in choosing their representatives; we cherish that principle. At the same time, we expect that the constituents, when proposing candidates for functions that are pivotal in the governance of the ILO – such as the presidency of the Conference – ensure that these candidates are fully committed to the mandate and tripartite structure of the ILO, its fundamental principles, rights and values, and its supervisory system.

The country that is currently nominated to preside over this year's session of the Conference, Qatar, has, in recent years, been subject to the scrutiny of the ILO's supervisory system, regarding the violations of fundamental rights of big numbers of migrant workers in the run-up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup. We must acknowledge Qatar for engaging with the ILO, with the international trade union movement and with the International Organisation of Employers on the fundamental reforms to its legal system and the improvements made on the ground.

However, after the World Cup, some serious doubts were expressed by unions active on the ground as to whether there was sufficient commitment to the further implementation necessary to address the ongoing plight of migrant workers. This has led, in recent weeks and days, to extensive conversations, partly under the guidance of the ILO, and we must express our gratitude here to the Director-General and his team for their engagement in this regard. These conversations have resulted in a joint understanding on the need for re-engagement and the need to speed up the reforms and their implementation, and in an agreement to address the outstanding issues jointly and at short notice in the interests of the migrant workers in Qatar.

Such a process is never easy, but once again we see that genuine social dialogue can deliver progress. We commend Qatar for stepping up its engagement with the ILO and the international trade union movement and for expressing its full commitment to the fundamental principles, rights and values of this house. We are looking forward to the positive results of this re-engagement. We would certainly wish to see similar processes happening in other countries in the region and beyond.

With these comments, I wish to express that the Workers' group can accept the nomination of Qatar as president of the Conference.

Ms Fuentes Julio

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)

Having heard the nomination put forward by the Government group, which has been duly endorsed by the Employers' and the Workers' groups, I take it that the Conference wishes to elect Mr Ali bin Samikh Al Marri, Minister of Labour of Qatar, President of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference.

I extend my warmest congratulations to Mr bin Samikh Al Marri and I have the pleasure to invite him to come up to the podium and assume his duties.

(Mr bin Samikh Al Marri, Minister of Labour of Qatar, is elected President of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference and takes the President's chair.)

The President

(Original Arabic)

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to perform this honourable duty. I shall do my best, together with my fellow Officers, to guide the work of the Conference, based on its long-standing traditions and guiding principles and rules. Furthermore, I will spare no effort to ensure that this session of the Conference is a success; I rely on your valuable support to this end.

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference

The President

(Original Arabic)

Our first task is the election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference. I give the floor to Ms Dimitrova, the Clerk of the Conference, who will read out the names of the candidates proposed by the three groups.

Ms Dimitrova

The Clerk of the Conference

The nominations for the three positions of Vice-President of the Conference are as follows: for the Government group, Ms Ajder (Republic of Moldova); for the Employers' group, Mr Munthe (Norway); and for the Workers' group, Mr Awan (Pakistan).

The President

(Original Arabic)

If there are no objections, may I take it that these proposals are approved?

(The proposals are approved.)

The President

(Original Arabic)

It is my pleasure to invite my fellow Officers to come up and join me on the podium.

Nomination of the Officers of the groups

The President (Original Arabic)

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

Government group

Chairperson	Ms Stasch (Germany)
Vice-Chairperson	Ms Imene-Chanduru (Namibia)

Employers' group

Chairperson	Ms Hornung-Draus (Germany)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Furlan (Brazil)
	Mr Mackall (United States of America)
	Mr Matsui (Japan)
	Mr Matthey (Switzerland)
	Ms Mugo (Kenya)
Secretary	Mr Suárez Santos (International Organisation of Employers)

Workers' group

Chairperson	Ms Passchier (Netherlands)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Atwoli (Kenya)
	Mr Dimitrov (Bulgaria)
	Ms Gono (Japan)
	Mr De Lisboa (Brazil)
Secretary	Mr Beirnaert (International Trade Union Confederation)

Constitution and composition of Conference committees

The President (Original Arabic)

The next agenda item concerns the constitution and composition of standing committees and technical committees to consider items on the agenda of the Conference. The Standing Orders of the Conference provide for the establishment of the following standing committees: the Credentials Committee; the Finance Committee; the General Affairs Committee; the Committee on the Application of Standards; and the Drafting Committee.

In addition to these standing committees, the Conference may wish to establish the following technical committees to consider and report on, respectively, items IV, V and VI of the Conference agenda: the Standard-Setting Committee on Apprenticeships; the Recurrent

Discussion Committee on Labour Protection; and the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition.

The groups have informed the secretariat of the nominations for the members of the Credentials Committee, which are as follows: for the Government group, Ms Samuelsen (Norway); for the Employers' group, Mr Yllanes Martínez (Mexico); and for the Workers' group, Mr Vogt (United States of America).

The Finance Committee is composed of one Government delegate from each Member of the Organization represented at the Conference. There is no need to register for this Committee.

As regards the General Affairs Committee, it has been the practice that its composition corresponds to that of the Governing Body. It is therefore composed of all the regular and deputy Government members of the Governing Body and all the regular and deputy Employer and Worker members, as nominated by the respective groups. As recommended by the Governing Body, the Conference may wish to refer agenda items VII, VIII and IX to the General Affairs Committee for it to consider and report on.

As regards the Drafting Committee, its composition will be determined, in accordance with article 9 of the Standing Orders of the Conference, by the committee which refers a text to it, which at this session will be the Standard-Setting Committee.

The composition of the committees, as proposed by the groups, is communicated to participants on the [Conference website](#).

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves the establishment of the committees and their composition as proposed?

(The proposals are approved.)

Requests for representation in Conference committees submitted by non-governmental international organizations

The President (Original Arabic)

In accordance with article 2, paragraph 2(k), of the Standing Orders of the Conference, the Governing Body has invited certain international non-governmental organizations to be represented at the 111th Session of the Conference, it being understood that it will be for the Conference to consider their requests to be present at the sittings of the committees dealing with the items on the agenda in which they have expressed a particular interest.

In accordance with article 36, paragraph 6, of the Standing Orders, the Conference may wish to invite the organizations listed in the document entitled *Participation of international non-governmental organizations in Committees of the International Labour Conference*, which is published on the website of the Conference, to be represented in the committees concerned.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves this proposal?

(The proposal is approved.)

Opening address by the President of the Conference

Mr bin Samikh Al Marri

President of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference

(Original Arabic)

At the outset, please allow me to extend my thanks to the Asia-Pacific Governments and to the Government group for nominating Qatar to preside over the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. I also express my appreciation to the Employers' and Workers' groups for supporting my nomination.

We value this trust that represents the culmination of Qatar's successful cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its tripartite constituents, mainly in the past few years, despite certain challenges that we will strive tirelessly to overcome.

We meet against the backdrop of multiple crises and much uncertainty across the world. Our meeting is timely as regards the discussion of issues of interest to workers, employers and governments across the world.

The items on the agenda of the 111th Session of the Conference are inextricably linked to our national development strategy in Qatar. I am confident that this is also the case of many governments present in this hall.

The Report of the Director-General entitled *Advancing social justice*, which we have before us, underscores the need to advance social justice and promote decent work across the world. It examines some of the realities facing the world of work today, such as inequality, insecurity and rampant poverty. It also highlights the strategic opportunities that exist, both nationally and internationally, to address these realities, including through a broad global coalition to support multilateral cooperation for social justice.

Climate change, with its transformative impact on the world of work, is by far more important and global. In this context, I look forward to the general discussion on a just transition, with a just environmental transition offering opportunities for economic diversification in Qatar.

This brings me to the second item on our agenda – that is the standard-setting discussion on apprenticeships, which is also one of our national priorities. Quality apprenticeships and other forms of training are vital to facilitate the effective participation of Qatari and non-Qatari workers in future strategic sectors.

Thirdly, the recurrent discussion on labour protection. As many of you know, this item is closely linked to labour reforms that are under way in Qatar. In this context, the Conference report entitled *Leaving no one behind: Building inclusive labour protection in an evolving world of work* refers to two sets of national laws that entered into force in 2021, namely on the minimum wage and occupational heat stress. Despite this, and as you know, since 2017, legislation has been adopted on domestic work; the *kafala* [sponsorship] system has been repealed, as part of reforms introduced to the contractual system; and joint committees have been established, bringing together elected workers and management representatives. Since 2017 too, our complaints system has become available online, and we have established labour dispute settlement committees as well as a fund to support workers. These changes are significant and have an impact on labour protection. Of course, this is still a work in progress, and much remains to be done. We are ready and committed to this.

As highlighted in the Conference report on labour protection, effective systems of social dialogue contribute to inclusive, adequate and effective labour protection. In the State of Qatar, we are exploring ways to build social dialogue among the Government, employers, and workers – a process that we cannot replicate from elsewhere. At the end of the day, not all societies are identical, and not all labour markets are similar. For these changes to be sustainable, they should be relevant to our context and reality.

Last year, Qatar proudly served as Vice-President of the 2022 International Labour Conference, when a resolution was adopted, including a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work and recognizing the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No.187), as fundamental occupational safety and health (OSH) Conventions. We continue to explore the likely ratification of these OSH standards in the near future, as well as the means to incorporate these principles into our domestic laws and policies and national programmes to further their implementation. In addition, we have recently established an independent occupational safety and health division at the Ministry, and we will examine the likelihood of setting up an OSH institute, with a focus on research, data collection, training and certification.

We have also been engaged in discussions with the ILO office on a new programme for the period 2024–27. While the details are still being worked out jointly with the ILO, they are comprehensive and build on recent developments. In addition, we have invited international trade union federations and the Global Union Federations to pursue their partnership with Qatar to provide further protection to workers.

Presentation of the Report of the Director-General of the International Labour Office

The President (Original Arabic)

I now have the honour to give the floor to the Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr Hougbo, so that he may present his vision of the work to be accomplished at this session of the Conference, and to present his report entitled *Advancing social justice*, together with its appendix entitled *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*.

Mr Hougbo Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference (Original French)

Welcome to this 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. I would like to begin by congratulating the Officers on their election to steer the work of this Conference. We are meeting again in person at a pivotal time for the labour market. A time when technological and scientific progress is continuing to shape new forms of work and is generating thousands of jobs, not to mention productivity gains.

At the same time, all countries, without exception, are continuing their efforts to recoup the economic and social benefits lost as a result of COVID-19, even though it is clear that these

efforts are being undermined by the numerous crises which are leaving the world of today in a state of upheaval. These structural labour market transformations will undoubtedly continue.

It is true that several countries are now facing skills shortages and feeling the impact of demographic changes on the labour market, while other Member States are confronting economic migration and, in some cases, the brain drain and are seeking to develop the skills of their national workforce so as to meet the needs of their own labour markets.

Although it is true that high-income countries have, in an overall sense, returned to their pre-COVID-19 levels in terms of social and economic development, the outlook is not so rosy for all low-income countries. Accordingly, the *ILO Monitor on the world of work*, published last week, estimates that global unemployment is at about 191 million people, just below the pre-crisis level.

Low-income countries are facing a jobs gap rate of 21.5 per cent, while the rate for high-income countries is 8.2 per cent. The situation is of even greater concern for those low-income countries that are also in debt distress: for these countries, the jobs gap rate is at more like 25.7 per cent, reflecting the impact on the labour market of problems relating to fiscal space and debt distress.

Although the labour market is now characterized by young people who are increasingly dynamic and better trained, it is nevertheless true that one young person in five is unemployed and is outside the education and training system. This has a broad but negative impact on the problem of the informal economy, the situation in respect of which has unfortunately deteriorated since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the efforts of governments and also of central bankers to curb this rampant inflation (which should remain at around 7 per cent in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund), the global increase in wages has remained well below the rise in prices, thus generating an almost constant loss of purchasing power, especially for the most vulnerable sectors of our society.

Although the productivity gains and their positive economic impact are welcome, we should also remember the ever-growing divide between productivity growth on the one hand and wage growth on the other, as well as the very large number of micro and small enterprises which create jobs but are obliged to file bankruptcy petitions.

My message is simple. No one should bury their head in the sand. The benefits derived from the fourth industrial revolution, which promises a radical transformation of production methods, demographic upheavals and the overriding need to decarbonize the economy, rightly constitute opportunities for a brighter future for us all. At the same time, deep-seated inequalities continue to exist. It is absurd to point out that, currently, 4 billion of our fellow citizens have no social protection and 214 million workers have an income that is below the poverty threshold. How can we explain that women are still earning, on average, 20 per cent less per hour than their male colleagues?

I fundamentally believe that we cannot stand by and watch the resurgence of child labour and forced labour. We cannot remain indifferent to the risks of discrimination, in any form, or to the risks of exclusion, or violence and harassment.

In short, we need to continue to push harder on this accelerator of social justice. Social justice which, need we recall, is and remains the cornerstone and the main *raison d'être* of our Organization. It has also underpinned the social agenda of the United Nations since its establishment.

The initiative to establish a Global Coalition for Social Justice is intended to bring together all stakeholders acting in good faith from the world of work, but also from the United Nations system, as well as international financial institutions, multilateral development banks, the private sector, civil society, academia and bilateral partners, in order to galvanize our efforts towards greater social justice.

In the short term, we would like to elevate the political debate on the need to mainstream the social agenda in all major international, regional and local meetings. Together, by the end of this year, we hope to identify the main thematic areas on which we must focus these additional efforts. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, with my predecessor, Guy Ryder, is a good example of what I am talking about.

The fight against inequality and informality and access for all to education and learning are other examples, as is the integration of human rights and labour rights into trade agreements and supply chains.

The Global Coalition for Social Justice is aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by mobilizing stakeholders in the multilateral system to better align their actions on social justice objectives.

Building on the ILO's social justice mandate, the Coalition seeks to balance environmental, economic and social considerations in the global conversation, including in the reform of the international financial architecture. We want to advocate policy coherence and investment in social protection and decent work. We also want to deepen the discourse on overhauling the financial system to better support the real economy and decent jobs and ensure a human-centred approach.

Since taking office, I have had the opportunity to visit several Member States. I have seen first-hand the adverse effects of successive crises, growing inequality and the burning cost-of-living issue, to name but a few of the challenges being faced. However, I have also witnessed the determination of many governments and the social partners to overcome these challenges and emerging issues.

Fortunately, there is a real willingness to tackle the structural barriers to economic and social progress. I am talking about a commitment to ensure that new technologies create decent jobs, to provide the skills and support needed for just transition so that workers and enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, can benefit from the new low-carbon economy, and to support social protection in ever fairer, more cohesive and more resilient societies. It is for all these reasons that my first report to the Conference focuses on "Advancing social justice".

I wish to warmly thank the Heads of State and Government, the representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, colleagues from the agencies of the multilateral system, and the other officials who have agreed to participate in the World of Work Summit: Social Justice for All.

In this context, we must strengthen our commitment to effective multilateralism. Both within the ILO and beyond our Organization, this should take the form of constructive engagement and the quest for joint and consensus-based solutions.

Faced with the threat of division, faced with the threat of entrenchment and faced with the threat of a polarization of opinions, we have a duty – I would say that it is a moral obligation – to prioritize the use of diplomacy to reconcile the views of the various groups. In short, at a

time when – let us say it – multilateralism is actually being undermined, we must do all we can to ensure the supremacy of the force of international diplomacy over the diplomacy of force.

We must endeavour to understand each other's point of view, find common ground and facilitate inclusion. At the ILO, this also means promoting the ratification of the Instrument of Amendment to the ILO Constitution, 1986, to enable us to move forward with democratizing the governance structure of our Organization.

It is my duty, as Director-General, to raise an unfortunate matter with you. Because, in fact, there is an unfortunate matter. Two thirds of Member States, 125 countries, have ratified the Amendment. Yet its implementation remains elusive and blocked by eight of the ten Member States of chief industrial importance. This state of affairs is at odds with our values of democracy and social justice.

Let us keep all our tripartite bargaining experience in mind over the coming two weeks to enable us to reach consensus in the various Conference committees. First, in addition to the usual work of the Committee on the Application of Standards, I am looking forward to the discussion of the General Survey on achieving gender equality at work. Second, the Standard-Setting Committee on Apprenticeships will consider the crucial need to promote quality apprenticeships in the framework of suitable policies. Third, the Recurrent Discussion Committee on Labour Protection will indicate to us future priorities regarding strengthening labour institutions in the spirit of the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work, 2019, and I can only welcome the importance that all the participants attach to this issue. Fourth, in the face of the challenges of climate change, the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition will consider the effects on the world of work of the transition to a low-carbon economy. Fifth, the conclusions of the General Affairs Committee are eagerly awaited this year. Lastly, the work of the Finance Committee will focus on the adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2024–25. The adoption of the budget is essential to provide us with the necessary resources to implement appropriate and human-centred solutions and to advance social justice.

During this session of the Conference, you will also have the opportunity to consider my report, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. It is a report that, unfortunately, confirms harsh labour market conditions, high unemployment and an increased poverty rate, particularly in Gaza, where the poverty rate has risen from 59 to 65 per cent. The ILO will continue to provide its technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and to workers and employers in Palestine.

Let us take this Conference as an opportunity to build a fairer and more stable world, with just transitions, quality apprenticeships that support the skills and employment potential of young people, inclusive and effective labour protection and, above all, more decent work.

Presentation of the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body

The President (Original Arabic)

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to the Chairperson of the Governing Body for the period 2022–23, Ms Fuentes Julio, who will present her report on the activities of the Governing Body over this period. The report is available on the Conference website as document [ILC.111/Report I\(B\)](#).

Ms Fuentes Julio**Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)**

I have the honour to present my report to you, document ILC.111/Report I(B). The report which I am presenting to this session of the Conference contains a summary of the most important discussions held by the Governing Body since the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference. I would like to note that this report is an expression of the willingness to keep all Members of the Organization informed of the decisions adopted by the Governing Body, membership of which is limited and changes every three years. This eagerness is of great importance as the decisions taken set the course of the Organization's work in all of the Member States.

Before I make my comments, I would like to thank the tripartite members of the Governing Body for the dedication with which they have carried out their work during the past 12 months. The momentum and pace of our discussions have resulted in an intense schedule for all the delegates and for the Office staff who have given us their unfailing support. Nevertheless, our willingness to produce harmonious results has in most cases allowed us to reconcile divergent positions through the search for consensus. Our work has not been easy, but we have managed mostly to bring it to a successful conclusion. Many thanks to you all for your effort and input.

I could not present to you the fruits of these joint efforts without having emphasized the importance for my country of having been able to contribute to the ILO's work as the Chairperson of the Governing Body. Chile has not occupied this position since the beginning of the 1990s, and that is why this opportunity has represented a great challenge and a fine responsibility. I sincerely hope that I have been able to represent the agreement reached by all the actors in the world of work, both from Chile and my beloved Latin America, as well as from other regions, with the establishment of decent work as a means and an end to achieving real social justice for us, as well as for future generations. This has been the guiding principle of the Chilean approach to chairing the Governing Body.

During my term in office, the Governing Body has gradually abandoned the arrangements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and returned to holding fully in-person meetings. This experience demonstrates that the role played by human interaction cannot be underestimated in terms of the effectiveness of negotiations. It is nevertheless important to recognize the benefits of remote connectivity, provided that the appropriate circumstances are in place. That said, although remote participation guarantees greater inclusion and represents an additional service, on which we can continue to rely in future meetings, it is obvious that it will never be as effective as face-to-face negotiations.

In March 2022, the Governing Body elected its 11th Director-General, Mr Gilbert F. Hounbo, who took up his duties on 1 October 2022, during my term in office.

The new Director-General has set his objectives and the direction in which he wants to take the Organization in clear terms. These include forging a Global Coalition for Social Justice during this session of the Conference, a subject which was discussed by the Governing Body. This timely initiative goes hand in hand with the call by the United Nations Secretary-General for a new social contract and with the World Social Summit that will take place in 2025. I trust that the Coalition will contribute to both initiatives.

The Global Coalition for Social Justice reflects the efforts of the Director-General to stimulate social justice through the promotion of decent work. It is anticipated that the

Organization will be able to deepen and strengthen the commitment of the international community to promote social justice. Similarly, it should promote the application of the Decent Work Programme, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, the Coalition will promote, guide and expand both new and current policy measures, which require greater solidarity, coherence and coordination. Director-General, I wish you complete success in the next stages of this initiative and I invite the Organization's tripartite constituents to continue giving relevant guidance to the Office so that the Coalition comes to fruition as a joint initiative for the benefit of all.

As you are aware, the Governing Body has also devoted long hours to examining the Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25, presented by the Director-General. In this regard, the Governing Body has drafted a resolution to be adopted at this session of the Conference and that will be considered by the Finance Committee. The Programme and Budget proposals that the Finance Committee will consider will set the course that the Organization will take during the next biennium. For that reason, it is of primary importance for the Conference to adopt a programme and budget at the current session, as the progress of the activities of and the impact that the International Labour Organization will have in the next two years depend on this. In light of the above, the Governing Body has spared no efforts to fulfil its role in this process. I now wish the Finance Committee much success in the performance of its duties. The Conference plenary sittings will take into consideration the vote on the adoption of the related resolution which, we hope, the Committee will be in a position to submit to it on Monday, 12 June.

This year, the Governing Body has also followed up on different resolutions adopted previously by the Conference. These resolutions include that concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy, the resolution on the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work, and the resolution concerning decent work in global supply chains. Likewise, the Governing Body has followed up on the cases of non-observance of international labour standards stemming from different articles of the ILO Constitution. These discussions will once again provide us with a tangible example of the fact that, where the Organization's normative function is combined with the clear political will of the Member States whose cases have been examined, the achievement of results in favour of dialogue and social justice is tangible. In this context, I would like to congratulate the tripartite constituents of all the Member States included in the agenda of the Governing Body this year, for their dedication and their clear willingness to promote the principles and values on which our joint action is based day by day.

I wish to end by saying that it has been a great honour and privilege to perform the duties of Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office during this year. As my term in office is coming to an end, I vow that under the new administration the noble founding principles of this institution will continue to water the seeds of the future of work that we aspire to reap, with a view to achieving a lasting peace firmly rooted in social justice.

Before concluding, I wish to thank also the Vice-Presidents here with me, representing the Employers and Workers, for the work we have done together during the past 12 months. It should be recalled that this has been the second consecutive year in which the three Conference officers have been women, which would constitute a source of great pride and satisfaction for all of us.

I warmly welcome the opportunity to meet with you again at the 348th Session of the Governing Body, which will take place on Saturday, 17 June, during which I will hand over the

gavel to my successor. With these words, I submit to you my report on the work of the Governing Body during the period June 2022 to June 2023, and thank you all for your attention.

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

The President (Original Arabic)

We will now hear the opening statements of the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups, who will present their groups' views in respect of the work of our Conference.

Ms Hornung-Draus Chairperson of the Employers' group

On behalf of the Employers' group, I would like to begin by congratulating the President and the Vice-Presidents of the Conference on their election at this 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. They are presiding over an important session, which is taking place in an evolving and complex international scenario with many challenges, but also with many opportunities ahead. In this context, it is more important than ever for the ILO to focus on and to remain loyal to its mandate – which is the world of work – and to its universal values and principles. These values and principles are defined and adopted by the International Labour Conference, the ILO's supreme decision-making body, in full respect for the social, economic and cultural diversity of its Member States.

As we move forward over the next two weeks, we must remember that achieving tripartite consensus is the foundation both for fair and equitable outcomes and for effective implementation, since only consensus can create ownership among all the actors concerned. It should therefore guide our discussions. Diversity and the resulting divergencies can and must be bridged with goodwill and in a spirit of consensus based on respect for all the constituents of this Organization. We must not let our divergencies make consensus the exception.

The Employers, Workers and Governments must work together and strive to achieve consensus. And the Office should act with integrity and impartiality, work to unite all the constituents and avoid taking an interested part in our deliberations. I am sure that, if we follow this approach, we will overcome any tensions and difficult moments in our deliberations.

In 2019, the centenary year of the ILO, this Conference predicted many transformations in the world of work, which would affect, among others, the way we work, working time and even the concept of work. We, the Employers, also called attention to the deep changes in the way businesses are evolving. The measures taken by governments in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated this process. With regard to digitization, today, we are no longer witnessing the "future", but the "present" of work. We are convinced that most current labour market regulations and institutions are solid, as well as flexible and also appropriate for this new reality in the world of work. We should not risk undermining the excellent basis that we have built together through social dialogue over more than a century and which will help us meet the challenges of new realities.

Mr Gilbert F. Hougbo, the new Director-General, is, for the first time, leading the ILO's support to this Conference. We welcome Gilbert, and his new leadership team, and we wish them all the best in their duties. I will refer tomorrow to the Report of the Director-General,

and more specifically to his flagship initiative, the Global Coalition for Social Justice. But let me insist that we very much hope that this initiative will help to “reinvigorate” the ILO’s role in the multilateral system.

For that to happen, it is imperative that the skills, productivity and sustainable enterprises agenda should also get adequate recognition and a place among the ILO’s priorities. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted by this Conference in 2019, provides us with the necessary orientation. Only with ambition in these areas can the ILO strengthen its credibility in the entire United Nations system.

We are finally back to a fully in-person session of the Conference. However, we can draw important lessons from our recent experience of virtual sittings. We can do much better to manage and optimize our time, avoid unnecessary procedures and be responsible with our time when we are intervening. Also, the use of digital tools can and should be leveraged to make the Conference more inclusive, especially for those who, exceptionally, cannot join us in person. The different committees will need to consider these lessons.

I would like to take a moment to briefly review the discussions ahead of us in the committees.

The Committee on the Application of Standards is again meeting to discuss a prioritized agenda. As the longest-standing Conference committee, the Committee on the Application of Standards provides the highest and most authoritative tripartite guidance on the implementation of ILO standards. This year, we look forward to the discussion of the General Survey on the six instruments concerning discrimination, workers with family responsibilities and maternity protection. Non-discrimination in the world of work is an important component in advancing a country’s overall business and economic performance, including in terms of national productivity and economic growth on the basis of equity and fairness. This discussion will help to shed light on how, in concrete terms, international labour standards strike a balance between non-discrimination, diverse societal expectations and cultural diversity.

The most demanding work of the Committee on the Application of Standards, as usual, will be the discussion of the list of individual cases. I must mention that there are still, regrettably, several Member States in which the ILO’s core principle of freedom of association is not respected, where efforts to achieve real and meaningful consensus for action are blocked, and where employer and worker organizations are excluded from attempts to build a better future.

As I did last year, I continue to insist on one crucial point: the Committee on the Application of Standards must make clear its commitment to balanced supervision, and it must do justice to the needs of sustainable enterprises. These needs should be reflected not only in the discussions, but also in the outcomes of the Committee’s debates. We, the Employers, will continue to make efforts to achieve consensual conclusions and we will voice our views, even if divergent, in mutual respect and understanding.

Our agenda also includes a recurrent discussion on labour protection as a follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008), as amended in 2022. This discussion is essential to build on the undeniable progress that has been made in labour protection since the previous discussion in 2015, as acknowledged in the report provided by the Office.

Let me insist on a fundamental point: recurrent discussions are not intended to open general policy discussions. Their objective is to review the ILO’s actions to assist constituents, to review the constituents’ efforts to implement the respective policies, and of course to draw

the lessons learned for future action. This discussion is not about raising new controversial concepts that may lead to endless, theoretical and polarized policy discussions. All of this would risk compromising the potential to reach a consensual outcome.

Importantly, all the constituents need to remember that we cannot dissociate labour protection from the needs of employers and the need to have sustainable enterprises that create employment. Companies need to grow, to be productive and to create decent jobs. Without a proper environment for them, no labour protection can be effective or sustainable.

At this session, the Conference will also hold a first general discussion on just transitions. It will build, most certainly, on the Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, which were adopted by the ILO in 2015. I think we can all agree that, to achieve a truly just transition, we need clear and coherent conclusions that focus on the priorities of the world of work. The current tendency in the public debate to narrow down the notion of transitions and the Sustainable Development Goals to ecological aspects only does not do justice to the complexity of the issue. I therefore thank the Director-General, who, in his statement, also made this point and quite clearly said that the objective of the Global Coalition for Social Justice is precisely to redress this imbalance by focusing on the world of work and on decent work and the need for these aspects to be considered in the context of a just transition. Just transition policies cover a wide range of aspects, so it will be crucial to keep the discussion focused and coherent, in order to provide evidence-based solutions and ensure a useful outcome.

The ILO constituents need practical guidance for job creation and skills development, especially during this turbulent period, with a high risk of substantial job losses due to the sharp increase in energy prices and high inflation rates. This impacts not only workers – and the Director-General mentioned the very negative and adverse impact on the purchasing power and welfare of workers – it also impacts companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), all across the world. In that regard, it is crucial to prevent poorly designed policies, aimed at addressing climate change, that cause the unintended and unnecessary destruction of decent work and jeopardize the objective of just transition itself.

Too many companies, especially SMEs in developing countries, struggle to anticipate the required business transformation for climate change mitigation and adaptation. They do not have access to finance, nor do they have any practical support to navigate these new requirements. The reality is that many companies are at risk of disappearing. Too often, policymakers have little or no knowledge of their concrete needs; yet, they are the basis for employment creation.

Badly designed climate policies can create disruptions in the real economy. They can put climate strategies themselves at risk. Measuring the impact, including in terms of costs and barriers, is crucial to avoid significant disruptions in the real economy, particularly for SMEs and of course for employment in general. This also means that the skills agenda should be at the top of just transition policies, and the ILO should put much more emphasis on action in this important field. And again, I commend the Director-General for also making this point, highlighting the importance of a skills policy for the ILO.

This brings me to the next committee. We are expected to agree on a new standard on apprenticeships, which precisely takes on the issue of skills. Effective apprenticeship systems are, undeniably, useful to address the challenge of unemployment and skills shortages and mismatches, and to facilitate the transition for young people from school to working life. But there is a decline in the number of apprentices globally, which is very unfortunate, and companies are finding it increasingly difficult to bring young people through apprenticeship

schemes, especially in developing economies with weak institutions. We therefore do not need rigid regulations; what we do need is a forward-looking instrument that offers orientation and flexibility and that has a promotional approach. Such an instrument should provide a win for the apprentice, the enterprise and for society at large. We achieved an important consensus during last year's fruitful discussion, which has been integrated into the proposed Recommendation by the Office. We need to preserve that balance, based on an adequate regulatory component and, most importantly, a promotional approach.

Before concluding I would like to take a moment to honour and pay tribute to a number of Employer members who very recently passed away, and who were important members of the Employers' group. They were actually expected to be present here at this session of the International Labour Conference. They are Mohamed Al Amer, Fasihul Karim Siddiqi, Zaki Ahmed Khan, and Alberto Echavarría. They will all be deeply missed.

Fasihul Karim Siddiqi was the Vice-President of the Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP), and a highly respected and active contributor to the Employers' group. His energy, good humour and creativity will be deeply missed. Zaki Ahmed Khan was the President of the EFP, and a recent member of the ILO Governing Body, who also actively participated in last year's session of the International Labour Conference. We cannot imagine the deep sorrow felt by the entire EFP team for the loss of both leading personalities, and our thoughts are with the families and the loved ones left behind.

Also, as many of you know, our colleague Mohamed Al Amer, our esteemed Employer member from the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, passed away suddenly during the March session of the Governing Body. His profound respect for the ILO and its long history remains with us.

And, last but not least, there is our beloved Alberto Echavarría, who was a Governing Body member, the Employer spokesperson for the Committee on Freedom of Association, and the Vice-President of the National Employers' Association of Colombia (ANDI), among many other important functions. Many of you here knew Alberto well. He spent much of his career – and put all his passion into – working to defend the principles of the ILO and the Employers' interests therein. He was, quite literally, one of the best Employer warriors fighting the just cause of respect for social dialogue and free and independent employers' and workers' organizations across the globe. We do not have words to express how saddened we are about this very recent loss. I would like to conclude with a thought that Alberto shared with us. He said, "we can make a difference here for society, workers and employers". It is our responsibility to carry out this work with respect and in a constructive spirit.

Ms Passchier Chairperson of the Workers' group

It is good to see so many of you here in Geneva, for what is the first fully in-person session of the International Labour Conference since 2019, four years ago. I hope that the human connection brings the positivity, hope and creativity that we need to reach powerful conclusions that demonstrate our joint determination to shape the future of work, to benefit all people and to provide social justice for all. Before I continue, I want to extend my condolences to Renate Hornung-Draus for the several losses that the Employers' group has suffered. I am sure that, at the 348th Session of the Governing Body on 17 June, we will be able to pay more extensive tribute to them.

Let me continue by congratulating the President and the Vice-Presidents of the Conference on their election. We are confident that they will make every effort to contribute

to, and steer us through, a successful session of the Conference. I offer my apologies, as I may take a few more minutes to present the Workers' initial remarks on the important issues on the Conference agenda. Although we can expect many tough discussions during the session, let us never lose sight of the challenges outside these walls that workers are facing in everyday life, as well as the challenges facing employers and governments to achieve a just transition to a peaceful and prosperous future that sometimes, today, seems to elude us.

There is the existential threat of climate change, which, in recent years, has been overshadowed by a global health crisis. Meanwhile, natural disasters caused by climate change, including floods, droughts, cyclones and heatwaves, are becoming more prominent around the world, with the poorest people and the poorest regions suffering the most, leading, inevitably, to an increase in migratory flows. Wars continue to rage and are at risk of further escalation with the threat of nuclear annihilation looming. This year, the so-called doomsday clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight: the closest to global nuclear catastrophe it has ever been. Massive investments in a new nuclear and conventional arms race are undermining investments in common security and life on our planet. Geopolitical tension continues to weaken multilateralism's capacity to tackle our world's common problems. Daunting news messages warn us that artificial intelligence will overtake humanity if we do not take control.

Among growing inequality, hunger, poverty and child labour, an expanding group of disenfranchised people have lost faith and confidence in their political leaders; extremism and populism are on the rise. This brings me to another crisis that the world is facing today, which is the now critical state of democracy and its relation to the suppression of human and labour rights. Last week at the ILO, an event took place, jointly organized by the ILO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, on the theme "The double helix of civic space and labour rights". It was organized to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), both of which were adopted in 1948.

Civic space, according to the United Nations in a guidance note published in 2020, is "the environment that enables people and groups ... to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their societies. ... Civil society actors – including ... trade unionists ... – should be able to express themselves freely in full security and effect change peacefully and effectively. ... These require mechanisms that allow effective access to information, dialogue and the expression of dissenting and unpopular views."

In his 2016 statement to the United Nations General Assembly, the then Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association pointed out that it is at times of multiple crises when assembly and association rights are needed most, as an avenue for people to peacefully speak out, contribute their talents, share their ideas and help society work towards solving its problems. Unfortunately, many governments have reacted by taking destructive and counterproductive measures, closing the space for civil society voices and actions.

At the event last week, I called the trade unions "the canary in the coal mine": where trade unions are free and independent to organize and participate in social dialogue, economies and societies are thriving. Where fundamental international labour standards are under attack, more often than not, civic space is also shrinking and democracy weakened, while living standards and working conditions suffer. The International Trade Union Confederation's Global Rights Index has tracked a decade-long erosion of workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively, which is associated also with growing restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly.

Later today, in the General Affairs Committee, we will discuss the extremely worrying situation in Belarus, in connection with which an article 33 procedure has been invoked for persistent violations of Convention No. 87 and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), which is unfortunately just one example of a country in which both civic space and freedom of association are under extreme attack.

The Declaration of Philadelphia of 1944, for good reason, asserted that freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress. And freedom of association and collective bargaining remain the most important and challenging fundamental rights to be achieved, especially as they are, in the ILO, seen as enabling rights that are necessary to achieve all other rights.

So, our agenda for the Conference is crucial and timely, and we welcome the Director-General's Report, *Advancing social justice*, which provides us with a broad perspective which should guide us throughout our work. Changes in work patterns and the abuse and use of temporary and short-term contracts have resulted in massive job insecurity and have undermined freedom of association, collective bargaining and access to labour protection, which is one issue on our agenda under the recurrent discussion. This recurrent discussion is a timely opportunity to put our money where our mouth is when we called, in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work of 2019, for the adequate protection of all workers, including by taking into account safety and health at work and other core rights such as the right to freedom of association and to bargain collectively, the right to a living wage and working time limits for all workers, regardless of their contractual arrangements or type of employment. And this must include all workers: migrant workers, precarious workers and workers in the informal economy, including self-employed workers.

In this digital age of platform or gig work and telework, working time requires us to think how the minimum standards enshrined in the Conventions and Recommendations can effectively be respected in the contemporary world of work. In our view, this cannot be done without making sure that people are guaranteed a living wage without having to work overtime.

In terms of the protection of the rights of young workers in their transition to decent jobs, we look forward to the second discussion with a view to the adoption of a Recommendation on quality apprenticeships. Clearly, the Recommendation should aim to elevate the global standard for apprenticeships, to protect our youngsters from exploitation, rather than lower the standard and the pressure of the market demand for cheap labour at the expense of their, and therefore also our, future.

The general discussion on a just transition, including the consideration of industrial policies and technology towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, is aimed at stepping up the implementation of a just transition by governments, workers and employers with the support and action of the ILO.

In the light of my earlier remarks on the climate crisis, this is a timely opportunity to position labour in the governance of a just transition to a more sustainable world. We will not be able to attain the commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change if we do not engage in effective industrial policies, elaborated with the social partners, using a mix of fiscal and investment policies and engaging in policy design for diversification strategies to further support the process of structural transformation with social and environmental justice as a goal. This includes ensuring a sectoral approach along global supply chains, a key role for indigenous and tribal peoples and a fair distribution of the gains in productivity through technological progress, as well as policy coherence across the system.

The General Affairs Committee will formalize a number of amendments to instruments that require updating, in the light of decisions taken by the Conference last year, in relation to a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental right at work, and also by the Special Tripartite Committee established under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, in relation to sector specific health and safety standards. This is the result of constructive social dialogue that contributes to a robust and up-to-date body of international labour standards. And we will welcome Spanish as the third authoritative language of the ILO.

Unfortunately, we have also been forced, for the second time in the ILO's history, to invoke article 33 of the ILO Constitution, to secure compliance with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry in respect of Conventions Nos 87 and 98 with regard to the Government of Belarus. I will not go into any detail here, but it is really a sad and tragic story involving more than 20 years of deliberate efforts by the Government of Belarus to suppress free trade unionism. This procedure really is a last resort for this house. In view of the extreme gravity and persistence of the situation, we call upon Governments and the Employers to show solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Belarus, many of whom are in prison, and to support the adoption of a comprehensive set of measures to secure compliance by the Government of Belarus with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry and to finally put an end to the flagrant violations of human and trade union rights in the country.

While stressing its importance, I will not dwell on the Committee on the Application of Standards. We do hope, however, that amid geopolitical tensions and fragile multilateralism, all the constituents remain committed to the genuine engagement with the supervisory system as a contribution to the implementation of our constitutional vision that "the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries". We very much welcome the report prepared by the Office on the basis of the General Survey among the constituents on gender equality at work. It provides a good and rights-based framework to support the ILO's development of a targeted strategy on gender equality and a gender transformative agenda. The data included in the report show that, despite commitments and rhetoric, progress over the last decades has remained minimal.

In addition, we fully endorse the view of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations that gender discrimination is to be understood broadly to cover distinctions based on the biological characteristics, as well as unequal treatment arising from socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to a particular sex or gender, including discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status.

We also welcome the appendix to the Report of the Director-General and his team, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, although with a sad and bitter recognition that things have further deteriorated since last year's report. Without any prospects for the young workers of Palestine – both men and women – to see any improvement in their lifetimes, this report must not be taken for granted as just another report, but must lead us and the wider United Nations system to more proactive engagement and action.

I mentioned the issue of discrimination, and this leads me to finish by saying that any conclusions that we agree on during this session of the Conference will largely remain a dead letter if we do not give the Organization the means to implement them. I hope it is clear to all of us that, as per our Constitution, this session of the Conference is our last and final possibility to endorse the Organization's programme and budget for the next biennium and prevent a shutdown of the Organization at the end of the year. The workers of the world expect their governments to act responsibly and prevent such a disaster, which would have unacceptable

consequences for the crucial work of the ILO, both in Geneva and in the field. We therefore call on all Governments to endorse the programme and budget.

We also call on the Governments to respect the tripartite nature of the house and not to use the discussion in the Finance Committee, which is not tripartite, to enter into policy debates that would entail changes to the programme and budget as approved by the Governing Body, without properly involving the Workers' and the Employers' groups. I very much look forward to our deliberations and negotiations among committed tripartite social partners and wish us all a very successful session.

Closing of the sitting

The President

This brings us to the conclusion of our opening sitting. We have put in place the structure that will enable us to carry out our work over the next two weeks.

I declare closed the opening sitting of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference.

(The Conference adjourned at 1 p.m.)