



FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The functioning of decision-making bodies

(a) The International Labour Conference

1. This paper provides a brief progress report on steps the Office has taken to comply with the request made by the Governing Body at its 284th Session (June 2002) for a review of the functioning of the International Labour Conference.

I. Background

2. A paper on this subject was submitted to the Governing Body at its 285th Session (November 2002).¹ It was discussed at both the 285th and 287th Sessions (June 2003) but not in a substantive manner. Subsequently, the Governing Body referred the document for consideration to informal consultations prior to its 288th Session (November 2003).

II. Progress report

3. Informal consultations with constituents were undertaken in September 2003. They were intended to clarify the objectives of the review and identify specific issues that remain causes for concern. Further discussions were to take place with government groups prior to the Governing Body session.
4. In general, informal discussions with Government and Employers' and Workers' representatives confirmed much of the analysis that the Office had presented in document GB.285/3. The constituents recognized that significant changes in the length, methods and practices of the Conference had been introduced in the past ten years. The Conference itself had two distinct elements: the technical work of the committees; and the more visible policy debate in the plenary. While the Conference by and large was working well, there was room for significant improvement. In general, this could be done within the framework of the Constitution and the Standing Orders.
5. In this respect, there remained widely shared concerns in the following areas:

¹ GB.285/3.

- (a) the need to raise the Conference's profile and visibility;
- (b) the need to enhance the political dimension of the Conference, without detriment to its technical work;
- (c) the need to ensure high-level participation in the Conference;
- (d) the identification of alternative methodologies for the work of technical committees;
- (e) the identification of possible changes in the format or structure of the plenary, aimed at fostering high-level political debate on topics of global interest; and
- (f) operational issues (including better time management, use of resources, preparation, training).

III. Reform and the 92nd Session (2004) of the Conference

6. The 92nd Session of the Conference promises to be of exceptional importance, as there will be a debate on the implications of the conclusions of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. In fact, there are likely to be no fewer than four reports to be dealt with in plenary: a report on globalization; report on activities; the Global Report; and the report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.
7. The discussion in plenary of the implications of the report of the World Commission will offer a unique opportunity to attract worldwide attention, to assess the immediate consequences for the Organization's work, and to underline the key role of the ILO alongside other major international institutions, in what many consider to be the most pressing and topical issue of our day.
8. The success of that discussion, however, will require a number of adjustments in the way in which debates take place. A full and high-level debate on several key topics in the framework of one week of the Conference is an enormous challenge. In addition, this has to be carried out without detriment to the rest of the work of the Conference, where committees deal with important and equally topical items (for instance, migration).
9. Consequently, the agenda of, and topics foreseen for discussion at, the 92nd Session of the Conference compels the Office and the Governing Body to find immediate and practical responses – at least on an experimental basis – to several of the concerns that have been raised in the context of the review of the Conference (namely, the Conference's profile and visibility; its attractiveness to senior policy-makers and the major international players; the bolstering of its political dimension); and not least, the different ways in which the deliberations can take place with sufficient participation of all (as, for example, in a Committee of the Whole).
10. *The Governing Body may wish to:*
 - (a) *instruct the Director-General to hold further consultations with constituents in the coming months on the review of the Conference and, in particular, on special arrangements for its 92nd Session, and present specific proposals in that connection to the Governing Body in March 2004;*

(b) revisit, at its meeting in November 2004, the question of possible reforms on the basis of the experience acquired in June 2004.

Geneva, 3 October 2003.

Point for decision: Paragraph 10.