

► Record of Proceedings

6C

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Plenary sitting: Outcome of the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

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Friday, 14 June 2024, 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr Buzu

Outcome of the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards: Presentation and discussion

The President

This morning we shall turn our attention to the outcome of the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards, namely the Committee's proposed resolution and Conclusions. These texts, which are being presented to the plenary for adoption, can be found in [Record of Proceedings No. 6A](#). The report on the Committee's proceedings is contained in [Record of Proceedings No. 6B](#). Needless to say, we look forward to listening to the Committee's presentation.

It is my pleasure to welcome the Officers of the Committee and its Reporter, namely: Mr Claudino de Oliveira (Portugal), Chairperson; Ms Maya Rubio (Spain), Employer Vice-Chairperson; Mr Ritchie (New Zealand), Worker Vice-Chairperson; and Ms Nghidengwa (Namibia), Reporter.

I will first give the floor to Ms Nghidengwa (Reporter), so that she may give us a summary of the Committee's work. The Officers of the Committee will then take the floor.

Ms Nghidengwa

Reporter of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

It is an honour for me to report to the Conference on the work and outcome of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards.

Our mandate from this esteemed Conference was to hold a first discussion on protection against biological hazards with a view to establishing a new international labour standard or standards. I am happy to report that the Committee has managed to review a significant part of the proposed Conclusions presented in Report ILC.112/IV(2), which the Office compiled from the responses of 87 governments, 50 employers' organizations and 94 workers' organizations to the questionnaire shared with Member States in December 2022. The questionnaire was included in the initial report to the Conference, Report ILC.112/IV(1).

I am proud to report that the Committee has reached an agreement that the International Labour Conference should adopt standards concerning biological hazards in the working environment and that these standards should take the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. I must say that such an agreement was not an easy achievement, but rather the result of lengthy, and sometimes heated, debates. The Committee was successful in achieving consensus on a set of Conclusions with a view to a Convention. It has achieved this remarkable result through tripartite negotiation and compromise, following intensive and constructive deliberations in 24 sittings over 10 days.

The proposed Conclusions with a view to a Convention include a Preamble which recalls the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work by the International Labour Conference in June 2022. The proposed Conclusions define the term "biological hazards" for the purposes of the new instruments, and the scope of the Convention. The Conclusions also state that each Member should, consistent with national law and practice and in consultation with the most

representative organizations of employers and workers, integrate the protection against biological hazards in the working environment into its national policy on occupational safety and health, which would be periodically reviewed.

The tripartite constituents have also agreed on a set of preventive and protective measures required for the management of biological hazards in the working environment, defining the role of the competent authorities in regulating and providing guidance on these specific hazards, and requested the progressive extension of occupational health services to all workers in all branches of economic activity. The Conclusions also include provisions on data collection, recording and notification of occupational diseases and occupational accidents, and on enforcement of laws and regulations. The collection and analysis of data pertaining to biological hazards provide for informed responses, effective planning and the successful prevention of accidents and injuries to health in the working environment. Finally, the proposed Conclusions have also defined the duties and responsibilities of employers and the rights and duties of workers and their representatives.

Due to the technical nature and the complexity of the issues involved and the diversity of approaches in different countries and regions, as well as the fact that this was the first time the Conference had been called on to address biological hazards in the working environment, the Committee did not have adequate time, within the sittings allocated, to finish its review of the Conclusions proposed by the Office, including the proposed Conclusions with a view to a Recommendation. The Committee requests the Office to propose, on the basis of the amendments submitted and the discussion of the Committee at this session, a revised text with a view to a Recommendation for the second discussion at the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Before closing, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of all participants in the Committee. The Government members, the Employer members and the Worker members discussed in a spirit of openness and mutual respect throughout the entire process. Despite initial challenges with divergent perspectives, the Committee was able to refocus on the substantive issues. The commitment of the tripartite members of the Committee to overcoming differences in opinion and positions by making compromises led to a consensus that aligns with the ILO's mission to promote safety and health at work. The Chairperson, Mr Claudino de Oliveira, Government member of Portugal, and the two Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Maya Rubio for the Employers and Mr Ritchie for the Workers, ably navigated these complex discussions and found solutions which ensured the success of our Committee's ambitious task. We thank Mr Claudino de Oliveira for his wisdom and patience in seeking consensus, which facilitated tripartite collaboration in achieving substantial outcomes. We are also thankful to our two Vice-Chairpersons, whose mastery of tripartite negotiation and the decision-making process was instrumental in getting the job done. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to all members of the Secretariat for their invaluable support, under the able leadership of Ms Seppo, representative of the Secretary-General. These colleagues worked tirelessly, day and night, both on and behind the scenes. Their excellent work has ensured the successful conduct of our business.

Ms Maya Rubio

**Employer Vice-Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards
(Original Spanish)**

In this process, the concept of safety and health as a new fundamental principle and right at work has provided us with context and clear limits. The Employers' group took part in the

debate in full awareness of its relevance and potential, with a view in particular to addressing the important issue of biological hazards in the working environment.

Governments, Workers and Employers met with the aim of working constructively towards the common goal of addressing biological hazards in the working environment. This is a very important issue for all of us, given that our work may have real and concrete impacts in the workplaces of the world. Preventing, managing and controlling the hazards related to biological agents is essential, both for employers and for workers.

It was and continues to be our shared responsibility to consider, in a balanced and coherent way, the perspectives of the three constituent groups and to consult all those who may be affected, both in developed countries and developing countries, in both small and large companies, and also workers, whatever their place of work. The instruments that we have developed this year, and will be working on next year, have to be able to provide a practical approach balanced between worker protection and the sustainability of companies, as well as a coherent risk-based approach that guarantees adequate protection and minimizes labour market disruptions. For that reason, it is important that they have the necessary flexibility to be adapted to the situation in each country.

The Employers have been clear about their goal of achieving an outcome that can be implemented in national legislation and in practice for the largest possible number of Member States. In their current form, the conclusions are not sufficiently practical to guarantee robust and generalized ratification. At present, the conclusions repeat what has been set out in other instruments and introduce excessively complicated elements, thereby creating uncertainty with regard to the application of other standards. We are concerned that the conclusions are based on too many instruments on the subject of workplace health and safety that have not been ratified sufficiently and lack flexibility, rather than relying on the weight and authority of the two fundamental Conventions on workplace health and safety.

Regarding scope of application and definitions, which are critical parameters on which to focus efforts and provide a solid basis for action, these are, in our respectful opinion, problematic. The definition of biological hazards presents significant practical problems when considered in the context of operational provisions. This creates ambiguity and legal uncertainty in terms of what will be required of employers in relation to the workplace and we have heard from many Governments that they share similar concerns with respect to their own obligations. This ambiguity is exacerbated by the blurring of the dividing line between responsibilities for public health matters and responsibilities for safety and health at work. The Employers argue for a clear distinction between, on the one hand, situations where exposure to a biological hazard has its origin directly in the workplace and, on the other hand, situations linked to external factors, such as pandemics, which evidently affect workplaces. The conclusions do not reflect this, but rather confuse those two types of situation. We need to establish a clear distinction, because the responsibilities and measures needed to protect the safety and health of workers differ between the two cases.

However, we do believe that the spirit of consensus and the expertise of all those involved in the search for compromise has broken through just in time to reach significant conclusions through the tripartite negotiations. We have seen the progress that has been achieved through our discussions and we have emerged from them with more experience and more appreciation for different perspectives, and this is reflected in the draft text, laying the foundations for next year and offering opportunities for success.

Having made these remarks, we will come back to this discussion next year with the best intentions and ready to devote all the necessary effort to achieving a good outcome. We would

ask the Office to continue to consult the groups before the second discussion and we are confident that, at the Committee next year, we will be able to develop applicable instruments that the Employers can promote and support. To that end, we anticipate significant improvements to the text in order to achieve greater practicality, clarity and coherence with other instruments. We have a year ahead of us in which to address the main concerns of the constituents. In the chamber of social dialogue, we must adhere to the collective objective of achieving an instrument that is practical and ratifiable.

I would add that it has been an honour for me to take part in the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards and to act as Vice-Chairperson for the Employers. Allow me to conclude by thanking all those present and all those who participated in the discussion.

Mr Ritchie

Worker Vice-Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

The Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards has reached its Conclusions, with proposals for a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation concerning biological hazards in the working environment, with a view to consulting the tripartite constituents and finalizing these standards at the next session of the International Labour Conference, in 2025.

The Workers' group is pleased with the progress made at this session of the Conference and wishes to thank the Employers' and Government groups for their diligent and constructive work in reaching our Conclusions. Our discussions were expertly guided by the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Claudino de Oliveira, from the Government of Portugal. We also wish to thank Ms Maya Rubio, the Employer Vice-Chairperson. The Office gave invaluable support, led by Ms Seppo.

The Workers' group came to these discussions committed and determined to do everything possible to extend protections to all workers who encounter biological hazards within the working environment. We did this in the knowledge that, since 2022, occupational safety and health (OSH) has been included in the fundamental principles and rights at work, as mandated by the tripartite constituents of this house. Along with freedom of association and the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining, the right to be free from discrimination, and the prohibition on forced labour and child labour, OSH is now included in the United Nations (UN) human rights framework. The right to a safe workplace will be greatly enhanced by the adoption of a Convention and guiding Recommendation on biological hazards in 2025 and, so far, we have a clear and unambiguous text for a proposed Convention.

Given the pandemic experience of the last few years, together with the growing incidence of antimicrobial-resistant pathogens and the increased risk of exposure to biological hazards arising from the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, there is no other legitimate option within the UN framework for the promotion of rights, peace and sustainability than to make every effort to enhance protection against biological hazards in the working environment.

The Workers' group, as one of the tripartite constituents of this house, advocates for all workers, including workers in the informal economy and other vulnerable workers, including migrant workers. In addressing the risks posed by biological hazards, it is important that all constituents recognize the reality of national and global economies, which have significantly reduced employment security, increased inequalities and consigned millions of workers and their families to insecure and inadequate incomes, which are insufficient to realize the rights to food, education, health and housing. We are in danger of being mere spectators, as the insatiable demands of capitalism intensify this crisis with every passing day. This house and its

tripartite constituents have an obligation to uphold its standards, including the fundamental principles and rights at work, and to ensure that these standards are accessible to all workers.

There is, of course, a public health and OSH imperative to reaching agreement on definitions and scope, which must be inclusive. Just as access to vaccines is a universal requirement to ensure global protection from infectious diseases, universal access to a safe working environment is a prerequisite to containing the spread of disease and to preventing unnecessary suffering and death. Cooperation between public health agencies and OSH agencies is a prerequisite to protecting our communities from exposure to biological hazards.

Public health policy and OSH policy must be complementary, but we endanger lives, increase suffering and disrupt business continuity if we believe that public health policy and action are enough to contain biological hazards in the working environment. By using the “hierarchy of hazard control” approach, workers and employers can remove, minimize and control biological hazards, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of public health and builds safer communities. It is important to be clear about this as we advance our discussions next year.

The effective management of biological hazards in the working environment, including new or emerging hazards, necessitates the development of preparedness and response plans and, where necessary, precautionary measures to deal with accidents and emergencies, as well as the need to take into account workers’ physical, mental and general well-being. We are pleased that the Committee has agreed to include these important mechanisms in the draft text of the Convention. Looking forward to next year, we must also agree on the language that will be used to ensure that both women and men have equal protection in line with their different needs and vulnerabilities. We have a good basis from this year’s discussions to meet our common goal, and we will devote our best efforts to achieving a strong Convention and Recommendation at the 2025 session of the Conference.

I want to thank everybody involved in the Committee, the Chairperson, the Employer Vice-Chairperson, the Workers’ group secretariat and the Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV) for their brilliant support, and the Drafting Committee in particular for going beyond the call of duty by working diligently at such an inhospitable hour. Most of all, I want to thank the Workers’ group members as a whole for their wise and considered contributions to our input, their patience, good humour and commitment. They come with a mandate from the workers they represent, and to those workers I say, you have great leaders committed to your well-being and safety.

Mr Claudino de Oliveira

Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

I have the honour, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards, to present to you some observations on the proceedings and the outcome of the Committee’s work.

Allow me to start by informing the Conference that we agreed that international instruments on biological hazards in the working environment are required, and that these instruments should take the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation.

May I recall that this Committee met as the result of a decision of the ILO Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021) to place on the agenda of the 112th and 113th Sessions of the International Labour Conference an item related to occupational safety and health protection against biological hazards. This decision is a follow-up to the assessment of the ILO’s

normative framework on occupational safety and health conducted in 2017 by the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group. It recommended that a regulatory gap related to these occupational hazards be addressed so as to complement and supersede one of the first ILO instruments, the Anthrax Prevention Recommendation (No. 3), which was adopted in 1919.

Since then, as we know, more than 40 international labour standards on occupational safety and health have been adopted by this house. But other than very limited references to some preventive measures in some standards, the ILO has never discussed biological hazards on their own for standard-setting purposes. This is also the first standard-setting process dedicated to safety and health after the historic decision of the Conference in June 2022 to include a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work, designating the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), as fundamental Conventions.

We have before us a unique opportunity. The protection of workers against sickness, disease and injury arising out of employment is a constitutional objective of the ILO. While the Organization's response to challenges related to occupational safety and health has changed over time, the adoption of OSH-related instruments is the gold standard for ensuring that the management of occupational hazards, both at the national and workplace levels, takes into account emerging and re-emerging risks. Climate change, for example, is exacerbating many workers' exposure to biological hazards, namely due to an increased risk of vector-borne diseases in workers through the effects of changing weather patterns on vector population sizes, survival rates, and reproduction. COVID-19 and epidemics that have severely affected workplaces in many regions in recent decades have also reminded us of the dire consequences of a lack of sound and resilient occupational safety and health systems when facing biological hazards.

If adopted next year, as currently proposed by the Conclusions approved by the Committee, the ILO will add to its normative framework specific references to biological hazards in the working environment. If so confirmed, they will be the first international instruments addressing these particular occupational hazards.

To guide its work, the Committee had before it two informative pre-Conference reports, which were the result of extensive research and consultations both within the Office and with constituents. Report ILC.112/IV(1) (the "white report") compiled information on national law and practice addressing biological hazards in a work context. The information collected enabled the Office to draft a questionnaire, which was sent to all Member States in order to obtain their views on the need for an instrument or instruments, and on the content. The complexity of the issues at stake started to emerge at this point, as the Office twice needed to postpone the deadline for replies to the questionnaire, which resulted in a more comprehensive view of ILO Members' perspectives. The Office received 87 replies from governments, 50 from employers' organizations, and 94 from workers' organizations. Based on the information received from Members, a second report was drafted (Report ILC.112/IV(2)), which contained a set of proposed Conclusions, including 32 points with a view to a Convention and 12 with a view to a Recommendation.

During our deliberations, we were cognizant that agreeing on the key principles and elements would be challenging, given the complexity of the subject matter being addressed, diverging points of view from tripartite constituents, and the quite different approach by national jurisdictions. Questions relating to the definition of biological hazards, the scope of

the instruments, and the form and content of national policies represented a significant part of the discussions.

The Committee was nevertheless able to build consensus and reach joint decisions on critical questions that will allow the process to move forward. Among these, the Committee agreed that international instruments on biological hazards in the working environment are required, and that these should be in the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. The Committee also agreed on the definition of biological hazards for the effects of the proposed standards. It is proposed that the standards would apply to all branches of economic activity and all workers, while providing for some flexibility for Member States, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations, to make temporary exclusions based on certain premises.

Elements of the national policy on biological hazards in the working environment were agreed on, including the need for coherence with broader national occupational safety and health policies, taking into account the best available information and promoting coordination between relevant national authorities. The Committee also agreed on preventive and protective measures to be adopted, including the development of national guidance, inter alia, for preparedness and response measures to deal with accidents and emergencies, taking into account new and emerging risks. The Committee also reached consensus on points related to occupational data collection, recording and notification of occupational diseases and accidents, duties and responsibilities of employers, and rights and duties of workers and their representatives. Other agreed points referred to employment protection measures and enforcement of laws and regulations.

Looking back and taking into account the range of issues raised during the work of the Committee and the different points of view offered, I am very pleased to inform you that the Committee was able to deliver on its mandate to a great extent. It is to be noted that time did not allow us to discuss the proposed points with a view to a Recommendation, but I believe that the Office now has the elements that will allow the process to move forward.

We were entrusted with a complex task – to start the discussion on the regulation of biological hazards in the working environment in order to address a normative gap in the ILO. I believe that, given the intricacy of the endeavour, the Committee has made a major breakthrough, upon which constituents will build in 2025. This was made possible by Committee members working towards consensus and demonstrating flexibility in accepting each other's views around all issues.

In this respect, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to all delegates representing governments, employers and workers, as they all brought constructive proposals and views. I must confess that I did not expect the negotiations to be so complex, but I am also delighted to report to you that consensus was the rule for decision-making in the Committee, valuing the importance of tripartism.

I would like to thank the Vice-Chairpersons – Ms Maya Rubio for the Employers' group and Mr Ritchie for the Workers' group – for their passion, professionalism and commitment. I would also like to thank the Government members for their useful contributions and full engagement throughout. My thanks also go to the Office – the representative of the Secretary-General, Ms Seppo, the deputy representative, Ms Paquete-Perdigao, the senior advisers, Mr Pintado Nunes and Mr Santos O'Connor, and the team of experts – for the excellent preparation of this standard-setting discussion, the comprehensive background reports, which provided an excellent basis for discussion, and their competent support during the deliberations. Last but not least, I thank the coordinators – Ms Wong-Ramesar, Ms Pinoargote and Ms Ramirez Abarca

– and all members of the Committee Secretariat, who provided continuous, smooth and efficient support throughout, and who worked long hours to support the Committee in producing its outcome. Please also allow me a word of thanks for the colleagues of the Portuguese delegation, who were always there for me.

The work of our Committee has ended for this session, but the work is not finished here. As a next step, the Office will prepare a new report containing a draft text of the instruments and a commentary, and will circulate it for Members' comments. This consultation will form the basis for the final report, which will facilitate the work of the Standard-Setting Committee at the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference next year. It has been my privilege to serve as Chairperson of this Committee.

The President

The discussion on the outcome of the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards is now open.

Ms Ponnet

Government (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Norway align themselves with this statement.

We want to express our warm thanks to Mr Claudino de Oliveira, the Chairperson of the Committee, for leading the discussions successfully, despite the fact that our discussions were sometimes difficult. We also thank the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons and our colleagues in the Government group for the fruitful contributions, which allowed us to gain a common understanding of this crucial matter.

The Conclusions we are adopting today are an important step towards improving the ILO's body of standards and protecting workers from biological hazards in the working environment, as well as to promoting and realizing the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment. They are a crucial step towards achieving the first international instrument on this key matter, and will provide a framework with the objective of protecting all workers in regard to biological hazards in the working environment, which goes beyond protection in the event of outbreaks and pandemics.

The Conclusions provide the basis for a new Convention and give guidance on what should be included in the accompanying Recommendation. We welcome the fact that we could agree on the most important elements, including the form of the instruments and the definition of biological hazards in the working environment. We are looking forward to finalizing this important work next year and to working towards a new Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation, on biological hazards in the working environment.

We would like to convey our great gratitude to the Secretariat for its support and guidance, and to all the interpreters for their excellent job in facilitating our work – even though it was sometimes difficult for them because we were talking a little too fast. We also thank the members of the Drafting Committee for reviewing the language of the instrument at late hours. Our thanks also go to the whole staff who supported the work of the Committee and of this session of the Conference. Lastly, I thank all the people who were working behind the scenes to make it possible for the Committee to produce its Conclusions.

Mr Mc Clashie**Minister of Labour (Trinidad and Tobago)**

The first standard-setting discussion on the issue of biological hazards has been an engaging and timely one, especially on the heels of COVID-19. Over the past two weeks, the Committee held in-depth discussions on the issue of biological hazards, the importance of ensuring protection from threats that may arise from such hazards in the working environment, and the possible mitigations to ensure protection to life and limb.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight at the national level the commitment of Trinidad and Tobago to ensuring protection against biological hazards. Our country, through its Occupational Safety and Health Authority, has a steadfast commitment to ensuring safe and healthy work environments. Established under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, this advisory body encourages compliance with the OSH Act in the workplace, develops codes of practice, and engages in research activities that will continue to promote a safe and healthy environment. Currently, work is under way to amend this legislation to ensure a robust national framework to promote workplace safety and health. This should positively impact my country's ability to comply with the new instrument.

We look forward to continued tripartite discussions on this matter next year, and to this body adopting a new instrument on biological hazards.

In closing, I want to commend the ILO on the work undertaken in addressing this critical issue and its continued support to countries such as Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms Ajam**Worker (South Africa)**

Thank you to the Secretary-General, all the Officers of the Conference, all the staff across the divide who have a role in making this Conference a success, all delegates, and particularly the members of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards. On behalf of the Workers' group, I wish to highlight some of the issues that have been characterized in the Committee.

We are pleased with the Conclusions and the outcomes. They are incredibly important for all workers of the world, recognizing the rights of both male and female workers, but especially vulnerable workers from Africa. This approach sets the tone, demonstrates goodwill and provides assurance that no one is left behind. The extension of protection to all workers insofar as biological hazards are concerned is absolutely remarkable, taking due cognizance of the exacerbation of biological hazards due to climate change. Climate change poses significant risks to workers in Africa and the global village, particularly the increased exposure to biological hazards. These risks are especially concerning for informal, outdoor and frontline workers. We therefore remain deeply committed to mitigating all risks posed by climate change and the increased exposure to biological hazards in ensuring sustainable and resilient workplaces in the face of these global challenges.

For this reason, clear inspiration has been drawn from the spirit and progress of the negotiations that have officially culminated in a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. While we are flexible with the Conclusions, it is our hope that the strength and concretized outcome of an even more solidified text in 2025 will guarantee inclusivity and the extension of protection against biological hazards for all citizens of the world.

Mr Moraes**Employer (United States of America)**

On behalf of the United States Council for International Business, the Employers' delegation, I would like to thank Isabel, Pierre, Robert, Matthias and Laura from the International Organisation of Employers, and the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) for guiding us in the last couple of weeks. Also, I want to thank my fellow members of the Employers' group for the valuable contributions during our group meetings. Thanks to the Chairperson, Mr Claudino de Oliveira, the Governments' representatives and to the Workers' group for the fruitful discussions and negotiations that, although many times challenging, are necessary to ensure that decisions made in this house are made by consensus. Last but not least, I would like to thank my fellow brave colleagues from the Drafting Committee for the hours we spent in the last few days to make this document easier to be understood and aligned in English, French and Spanish.

The spirit of constructive work, focusing on achieving consensus, was present during the entire session. However, there are important and concerning topics to be considered for next year, especially related to the definitions and scope section, as well as the distinction between public health and occupational health and safety.

In conclusion, speaking for myself now, I would like to say that, as a physician specialized in occupational medicine and infectious disease, I am leaving here with a positive feeling that the document produced at this session of the Conference will set the stage for a productive discussion next year, focusing on the development of a standard that will be able to be ratified and implemented. This will contribute to strengthening health and safety in the workplace, which is one of the elements of the mission of the ILO, the only tripartite UN agency.

Ms Landry**Worker (Canada)****(Original French)**

I wanted to share with you the importance of the work being done in this house on the Convention on biological hazards in the working environment, a subject that may sometimes seem arduous and daunting, but which is essential to ensuring the recognized fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment for all workers, regardless of their place of employment, occupation or gender. Having a safe and healthy job, free of biological hazards, also means having the right to return from work in good health, in a way that promotes our personal development and the development of our families and our communities.

Over the past two weeks, I have witnessed how difficult it is to achieve a genuine and flexible tripartite dialogue to move the discussions forward. I would like to invite all those who will sit on the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards next year to come with an openness to dialogue in order to advance the work we must finish, which will certainly again require long hours of work as we have seen over the past two weeks, but which I hope will do credit to the millions of workers who are exposed to biological hazards that jeopardize their health and safety every day. Because improving their conditions and thereby respecting their fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment is why we are here.

The Convention on biological hazards will be even more crucial as workplaces face additional challenges in the wake of climate change. In Canada, global warming is already exposing workers to zoonotic diseases that were unknown to us just two decades ago, and this is only the beginning.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues from the Workers' delegation, and underscore the extraordinary work of the Worker Vice-Chairperson, Mr Ritchie, and group Secretariat members, Mr O'Neill and Ms Llanos, who brought us together so well around the common goal of obtaining a Convention and Recommendation on biological hazards in the working environment. We look forward to continuing the discussion next year.

Mr Chester
Employer (South Africa)

I speak as a technical expert on behalf of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA).

Our task, as a Committee, was to produce a document focusing on fundamental principles relating to biological hazards, whether from operational or incidental sources – for example, tuberculosis, malaria, influenzas, SARS-CoV-2 and whichever the next one is around the corner. The task was huge, and the detail was complex. The passion of the tripartite groups – Government, Workers' and Employers' – was highly evident and set a dynamic tone for our negotiations.

We all know that changing mindsets can be challenging, and our discussions have been testament to this. While we found common ground in many areas, consensus on some fundamentals, including the definition of "biological hazards", proved elusive. Further to this, the placement and understanding of definitions and concepts within the instruments sparked considerable debate. Terms such as "risk", "risk assessment", "risk-based approach", "reasonably practicable" and, of course, "biological hazard" were discussed repeatedly, which underscored their importance in the instruments. We devoted substantial time to broad debates, perhaps at the expense of technical detail, even though existing Conventions like the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), provide ample coverage.

Despite these lengthy, and sometimes frustrating, discussions, we reached consensus on many key issues. We now have a document that is significantly improved from the base text. I eagerly anticipate our continued engagement to strive towards a Convention that is widely understood, appreciated and, above all, ratified. Improper oversight in these areas would have disastrous consequences for governments, workers and employers.

In closing, I would like to thank BUSA for my invite – I am honoured – and extend my deepest appreciation for the Biological Hazards Committee Chairperson, Mr Claudino de Oliveira, the coordinators, governments and especially my South African Government representative, Bulelwa, and the Africa group representatives, Betty and Benjamin. They were an example of social dialogue. I also extend my gratitude to the Vice-Chairpersons, Mr Ritchie and, of course, my own group's Vice-Chairperson, Ms Maya Rubio, whose courage under fire was truly commendable. They, and particularly Pierre on our side, provided a calming presence amidst the storm. And I thank, of course, the Drafting Committee and interpreters. I also want to acknowledge the Secretariat and representatives of the International Organisation of Employers for their deep understanding of the Conventions and working methods, and the entire Employers' group team for their passion, knowledge, temperament and wisdom. I do look forward to collaborating with you all again.

Mr Zuccotti

Worker (Argentina)

(Original Spanish)

Just two years ago, a fifth fundamental right was added, guaranteeing a safe and healthy working environment for all workers. This decision made it possible to take a more comprehensive look at all the fundamental rights and, since then, it has been a matter of fulfilling a duty of care to people, which also includes the environment in which they work. Recent history has shown us that biological hazards are never far away and that, if we do not address them, the consequences can be devastating and unpredictable. We cannot ensure that there will be no new pandemics, but we must ensure that we do everything possible to achieve the fullest level of prevention so as to protect workers around the world from being exposed.

The Conclusions before the plenary will give rise to the first standard that will make operational various aspects of the fundamental Conventions on occupational safety and health. This Convention and the Recommendation will be the first international labour standards to address the important issue of the protection of all workers from biological hazards. As constituents, we should do all we can to reach agreements in this house of social dialogue that will result in an up-to-date text that covers all productive activities that are subject to these risks.

I assure you that this will lead to a better working environment and offers real potential for saving lives: the ultimate objective when it comes to decent work. The Workers' group can be counted on for its effort, commitment and, fundamentally, its good faith in continuing to build a world with more social justice for all. Lastly, my thanks go to the remarkable Workers' group for the opportunity to participate in this discussion.

Resolution and Conclusions**Proposed Conclusions: Adoption****The President**

There being no further speakers, we shall now proceed with the adoption of the proposed Conclusions of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards, as set out in Record of Proceedings No. 6A.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference adopts the proposed Conclusions?

(The Conclusions are adopted.)

Resolution to place on the agenda of the next ordinary session of the Conference an item entitled "Biological hazards in the working environment": Adoption**The President**

Let us now move to the adoption of the resolution to place on the agenda of the next ordinary session of the Conference an item entitled "Biological hazards in the working environment".

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference adopts this resolution?

(The resolution is adopted.)

I would like to extend my warmest thanks and congratulations to the members and Officers of the Committee for their work. I would also like to thank the Secretariat for its support. We already look forward to the outcomes of this double discussion standard-setting procedure.

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)