



SECOND ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference

(a) Consolidation of measures taken to improve the functioning of the International Labour Conference

1. The Governing Body decided in 1995, as part of a series of measures to reduce expenditure, to introduce on a trial basis the following reforms in the functioning of the International Labour Conference:
 - (a) the shortening of the Conference by one day;
 - (b) the reduction of the time limit for speeches in plenary sitting on the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, from ten to five minutes;
 - (c) the reduction of the duration of the plenary discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, to one calendar week;
 - (d) discontinuation of the in-session production of the issues of the Provisional Record of the Conference covering the discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General; and
 - (e) the selective free distribution of Conference reports.
2. Except for the selective free distribution of reports and the discontinuance of the in-session production of the Provisional Records, which were reviewed and abandoned in 1998, all the reforms have, subject to minor adjustments, been put into practice during the 83rd (June 1996), 85th (June 1997), 86th (June 1998), 87th (June 1999), 88th (June 2000) and 89th (June 2001) Sessions of the International Labour Conference.¹

¹ The 84th Session of the Conference (November 1996) was a Maritime Session governed by different arrangements.

3. In addition to these reforms, it will be recalled that in 1995, when, on the Governing Body's proposal, the Conference amended article 19 of its Standing Orders to permit the Conference to vote by electronic means, the electronic voting system was foreseen for use by the Conference only; not by committees nor by the electoral colleges for Governing Body elections. However, for the two last Governing Body elections at the 83rd (June 1996) and 87th (June 1999) Sessions of the Conference, the government electoral college decided to vote by electronic means.
4. Some of these reforms, as well as the possibility for electoral colleges to vote by electronic means, would normally call for amendments to the Standing Orders. To be able to implement them, the Conference has up till now decided at each session to declare the relevant derogations from the Standing Orders, through the suspension procedure under article 76 of the Conference Standing Orders.
5. The reforms have now been in operation for six consecutive years and the regular evaluations carried out by the Governing Body² have permitted the identification of those reforms the implementation of which has been widely accepted and given positive results. Without prejudice to a future broader discussion on the functioning of the Conference and its committees and their working methods, the time now seems ripe to consolidate the reforms in the Standing Orders of the Conference.
6. The purpose of this paper is, therefore: to suggest amendments to the Conference Standing Orders which appear necessary to consolidate and enhance the reforms discussed below (I); and, as far as other reforms not requiring amendments to the Standing Orders are concerned, in particular the time frame for the Conference plenary and committees, to consider possible adjustments in view of the experience gained during the recent sessions of the Conference (II).

I. Suggested amendments to the Conference Standing Orders

7. The provisions which have been the subject of individual decisions for suspension under article 76 of the Standing Orders relate to the time limit for speeches, the role of the Selection Committee as a consequence of the reduction of the duration of the plenary discussions of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, and the possibility for electoral colleges to vote by electronic means.

Time limit for speeches

8. The ten-minute time limit for speeches provided for in article 14, paragraph 6, of the Conference Standing Orders has been reduced to five minutes for the discussion in plenary sittings of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General.
9. Article 14, paragraph 6, of the Standing Orders of the Conference provides only for a maximum time limit for speeches delivered in plenary, and permits the Conference to consent to a longer time limit or the Officers of the Conference to propose a shorter time limit for a specific topic. Such a proposal is submitted to the Conference for approval.

² [GB.267/PFA/7](#) – [GB.267/8/1](#); [GB.271/LILS/2](#) – [GB.271/11/1](#); [GB.274/LILS/2](#) – [GB.274/10/1](#).

10. An amendment to article 14, paragraph 6, to the effect that the time limit for speeches be reduced to five minutes for all speeches delivered in plenary would apply not only to speeches concerning the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, but also to the discussion of other subjects to which the reform is not meant to apply, such as the discussion of committee reports (in respect of which speeches longer than ten minutes are common practice, in particular for the presentation of committee reports by the Reporter and the groups' spokespersons). In order to avoid the Conference having to decide on a longer time limit for speeches every time the five-minute rule would not prove adequate, the consolidation of this reform in the Conference Standing Orders would require a distinction to be made as regards the topics for which speeches longer than five minutes would be allowed. This could be achieved by adding a provision on a specific time limit for speeches concerning only the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, to be set at five minutes, while keeping the ten-minute time limit as the general rule for other topics, subject of course to the discretion of the Conference to extend or reduce them as it thinks fit in specific cases. Article 14, paragraph 6, could accordingly be modified as follows (proposed additions appear underlined):

6. *Except with the special consent of the Conference, no speech, whether by a delegate, a visiting minister, an observer or a representative of an international organization, shall exceed ten minutes exclusive of the time for translation, and no speech concerning the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General referred to in article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2, shall exceed five minutes exclusive of the time for translation. The President may, after consultation with the Vice-Presidents, submit to the Conference for decision without debate a proposal to reduce the time limit for speeches on a specific topic before the opening of the discussion thereof.*

11. The specific reference to paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 12 has been included so as to exclude from the scope of the amendment the time limit for speeches applicable to the discussion of the global report referred to in the Annex to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Proposed adjustments to govern the discussion of such reports by the Conference are contained in a separate document to the Committee (GB.282/LILS/2/2).

***The role of the Selection Committee
as a consequence of the reduction of
the duration of the plenary discussion
of the reports of the Chairperson of the
Governing Body and the Director-General***

12. The reduction of the duration of the plenary discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General has been made possible by the reduction in the time limit for speeches. As such, it does not call for an amendment to the Standing Orders of the Conference since, under article 4, paragraph 2, the time for the plenary sittings is decided by the Selection Committee. One of the main advantages of this reduction is that after the opening day, the Conference is not scheduled to meet again in plenary sitting until the following week. However, the suspension of the plenary sittings during the first week of the Conference requires a series of procedural adjustments which call for amendments to the Standing Orders of the Conference, which alone has authority to take certain decisions.

13. Under articles 9 and 56 of the Standing Orders, the Conference decides, on the recommendation of the Selection Committee, on changes in the composition of committees and on requests by non-governmental organizations to be represented in committees. Most of the changes and requests occur at the beginning of the Conference during the period of suspension of the plenary. At the 83rd Session of the Conference (1996), those changes and requests were first considered by the Officers of the Selection Committee, to whom authority had been delegated by the Committee itself, and then by the Officers of the Conference, who acted under the powers delegated to them by the Conference. This double consideration of routine matters was avoided at the ensuing sessions of the Conference by the Conference delegating to the Selection Committee, and authorizing it to delegate in turn to its Officers, the authority to approve non-controversial changes in the composition of committees and non-controversial requests by non-governmental organizations to be represented in committees. In the event of disagreement between the Officers of the Selection Committee, the matter would be submitted to the Conference for decision. The necessary derogation was made from articles 4, paragraph 2; 9(a); and 56, paragraph 9, of the Standing Orders.
14. Experience over the last six years has shown that the delegation of authority to the Selection Committee could be extended to other routine matters and that the procedure could be further simplified. In these circumstances, the Committee may wish to consider the possibility of proposing amendments to the relevant provisions of the Standing Orders which would in some cases go beyond the practice of recent years.
15. With respect to article 4, paragraph 2, the amendment proposed below has been drafted in general terms to provide for some flexibility so that the procedure of delegation of authority to the Selection Committee could cover, in addition to the composition of committees and invitations to non-governmental organizations, other non-controversial decisions on routine matters, such as invitations to observers from non-member States or to intergovernmental organizations to participate in the Conference. Under the proposed amendment, should the Officers of the Selection Committee or the Committee itself be unable to reach a unanimous decision on any particular issue, the matter would be referred to the Conference for decision (proposed additions appear underlined).

ARTICLE 4

Selection Committee

...

2. *It shall be the duty of the Selection Committee to arrange the programme of the Conference, to fix the time and agenda for the plenary sittings, to act on behalf of the Conference with respect to decisions on non-controversial questions of a routine nature and to report to the Conference on any other questions requiring a decision for the proper conduct of its business, in accordance with the Conference Standing Orders. Where appropriate, the Committee may delegate any of these functions to its Officers.*

16. With regard to the composition of committees, under article 25, paragraph 2, and article 9(a) of the Conference Standing Orders, the initial appointment of committees and their membership is decided upon by the Conference; subsequent changes in committees' membership are to be decided by the Conference on the recommendation of the Selection Committee. The preliminary consideration of the matter by the Selection Committee purported to ensure a geographical and technical balance as well as a numerical balance between the three groups in each committee, and to avoid the Conference having to deal with possible disputes concerning the wish of certain delegates or advisers to sit in a committee against the will of the corresponding group. The first concern, embodied until

1992 in a separate paragraph of article 9, though theoretically desirable, appeared difficult to achieve and was for a long time ignored until the provision was abrogated. The second was progressively taken care of in practice through the introduction of the voting weighting system which was eventually codified in article 65 of the Conference Standing Orders in 1945. With respect to the final concern, article 9(b) provides for the possibility of lodging an appeal where a delegate has not been included in a committee by its group. However, this procedure has been scarcely resorted to. Disputes concerning the composition of committees has in practice been dealt with outside the framework of the Standing Orders through the Appeals Board procedure set up in 1959 and last used in 1989.

17. The main effect of the reform introduced on a trial basis in 1996 has been a significant simplification of the procedure. By delegating the authority to approve changes in the composition of committees to the Selection Committee, and the latter in turn to its Officers, the double consideration of the matter has been avoided, with the subsequent time savings for both the plenary and the Selection Committee. However, the disposal of such matters directly by the Officers of the Selection Committee has become a purely formal and time consuming exercise requiring the Officers to meet every evening merely to endorse the modifications in the composition of committees proposed by the Employers' and Workers' groups or those requested by individual governments. A further simplification of the procedure could therefore be for the Conference to rely on the modifications proposed by the groups, as is already the case in practice concerning the initial membership of committees (such initial composition, based on the proposals made by the groups, is in fact approved by the Conference in block without having before it any specific list of nominations, which are only made public in the first report of the Selection Committee). Changes in the composition of committees would however, as in the past, be subject to the appeal procedure laid down in article 9(b) of the Conference Standing Orders. Since this provision concerns at present exclusively the disagreement of delegates not proposed by their respective groups to sit in a committee, it could be extended to cover also the disagreement of advisers, who can also be appointed members of committees under article 56, paragraph 1, of the Standing Orders. Article 9 could thus be modified as follows (proposed additions appear underlined and proposed deletions in square brackets):

ARTICLE 9

Adjustments to the membership of committees

The following rules shall apply to all committees appointed by the Conference with the exception of the Selection Committee, the Credentials Committee, the Finance Committee of Government Representatives and the Drafting Committee:

- (a) *once the various committees have been established and their initial membership appointed by the Conference, it shall be for [the Selection Committee to propose to the Conference, for its approval,] the groups to determine subsequent changes in the composition of such committees.*
- (b) *if a delegate or adviser has not been nominated by his group to sit on any committee, he may bring the matter to the notice of the Selection Committee which shall have power to place him on one or more committees, enlarging the number of members of such committee or committees accordingly. Any such request shall be made to the Chairman of the Selection Committee;*

18. If this new procedure were to be adopted, article 25 could remain unchanged, as the Conference would retain authority to appoint the initial membership of committees. However, the procedure laid down in article 75 of the Standing Orders for the nomination

of members of committees by the Government group, which has been long ignored, could be deleted altogether.

19. With respect to invitations to non-governmental organizations to be represented in committees (article 56, paragraph 9, of the Standing Orders), under the current practice the Selection Committee proposes such invitations during its first sitting, which takes place immediately after the opening of the Conference so that the Conference may approve them on its second sitting which is held in the afternoon of the opening day of the Conference. Thereafter, any new request from a non-governmental organization to be represented in a committee is decided upon by the Selection Committee on the authority delegated to it by the Conference. The amendment to article 56, paragraph 9, of the Standing Orders proposed below would be to the effect that the Selection Committee would decide directly on invitations to non-governmental organizations to be represented in committees, it being also understood that should any such decision prove controversial, the matter should be referred to the Conference for decision in accordance with the general provision under the proposed amendment to article 4, paragraph 2 (see paragraph 15 above).

ARTICLE 56

Composition of committees and right to participate in their work

...

9. *Representatives of non-governmental international organizations with which the International Labour Organization has established consultative relationships and with which standing arrangements for representation at the Conference have been made, and representatives of other non-governmental international organizations which the Conference, or the Selection Committee within the limits set out in article 4, paragraph 2, has invited to be represented at the committee, may be present at the meetings of the committee. ...*

20. If the above amendments were adopted, the plenary would no longer need to hold a second sitting on the opening day of the Conference, such sitting being at present devoted to the adoption of the report of the Selection Committee and of the derogations necessary to apply the reforms introduced in 1996.

Electronic voting system

21. As indicated in paragraph 3 above, the provisions of article 19, paragraph 16, of the Conference Standing Orders concerning the votes taken by electronic means apply only to the Conference, and not to its committees or to electoral colleges the voting procedures of which are contained respectively in sections H and G of the Conference Standing Orders. In order for an electoral college to take advantage of the electronic voting system, as has been the case with the government electoral college on the occasion of two of the three Governing Body elections held since the system was introduced in 1993, a derogation from the relevant provision of the Standing Orders is necessary. However, a simple amendment could be made to article 52 so that each electoral college might, at its discretion, decide to vote by electronic means without requiring the Conference to suspend that provision each time (proposed additions appear underlined).

ARTICLE 52

Procedure of voting

...

3. *The counting of the votes shall be carried out under the direction of the representative of the President of the Conference assisted by two returning officers appointed by the electoral college from among its members. However, if an electoral college requests to vote by electronic means, the provisions of article 19, paragraph 16, concerning a vote by secret ballot shall apply.*

22. Since the hardware and software of the electronic voting system will in any event need to be updated in the short term, the possibility of its extension to committees, combined with additional information technology facilities (for instance, electronic production of proposed texts, amendments and motions and their projection on screens), so as to facilitate committee work and make more time available for discussion and negotiations could be also explored on the same occasion. If the Governing Body wished to pursue the examination of such proposals, the Office could prepare an estimate of the expenditure they would involve for a future session of the Governing Body.

II. Possible adjustments concerning the time frame of the Conference

23. The need for possible rescheduling of the time frame of the Conference has been expressed with respect to both the plenary and committees.
24. Concerning the plenary, it will be recalled that the initial decision in 1996 to reduce the duration of the plenary discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General was to limit such discussion to one calendar week, from Tuesday of the second week of the Conference to Wednesday of the third week. As a result, the discussion of these reports, which had before the introduction of the reform spread over 20 or so sittings, has been dealt with since 1996 in about 12 plenary sittings. However, a number of additional plenary sittings became necessary, first because of the resumption of the special sitting for the discussion of the appendix to the Director-General's report dealing with the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories (which had not been held in 1996 and 1997), and later on, in 2000, because of the setting in motion of the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration, in particular the discussion of the global report, to which two plenary sittings have been devoted under the ad hoc arrangements adopted in 2000 and 2001. These additional demands on the plenary, together with the holding of special events during the second week of the Conference have limited the number of sittings available for the discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General, and have made it necessary to foresee extended, night or Saturday sittings so as to accommodate all the speakers registered for the discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General. If the savings achieved on account of the reforms are to be maintained while at the same time making the discussion of the report of the Director-General and its annex and of the global report as well as the special events, fit within the current time frame (from Monday of the second week until Tuesday of the third week), a rescheduling of the plenary is necessary. This could consist of limiting the number of special events: for instance, the organization of a high-level event could be focused on the discussion of the global report, or, if as it is suggested in the document relating to the arrangements for the discussion of the global report, all or part of such discussion were to take place in a committee of the whole, to consider the possibility of holding the meetings of that committee without suspending the

plenary discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.

25. Regarding the time frame for committees, it will be recalled that when the Conference was shortened by one week in 1993, special attention was paid so as not to reduce the number of sittings available to standard-setting committees and to the Committee on the Application of Standards, although they had to be concentrated in a significantly shorter time period. This has resulted in straining the capacity of delegates and the secretariat. If as has been mooted in recent years, additional sittings might seem necessary in order to permit committees to discharge their work in more appropriate conditions, it would be possible to afford them additional time by advancing their establishment by one day. To this end, the opening of the Conference could be advanced to Monday of the first week late in the afternoon or in the evening so that the groups would still have nearly a full day available for their preparatory meetings. Committees could then start their work as of Tuesday of the first week, instead of Wednesday, thus gaining a full day.
26. If the Governing Body were to endorse these ideas, together with the necessary reforms proposed above, the opening of the Conference referred to in article 25 of the Standing Orders could be limited to a brief formal meeting to decide upon the minimum requirements for the Conference to start its work, i.e., the appointment of the Officers of the Conference and the institution of committees. A more solemn opening ceremony, including the speech of the President, the presentation of the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the introductory speech of the Director-General could be scheduled on the second Monday and be followed by the beginning of the discussion of the reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Director-General, or even by the visit of a Head of State or other distinguished visitor.

Summary of the reforms and of the action proposed

Reform	Action proposed	Reference
Reduction of the time limit for speeches	Amendment of article 14, paragraph 6, of the Conference Standing Orders	Paras. 8-11
Permanent delegation of authority to the Selection Committee on non-controversial questions of a routine nature	Amendment of article 4, paragraph 2, of the Conference Standing Orders	Paras. 12-15
Composition of committees: Determination by the groups subject to the appeals procedure to the Selection Committee	Amendment of articles 9 and 75 of the Conference Standing Orders	Paras. 16-18
Permanent delegation of authority to the Selection Committee for the invitation to NGOs to be represented in committees	Amendment of article 56, paragraph 9, of the Conference Standing Orders	Paras. 19-20
Possibility for electoral colleges to vote by electronic means	Amendment of article 52, paragraph 3, of the Conference Standing Orders	Para. 21
Examination of possible updating of the electronic voting system and provision to committees with electronic voting and other information technology facilities	Office to prepare document for the PFAC	Para. 22
Rescheduling of plenary sittings: Advancement of the opening of the Conference, postponement of the solemn opening ceremony to the second week, rationalization of plenary sittings during the second week	Decision of the Governing Body	Paras. 24 and 26
Advancement of the establishment of committees	Decision of the Governing Body	Para. 25

27. In order for the above proposals requiring amendments to the Standing Orders of the Conference to be recommended to the 90th Session of the Conference, a decision is not necessary until the next session of the Governing Body in March 2002. However, even if the proposed amendments are adopted by the Conference at its next session, they could not be put into effect during that session until they have been approved by the Conference. If the proposed reforms, as adjusted, are to apply again during the next session of the Conference, derogations from the Standing Orders would be necessary for the Conference to continue to benefit from them until they can be consolidated in the Standing Orders.
28. *Should the Committee consider that the consolidation of the above reforms can be proposed at this stage, the Committee may wish to recommend to the Governing Body:*
- (a) *that all the measures adopted at the 89th Session of the Conference (June 2001) be maintained at the 90th Session (June 2002) of the Conference;*
 - (b) *that it consequently propose that the Conference again make the necessary derogations from articles 4, paragraph 2; 9(a); 14, paragraph 6; and 56, paragraph 9, of the Conference Standing Orders, so as to implement the above measures at that session pending the adoption of the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders;*
 - (c) *that it propose to the 90th Session of the Conference that its officers recommend the suspension of article 52, paragraph 3, of the Conference Standing Orders to the extent necessary to allow the government electoral college to vote by electronic means;*
 - (d) *that it recommend that the International Labour Conference, at its 90th Session (June 2002):*
 - (i) *amend article 14, paragraph 6, of its Standing Orders as proposed in paragraph 10 above;*
 - (ii) *amend article 4, paragraph 2; article 9; article 56, paragraph 9; and article 75 of its Standing Orders as proposed respectively in paragraphs 15, 17, 18 and 19 above;*
 - (iii) *amend article 52, paragraph 3, of its Standing Orders as proposed in paragraph 21 above;*
 - (e) *that it request the Office that it present to the PFAC in March 2002 an estimate of the cost involved in updating the electronic voting system and providing committees with electronic voting and other information technology facilities.*
29. As to the other proposals not requiring amendments to the Standing Orders, namely those concerning a possible rescheduling of the plenary and committees, they would require the Governing Body to take a decision of principle at its present session, as they should be reflected in the Memorandum which accompanies the letter of convocation to the Conference which the Office addresses to member States at the beginning of the year.
30. *The Committee may accordingly wish to recommend to the Governing Body that it decide the rescheduling of the plenary and the committees of the 90th Session*

of the Conference (June 2002) on the basis of the proposals outlined in paragraphs 23 to 26 above, taking into account the views expressed by the Committee.

Geneva, 7 October 2001.

Points for decision: Paragraph 28;
Paragraph 30.