



## THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**The functioning of decision-making bodies****(a) The International Labour Conference****Introduction**

1. A paper on this topic was submitted to the Governing Body in November 2002.<sup>1</sup> It was briefly discussed at both that session and in June 2003. A further discussion in the Governing Body in November 2003, as well as two informal consultations in September 2003 and in January and February 2004, prepared the ground for a more substantive discussion in March 2004 when the GB discussed a paper<sup>2</sup> on review and possible improvements in the functioning of the International Labour Conference (ILC). Measures were adopted on that occasion to enable the Conference to discuss an additional report by the Director-General to the Conference under article 12 of its Standing Orders on the subject of the ILO follow-up to the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. Apart from this specific decision, a set of other issues related to the functioning of the ILC have been discussed over the last two years which are reproduced below for the information of the Governing Body, as requested.

**Proposals to improve the functioning of the Conference**

2. *Duration of the Conference.* A further reduction in the duration of the Conference is not feasible under present arrangements, as none of the proposed changes to enhance its quality and relevance would entail a shorter Conference. The discussions have focused on possible improvements in certain working methods and operational aspects, rather than the overall framework of the Conference.
3. *Role and procedures of the Conference plenary.* There is widespread dissatisfaction with the general debate in the 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

<sup>1</sup> GB.285/3.

<sup>2</sup> GB.289/3/1.

instead of speeches, and alternating political and technical sessions. One innovation in 2004 was a panel of heads of state and government.

4. The contradiction between the recognized benefits of continuing the practice of five-minute speeches to the plenary by all the delegates to the Conference and the concern of persons speaking to a large and often nearly empty room has not been resolved. Nevertheless, apparently there is a strong desire from within all of the three groups to maintain plenary speeches in spite of the lack of significant interest on the part of the delegates to listen to other speeches. Any suggestions on this matter would be appreciated.
5. There have been suggestions for stricter enforcement of time limits on interventions in the plenary; 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. On the issue of delegates keeping to time limits, there was a slight improvement at the 2004 Conference owing to both the cooperation of delegates and the discipline applied by the chairperson. Unless it would be seen as desirable to apply much stricter measures, such as the cutting of the microphone when the allotted time has been used (as applies in many national parliaments), improvement should continue to be sought through cooperation and good chairmanship. The introduction of time limits for committee officers and reporters in their report back to plenary was largely successful in 2004. The allotted times will be reviewed in the hope that an even better outcome can be achieved.
6. As part of the continued drive for cost efficiencies, the Governing Body will note that the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee, in its consideration of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2006-07, has before it a proposal for the cessation of a daily provisional record as from June 2006. In the event of the acceptance of this proposal, the Office will consult further with the Governing Body as to alternative modalities for recording the debate.
7. *Work of technical committees.* An idea suggested was to hold preparatory conferences running in parallel or prior to the ILC. However, it is acknowledged that these would definitely entail additional expenses and other logistical problems both for the Office and for the member States. Another suggestion was 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. There was no consensus on this issue.
8. There were conflicting views on whether committees had too little or too much time, but there was broad agreement on the need to continue refining methods of work to achieve greater efficiency. Ways to ensure more efficient use of time and resources have been explored. The committees are already able to start their work on the first morning of the Conference. However, there are considerable practical difficulties in having the committees start their substantive work in their tripartite sessions on the same morning. The committees technically do not exist until they are officially constituted by the plenary of the Conference on Tuesday morning. The groups also need to determine their membership in the committees and deliberate on the issues at the committee before commencing the discussion at the tripartite meeting of the committee. Beginning sessions on time and possible reductions in the duration of group meetings would help avoid the need for evening sessions.
9. *Preparation.* Better preparation for Conference discussions has been undertaken through such mechanisms as 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 clearer guidance from the Governing Body when setting the agenda of the Conference.

10. All groups are now taking steps to improve preparation for the Conference. Groups are briefed by the Office on a more regular basis, and the government coordination mechanism is working more effectively. The early identification of chairpersons remains a problem.
11. *Training for officers and committee members.* Regional government groups have been informed through their coordinators of the need to identify at an early date the chairpersons of different committees. The Office has started providing orientation and training for those chairpersons and other officers of the committees identified early enough with special emphasis on the rules of procedure of a tripartite debate, and the application of the standing orders. This also applies to the president and vice-presidents of the Conference. The presentations for committee members explaining the committee working procedures introduced in 2004 were well received and will be continued. Similarly, the briefing booklets for committee chairpersons and spokespersons on process and procedures have proven to be valuable.
12. *Use of technology.* Work is currently under way in the development of a system whereby amendments and sub-amendments will be projected on screen in English, French and Spanish to assist both participation and the process flow. This system will be tested in one of the Conference committees of the 93rd Session of the ILC in June this year. Steps towards overcoming the initial teething problems in the new electronic voting system have been taken and software has been developed to permit the system to be utilized as required for the Governing Body elections. The system is mobile and voting stations can be used in the ILO building as well as the United Nations meeting rooms.
13. *Production and distribution of documents.* There is a unanimous demand to have the Conference documents received by delegates at the very latest four weeks prior to the opening of the Conference. There were suggestions that there should be further rationalization and more restricted document production, printing and distribution.
14. As regards the documentation for the Conference in June 2004, the main Report of the Director-General on the follow-up to the World Commission was sent out around mid-May, the annex on the occupied territories in the second half of May, and the report on migrant workers around mid-May. All the other reports submitted to the Conference were sent out either in all seven languages or in some of them and within the prescribed deadlines. Documentation for 2005 is still in preparation with, at this stage, an expectation that time targets will largely be met.
15. Posting of draft in-session reports on the public web site could not be done in 2004 due to timing constraints. However, the principle is recognized as desirable and the matter is being re-examined for the Conference in June 2005.
16. *The Conference profile.* Few practical suggestions were put forward for raising the Conference's profile. It was agreed that the Conference's visibility should not be an end in itself. 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. Attention to the political dimensions at the Conference should not be to the detriment of its technical work.
17. *Discussion of the Global Report.* The experience in June 2004 to discuss the Global Report in a conference room and not in the plenary hall, seems to have been positive. The LILS Committee of the Governing Body has before it a proposal to follow the same modalities this year. The new time management arrangements for the discussion proved to be an improvement. While it was seen as important to refrain from having a formal speakers list so as to allow a more free-flowing and responsive debate, a procedure to ensure that speakers know when they will be given the floor will be developed.

18. *Side events and special events.* The instruction that side events should be restricted in number has been implemented. In 2004 there were five official side events plus briefing sessions for the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). All other meetings were held only for specific groups (mainly Employers or Workers) with participation by invitation only. The new process of consultation with group representatives and Government coordinators on proposed side events was useful and will be continued. It has been agreed, in consultation with the officers and groups, that this year a knowledge fair providing follow-up to the 2002 Conference discussion on the informal economy will take place, and all side event proposals will be requested to focus on that theme.
19. There were fewer off-agenda activities during the 2004 ILC with the largest group of meetings being the bilateral meetings facilitated by the Office for member States using the Conference as a networking opportunity.
20. The World Day Against Child Labour day will again take place during the 2005 ILC with planning at this stage leaning toward a special session in the plenary hall. This will entail a short cessation of the discussion on the Chairperson's and Director-General's Reports.
21. *International non-governmental organizations (INGOs).* While it is clearly understood that under no conditions should the tripartite nature of the debates and decisions be undermined, committees have developed methods and conditions under which INGOs, which are accredited to the Conference, might make their views known on the items dealt with by different technical committees.
22. *Specific committee working methods.* Improvements in the rules regarding the work of the Credentials Committee have been adopted. The discussion in the Committee on the Application of Standards on its working methods will continue this year.
23. ***The Governing Body may wish to take note of these improvements in the functioning of the International Labour Conference.***

Geneva, 11 February 2005.

*Point for decision:* Paragraph 23.