

President,
Director General,
Ministers,
Representatives of workers and employers,

The last 15 months has been challenging for all of us.

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted upon us an unprecedented health crisis, which quickly transformed into a severe economic crisis, and an equally serious labour market crisis across the globe.

As we are gathered for this historic virtual conference, the virus is still causing vast sufferings and prolonged economic setbacks.

While the situation is still critical in many countries, we find ourselves in a period of rising hope and faith in a gradual and steady recovery from this devastating crisis.

The reason why we dare to say this loud, is the development and roll-out of vaccines that prove to be effective.

As underlined in the report of the Director-General, the IMF's latest estimates for economic retrieval also give rise to real optimism.

Yet, the road ahead is filled with obstacles and possible setbacks, which are well accounted for in the ILO report.

I share with ILO its concerns about the profound unevenness in the current situation: Some parts of the world are worse hit than others and have less capacity to fight the virus and overcome its effects.

Indeed, as ILO states very clearly, the pandemic may end up being a serious setback for many of the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda, regarding global sustainability and the drive to combat poverty and inequality.

In our collective strive to "build forward better", avoiding more inequality must be at the forefront of our recovery work, and I would like to applaud ILO for highlighting this crucial perspective.

After all, the fight against COVID-19 and its devastating social and economic effects cannot be won by single countries alone.

It must be won globally – together.

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In Norway, we are now lucky to be in a position, where we slowly and gradually may reopen our society.

This is a huge relief for the population in general, and not least for workers and employers in branches that has been severely hit by restrictions.

Still we are facing high unemployment rates, but we have reason to believe that further reopening will take us closer to a new "normal".

It is essential that as many workplaces and businesses as possible not merely survive the crisis, but are able to recover, develop, and prosper.

This goal has been a main pillar in the Norwegian response.

Lastly, I would like to emphasise the value of a close and cooperative relationship with the social partners.

As you all know, a broad and well-functioning tripartite cooperation has long been a key element in the Norwegian labour market policy. And this has been a huge advantage in our response to COVID-19.

The shared determination to find common ground – and sensible and balanced solutions – has again proven indispensable for policy making.

The ILO emphasis on tripartite cooperation is thus a quality I strongly support, and which I sincerely hope will further spread and prosper in the years to come.

I wish the ILO and all the delegates all the best for the Conference.

I salute all the hard work that is being done by policy makers and advisors, many from our new home-offices, at kitchen tables and living rooms all over the world, to make a human centered recovery from the corona crisis possible.

Thank you.

Check against delivery.