



THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The functioning of decision-making bodies

(a) The International Labour Conference

Introduction

1. After discussion of a document on review and possible improvements in the functioning of the International Labour Conference,¹ the Governing Body decided in November 2003 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.
2. Consultations were held in January and February 2004. The present paper draws on those consultations, which touched upon this topic, but concentrated on the review of the Governing Body. The first part of this paper is on the forthcoming session of the Conference. The second part contains a summary of discussions held so far and a number of general ideas on the review of the International Labour Conference.

92nd Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2004

3. In accordance with article 12 of the Standing Orders of the Conference, at each session, the Conference receives two reports: one from the Chairperson of the Governing Body on the work of the Governing Body during the last year and one from the Director-General. Since the adoption in 1998 of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Director-General is also called upon each year to submit to the Conference a Global Report under the follow-up to the Declaration. In addition, pursuant to a

¹ GB.288/4/1.

Conference resolution of 1980, the Director-General's yearly Report comprises an appendix on the situation of the workers of the occupied Arab territories.

4. Article 12, paragraph 2, of the Conference Standing Orders provides that, as the first year of a biennial financial period, this year's Report of the Director-General will deal with "programme implementation and activities of the Organization during the preceding financial period, together with proposals for advance planning as well as information on the steps taken by the Governing Body and the Director-General to give effect to the decisions of the Conference at its previous sessions and the results achieved".
5. In view of the expectations raised by the work undertaken during the last biennium on the social dimension of globalization, in particular through the World Commission, the Director-General intends to submit to the Conference an additional report under article 12 of its Standing Orders on this subject, taking into account the discussions in the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization and the orientations that the Governing Body may provide in this connection.
6. Except for the discussion of the Global Report, in respect of which special arrangements are foreseen in the follow-up to the Declaration (see GB.289/LILS/1/2), the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Reports of the Director-General, including the appendix referred to above, are to be discussed together in plenary in accordance with the provisions of article 12, paragraph 3, and article 14, paragraph 6, of the Conference Standing Orders. Under these provisions, speakers will be able to intervene only once in connection with all such reports and their interventions will be subject to a five-minute time limit.
7. Should the need arise to have specific topics in one of the Director-General's Reports addressed in a more focused manner, constituents would be informed in due course of the time and venue of any tripartite high-level meeting, round table or panel that could be organized during the forthcoming session of the Conference.
8. Efforts have continued to identify at an early date the chairpersons of different committees, and the Office will provide orientation and the necessary training for them, with special emphasis on the rules of procedure of a tripartite debate, and the application of the Standing Orders. Another suggestion was for the Office to organize and hold briefing sessions for delegates on the drafting of amendments and the procedures for their discussion. This briefing will be introduced this year.

Other proposals for future Conferences

9. *Duration of the Conference.* The discussions have focused on possible improvements in certain working methods and operational aspects of the Conference, rather than its overall framework. It was made clear that a further reduction in the duration of the Conference would not be possible under present arrangements, as none of the proposed changes to enhance the quality and relevance of the Conference would entail a shorter Conference.
10. *Role and procedures of the Conference plenary.* There is widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of the general debate in the Conference plenary, but few suggestions and little agreement on how the problem should be addressed. Some suggestions have been put forward on devising alternative approaches such as introducing high-level panel discussions, or round tables instead of speeches, and alternating political and technical sessions.

11. There have been suggestions for stricter enforcement of time limits on interventions in the plenary; stricter limitations on the interventions of committee officers and reporters when submitting their committee reports to the plenary; and discouraging the practice of each speaker congratulating the Chairperson, or reading out curriculum vitae.
12. *Work of technical committees.* Changes proposed include holding of preparatory conferences running in parallel or prior to the International Labour Conference. However, it is acknowledged that these are likely to entail additional expense and other logistical problems. Another suggestion has been to limit the agenda of the Conference to one standard-setting and one general discussion item at a time to ease the workload of delegations.
13. There were conflicting views on whether committees had too little or too much time, but broad agreement on the need to continue refining methods of work to achieve greater efficiency. The committees are already able to start their work on the first morning of the Conference, and beginning sessions on time and possible reductions in the duration of group meetings would help avoid the need for evening sessions. Reference was made to the enhanced use of information technology, and development of applications to improve the clarity of the committees' debates and expedite voting procedures as well as the submission and discussion of amendments. Steps have been taken towards the implementation of these initiatives.
14. *Better preparation for Conference discussions.* This could include prior consultations with the representatives of the three groups, prior technical and expert meetings on the subject, better interaction with the sectoral and technical meetings and programmes, and more clear guidance from the Governing Body when setting the agenda of the Conference.
15. *Production and distribution of documents.* There is a unanimous demand to have the Conference documents received by delegates at least four weeks prior to the opening of the Conference. There were suggestions that there should be further rationalization of document production and distribution.
16. The draft reports of the technical committees should be immediately posted on the ILO public web site so that they can be consulted by experts who have left before the adoption of the reports.
17. Few practical suggestions were put forward for raising the Conference's profile. A number of speakers agreed that the Conference's visibility should not be an end in itself, but that it would be the natural by-product of an agenda that featured topical and relevant issues, interactive debates, high-level participation, and outcomes that were relevant to the world of work, in the form of effective conclusions with real impact.
18. It has been repeatedly said that the number of side events and special events should be restricted. At times the side events may be confused with the constitutionally required work of the Conference and its committees. It was suggested that the secretaries or the coordinators of the three groups be consulted in advance in determination of the number, topics and time of the side events. The beginning of the third week might be a suitable time for any special event or side event, as these would not parallel the work of the technical committees.

- 19.** *International non-governmental organizations (INGOs).* Depending on the topics, ways can be found for INGOs, which are accredited to the Conference, to make their views known on the items dealt with by different technical committees. Some time may be set aside for this purpose. Under no conditions should the tripartite nature of the debates and decisions be undermined.

Geneva, 20 February 2004.

Submitted for discussion.