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

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Friday, 13 June 2025, 10.30 a.m.

President: Mr Moyo

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

The President

I would now like to invite you to direct your attention to the outcome of the work of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards, as set out in [Record of Proceedings No. 5A](#). This document contains the texts of the Convention and Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, which are being submitted to the Conference for adoption. The report on the Committee's proceedings is contained in Record of Proceedings No. 5B.

It is my pleasure to welcome the Officers of the Committee and its Reporter, namely: Mr Claudino de Oliveira (Portugal), Chairperson; Ms Rudelli (France), Employer Vice-Chairperson; Mr Ritchie (New Zealand), Worker Vice-Chairperson; and Ms Huna (South Africa), Reporter.

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

Ms Huna

Reporter of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

It is both an honour and a privilege for me, Bulelwa Huna, to address this Conference today on behalf of the Government of South Africa and to report on the significant work and outcomes of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards.

This work has been carried out pursuant to the mandate entrusted to us by this esteemed Conference. The Committee was tasked with undertaking the second discussion on protection against biological hazards in the working environment with the ultimate objective of establishing new international labour standards on this increasingly critical issue.

It is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I report that the Committee has once again reached a landmark agreement. We have decided, through careful deliberation and consensus, that the new standards should take the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. Furthermore, we have agreed upon the content of both instruments, reflecting a remarkable achievement in tripartite cooperation and commitment.

Over the course of 19 sittings in just eight days, the Committee engaged in thorough and thoughtful dialogue. These discussions were marked by constructive engagement, mutual respect and an unwavering dedication to the shared goal of safeguarding the safety and health of workers worldwide, while ensuring business continuity. The result of these efforts is a set of provisions that we believe constitute an effective and robust Convention.

The Convention opens with a Preamble that recalls the constitutional responsibility of the International Labour Organization to promote programmes that ensure adequate protection of workers' life and health across all occupations. It reaffirms that a safe and healthy working environment is not merely a goal, but a fundamental principle and right at work. It also acknowledges that this is the first global instrument of its kind to address biological hazards

in the world of work – a critical step forward in our collective journey to respond to the challenges of modern labour environments.

The Convention defines key concepts, including what constitutes a biological hazard, and introduces related notions, such as exposure, biological risk, and risk evaluation by the competent authorities. It calls upon Member States to integrate biological hazards into national occupational safety and health policies, developed in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of effective coordination and the exchange of information among relevant authorities.

Beyond this, the Convention sets forth a framework of preventive and protective measures to manage biological hazards. It outlines the respective responsibilities of governments, employers and workers, recognizing the importance of their collaboration in ensuring safe working conditions. It mandates that the competent authorities develop, publicize and regularly review guidelines and preparedness strategies to respond to incidents, including accidents and emergencies, involving exposure to biological hazards in the working environment.

Key areas addressed by the Convention also include occupational health services, mechanisms for the recording, reporting and notification of occupational diseases and accidents, provisions for employment injury benefits, and systems to ensure compliance.

The accompanying Recommendation elaborates on the provisions of the Convention and offers guidance. It identifies examples of biological hazards and their transmission pathways. It provides comprehensive instructions on national preparedness and response, including early warning systems and protocols on national preparedness and response for managing outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. The Recommendation also elaborates on measures based on the hierarchy of controls, aligning them with the results of thorough risk assessments. Importantly, it highlights specific sectors, occupations and categories of workers that require targeted and enhanced protection.

As we conclude this report, I wish to extend sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to the work of the Committee. The Government members, the Employer members and the Worker members participated with remarkable dedication, mutual respect and a spirit of cooperation throughout the deliberations. Their commitment to dialogue, compromise and consensus was instrumental in achieving the progress we report today. This collective achievement speaks to the strength and value of the ILO's tripartite model.

I would also like to express our deep appreciation to the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Luís Claudino de Oliveira, Government member from Portugal. His leadership was marked by wisdom, patience and an unwavering pursuit of consensus, which facilitated our successful collaboration. Equally, I wish to recognize the contribution of the two Vice-Chairpersons: Ms Delphine Rudelli, representing the Employers' group, and Mr James Ritchie, representing the Workers' group. Their skilful navigation of complex issues and their mastery of the intricacies of tripartite negotiation played a vital role in moving our work forward.

Our gratitude also extends to the members of the ILO Secretariat, under the capable leadership of Ms Mia Seppo, representative of the Secretary-General. The Secretariat provided us with unfailing technical, procedural and logistical support. Their tireless efforts, often behind the scenes and extending well beyond regular hours, were indispensable in ensuring the successful conduct of our work.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the importance of the instruments we have developed. They represent not only the culmination of rigorous and inclusive negotiations, but also a beacon of protection for workers across the globe, particularly at a time when biological hazards are of growing concern in the world of work. It is my hope, and that of my Government, that this Convention and Recommendation will be adopted by this Conference and will guide our collective efforts towards a safer, healthier and more resilient future for all workers everywhere.

Ms Rudelli

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

I would first like to extend my sincere appreciation to Ms Isabel Maya Rubio, who led our Employers' group last year. She played a very critical role in representing us, and her exceptional technical expertise and support have been invaluable, both to the Employers' group and also to me personally in taking on the role of spokesperson.

Governments, workers and employers sought an important outcome over two years of negotiations to reach the common goal of addressing biological hazards in the working environment. This was the first standard-setting discussion following the recognition of a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work.

Managing risks arising from biological hazards in the working environment is essential for all ILO constituents, and particularly relevant five years after the COVID-19 pandemic. Let me share with you some reflections on what we have achieved and where we feel, as Employers, we have missed some opportunities.

The Employers have been guided by, and have highlighted since the beginning of the negotiations, the need to ensure that the discussion should deliver an outcome that can be implemented in national law and practice by as many Member States as possible. The Convention which we have developed, although not ideal, is a balanced instrument in the view of the Employers' group. However, we have some reservations about the Recommendation. We outlined many of these issues and we still want to highlight that the Recommendation leaves us concerned.

The Employers' group called for coherence, clarity and instruments which are practicable, and we have done that throughout the discussion. We attempted to improve the text as much as possible. At times, there was a reluctance to debate substance and explain positioning, which resulted in a text – the Recommendation – that we feel does not reach its full potential. As an example, referring to the participation of workers and their representatives in the Recommendation when it is not present in the Convention creates incoherence and confusion and goes beyond what is usual practice. This will present a clear obstacle for ratification and implementation, particularly in some regions and especially for micro companies and small and medium-sized businesses, the backbone of the real economy. Furthermore, overly prescriptive and detailed provisions in the Recommendation do not help the objective of providing useful guidance.

Nevertheless, we appreciate that some very important aspects are in the Convention. They form a solid foundation based on several elements: a workable definition that is not overly broad and provides sufficient clarity; the crucial risk-based approach which underpins occupational safety and health measures; the principle of the hierarchy of controls; and, finally, the shared responsibilities and duties of governments, employers and workers. The Convention also rightfully recognizes the need to support employers in situations of outbreaks and public health emergencies, as well as the fact that employers' responsibilities do not go

beyond environments under their control. We believe that this will allow us to better protect all workers and employers against biological hazards and help ensure the safety and health of workers as well as safeguard business continuity.

However, the distinction between biological hazards originating directly from work-related situations and those linked to external factors such as pandemics and outbreaks is not appropriately clarified and is further complicated by the Recommendation. This missed opportunity will reduce understanding of different obligations and might undermine more effective measures necessary to protect workers' safety and health and to ensure business continuity.

We also want to express our concerns over the dynamic in the room and, at times, the lack of constructive dialogue. The absence of appetite for discussion, and even silence, when asked for the rationale behind certain positions was disappointing for us, particularly on the Recommendation, a text which was not discussed last year. We regret that the room did not witness much exchange in flexibility. Consensus, and notably making every effort to achieve this, is the basis on which we work within this house. Trusting in this enables us to reach outcomes that have the buy-in of all constituents, within this Committee and beyond.

Let me conclude by thanking the Chairperson and the Worker Vice-Chairperson. Dear Luís – I think I can call you Luís now, after two weeks – thank you for your calm, your patience and your humour in these sometimes challenging negotiations. Dear James, thank you for meeting us in the middle. We tested the limits of the English language together, and even French sometimes, but we did work within the spirit of compromise. A special thanks to the Employer members and to my team for their support throughout this process. I would also like to recognize the very hard work of the ILO staff, especially those behind the scenes, as we have been saying, who made the work of our Committee possible during these two years. I also do not want to forget the interpreters, because without them, none of the work would have been possible.

Mr Ritchie

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

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that I commend to the 2025 session of the International Labour Conference the adoption of the Convention and supplementary Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment. I do this while noting that these instruments follow the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 to 2022 and that this Convention constitutes the first international instrument specifically addressing biological hazards in the working environment at the global level. It follows quickly on from the 2022 decision to include a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work. It should also be noted that this Convention will be the first instrument to be adopted in three official languages: English, French and Spanish.

The discussions over two years were at times very difficult and there were inevitable and strong differences of opinion. However, it must be stressed that, at all times, the constituents of this House reflected a strong commitment to occupational safety and health, and it was a shared commitment which enabled the agreement of the text before you on the Convention and supplementary Recommendation.

Let me share some of the important contents which will facilitate the improved safety and health of millions of workers around the world. The Convention contains a broad-based definition covering all biological hazards, including microorganisms and hazards of animal or

plant origin in relation to disease, irritant, allergic and toxic effects, and injuries. All workers are covered, as per the definition of a worker under the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155): "This Convention applies to all workers in all branches of economic activity".

Included is a broad definition of health, considering workers' physical and mental health and well-being. This is reinforced in the Recommendation, which notes: "Health not only indicates the absence of disease or infirmity but also includes the physical and mental elements affecting health which are directly related to safety and health at work."

The climate crisis increases the risk of exposure to biological hazards, including zoonotic diseases, and the Convention stresses the need to take preventive action on climate and environmental risks. This reference marks a significant realization in the normative instruments of the ILO of the influence of climate change on occupational safety and health.

Each Member State shall ensure national and international coordination between authorities, experts and international organizations. Importantly, the Convention requires employers and Member States to take precautionary measures for the control of biological hazards and risks in the working environment, and requires national authorities to promote new research where there is insufficient information. The Convention also includes confidential mechanisms for reporting any breaches of national laws and regulations, with explicit protection from retaliation against any worker who reports a breach.

In considering preventive and protective measures, specific provision must be made for particularly affected sectors and occupations. This is supported by, and not limited to, a list of sectors and occupations in the Recommendation, which now includes explicitly food production, construction, forestry and transport, with a catch-all clause on occupations that are critical to the functioning of society and its well-being.

There is also a special protection for vulnerable workers, with a specific provision we needed, ensuring this does not result in discrimination or occupational segregation. The Recommendation includes welcome subparagraphs on workers in need of protection due to their social situation and multiple disadvantages, as well as including migrant workers. Workers must have access to information which is periodically reviewed and is in understandable language, and the Convention declares an ambition for occupational health services, so Member States shall seek to progressively extend occupational health services to all workers in all branches of economic activity and use national health and labour infrastructures for the provision of occupational health services to workers.

The Convention also provides for access to benefits or compensation for any disease or injury due to occupational exposure to biological hazards and requires adequate resources and support for inspection and enforcement.

The Convention includes a duty on employers to take all reasonable and practicable measures to eliminate the biological hazards in the working environment or, when not possible, control and minimize the risks due to those hazards, taking due account of the hierarchy of controls.

Provision is also made for training in paid work time for workers and, where possible, during normal working hours, and workers' representatives should also be provided with training. Included are extensive rights for workers and their representatives, reflecting the provisions of Convention No. 155, and duties of workers and their representatives, qualified by a condition on employers to ensure there are arrangements to make cooperation possible. Workers have the right to refuse dangerous work with no undue consequences and cannot be

required to return while the danger remains. The Recommendation clarifies that workers and their representatives have the right to consultation and participation, and the Recommendation provides for support for workers and employers in the event of outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Also in the Recommendation, there is explicit reference to Members taking due account of ILO social security and injury benefit Conventions and Recommendations and the promotion of income and job security.

Reaching agreement on the text has been a long but rewarding process. It is the culmination of years of work by the International Labour Office, led by Ms Mia Seppo, and the ILO's tripartite constituents. I wish to place on record my thanks to all involved and the deep appreciation for the work that has gone into this timely and critical Convention and supplementary Recommendation on biological hazards. In particular, I wish to thank the expert Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Luís Claudino de Oliveira, whose patience and skill guided us to a successful conclusion, and the Employer Vice-Chairperson, Ms Delphine Rudelli, for her mastery of the English language as well as the French language, but most importantly for her considered contributions and the determined manner in which she represented the interests of employers in the spirit of compromise.

The support I received from the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and the Workers' secretariat to the Committee was extremely detailed, professional and good humoured, and the members of the Workers' group for the Committee are workers' champions and leaders, who know the true meaning of worker solidarity.

Mr Claudino de Oliveira

Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards

It is an honour and a pleasure for me in my capacity as Chairperson of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards to present to you some reflections on the proceedings and outcomes of the Committee's work.

Since the founding of the ILO, over 40 international labour standards have addressed safety and health at work. Yet, aside from limited references to biological agents in a handful of instruments, the Organization has never directly addressed this hazard category through a dedicated standard-setting process. The work of this Committee, therefore, represents a historic first.

It is also significant that this discussion took place in the wake of the landmark decision of this Conference in June 2022 to recognize a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work.

The protection of workers against sickness, disease and injury arising out of employment is enshrined in the Constitution of the ILO and, as such, is core to the work of the Organization. While the means to ensure that protection must evolve, the principle remains firm. The biological hazards faced by workers – whether through exposure to microorganisms, cells, endoparasites, toxins of plant or animal origin, or other sources of risk – are real, pervasive and growing in complexity. The COVID-19 pandemic, which deeply affected every economy and society, painfully demonstrated that biological hazards cannot be viewed as a niche or sectoral issue. They are a central concern for workplace safety, human health and global economic stability.

Looking back on the past two weeks and acknowledging the diversity of the issues raised and the complexity of the viewpoints shared, I am pleased to report that the Committee

substantially fulfilled its mandate, and consensus was found not only on the form of the instruments but also on the content of the Convention and the Recommendation that supplements it.

We were given a complex task: to regulate biological hazards in the working environment at the global level and to fill a long-standing normative gap in the ILO. Given the intricacy of the matter and the diversity of the stakeholders involved, the outcome is a remarkable achievement. This was made possible by the spirit of dialogue, flexibility and mutual respect shown by all the members of the Committee.

In this respect, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the delegates of the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups. Their constructive contributions, open minds and willingness to seek consensus were the key to our success. I must admit that the negotiations were sometimes demanding, but I am pleased to report that we maintained consensus as our rule of decision-making throughout, reaffirming the vital importance of tripartism in the ILO's standard-setting process.

I also wish to recognize the vital contributions of our Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Delphine Rudelli for the Employers' group and Mr James Ritchie for the Workers' group. Their professionalism and unwavering commitment to the work at hand was remarkable and I thank them very much for their commitment. My thanks also go to the Government members, whose insights and collaboration were indispensable.

Allow me to commend the Secretariat for its outstanding support. I am grateful to Ms Mia Seppo, representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms Vera Paquete-Perdigão, deputy representative, for their leadership. Let me also thank the main experts, Mr Joaquim Pintado Nunes and Mr Francisco Santos O'Connor, and the whole team behind them for the efficient technical guidance provided. Special thanks go to our coordinators, Ms Lisa Wong, Ms Ana Catalina Ramírez and Ms Paola Pinoargote and the entire team supporting them, of course. Their tireless work ensured the timely and efficient delivery of our Committee's outcomes.

The adoption of the new Convention and Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment marks a historic milestone, not only for dialogue but for the international community as a whole. These new standards are crucial because they offer broad, inclusive protection against all types of biological hazards, across every sector and occupation. They go beyond crisis response to establish everyday safeguards, ensuring that all workers are protected and that workplaces are resilient, safe and dignified.

Occupational safety and health is foundational to the ILO's mission to promote social justice and decent work. In today's globalized and interconnected world – where the boundaries between workplace and public health risks are increasingly blurred, where threats related to the changing weather patterns can lead to an expansion of vector-borne diseases to new regions and countries, where technology keeps evolving at a surprising pace, where workers are exposed to a growing number of chemical substances and other hazardous materials at work – we must continue to advance strong, relevant and modern standards to protect health and safety.

I now submit to the Conference for adoption the outcomes of the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards – a new Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation – which provide a solid contribution to the promotion and realization of the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment.

The President

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

Ms Nyereyegona

Government (Zimbabwe), speaking on behalf of the Africa group

Zimbabwe has the honour of presenting this statement on behalf of the Africa group on the Convention and Recommendation proposed by this year's Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards. We want to congratulate the Committee's Chairperson, the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons, the Secretariat, and the fellow Government and Workers' and Employers' representatives who participated in the Committee on their great work, which is a true testament to effective social dialogue.

The Africa group appreciates the decision by the Governing Body to place on the agenda of the 2024 and 2025 sessions of the Conference a standard-setting item on protection against biological hazards in the workplace. The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still vivid in our minds and the negative effects in the workplace cannot be disputed.

The Africa group recognizes the disproportionate impact of biological hazards on workers in the region, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, farming, waste management and transport. The region's public health sector still struggles with infectious diseases, which remain a threat to the region's economic and social development. We appreciate the sensitivity of the developed instruments to regional differences and vulnerabilities and the flexibility which makes the instruments usable by all Member States.

The developed instruments are important tools for Member States as they develop or enhance their legislation, systems and programmes aimed at managing biological hazards in the workplace. As we look forward, the Africa region remains committed to supporting the development of more instruments to address workplace hazards in the near future, as we endeavour to realize our shared goal of advancing decent work and indeed the fundamental principle and right at work that is safety and health.

As the Africa group, we appreciate the technical support the International Labour Organization offers the region. As regards the protection against biological hazards, we urge the Office to offer technical support to the Member States in the region to enable the development or enhancement of legislation. We look forward to widespread ratification of the instrument, which speaks to the core of protecting workers' safety and health globally.

Mr Costela

Government (Chile), speaking on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC)

(Original Spanish)

It is an honour to speak to you today on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC) to celebrate an historic milestone: the adoption of the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment and the Recommendation supplementing it. This achievement is the result of intense standard-setting discussions over two years within the Committee, and is testimony to what can be achieved through social dialogue at its finest.

Since the founding of the ILO, this area so vital for the occupational safety and health of millions of workers had lacked specific regulations, with the only exception of the Anthrax Prevention Recommendation, 1919 (No. 3). Today, we are proud to say that we have filled this normative gap by establishing robust legislation that directly addresses this subject.

The path to this achievement was not easy. The Committee's sittings were characterized by intense discussions and differing views. Nevertheless, we witnessed a brilliant example of how Governments, Employers and Workers – the three pillars of tripartism – can demonstrate strong determination to find common ground. Yes, there were tense moments, but also profound understanding and mutual respect. Everyone gave some ground and ultimately everyone gained, forging a consensus that reflects the needs and realities of each stakeholder. In these standard-setting discussions on biological hazards, GRULAC reaffirmed its unrelenting commitment to constructive and good-faith dialogue, cooperating with the social partners and other Governments to seek and achieve agreements that would benefit all parties.

The agreements that we have reached go beyond mere standard-setting; they are a powerful statement of our commitment to the right to a safe and healthy working environment, which became a fundamental right in 2022. By addressing biological hazards, we are protecting lives and preventing diseases for all workers the world over.

Now that we have these instruments in our hands, we will have to step up our efforts. In this process, each of the tripartite groups of this house had to relinquish some legitimate initial interests, but the spirit of consensus that led us here must drive us to secure the votes required for the final adoption of the instruments. Once they have been voted on, the second fundamental phase is ratification and implementation by each and every Government. Only through ratification will this Convention come into full force and be able to transform the occupational realities of all workers of the world. GRULAC celebrates this resounding success. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Chairperson of our group, who always remained calm and demonstrated leadership, even in the most challenging moments. We should also like to sincerely thank the Vice-Chairpersons of the Committee, the Secretariat and the translators, whose tireless work was so essential for the success of this Committee.

We end this session of the Conference with the satisfaction of knowing that we fulfilled our duty and have sown the seeds for a safer and more just future of work for all.

Mr Kathagen

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

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

We welcome the fact that the Committee concluded its important task and is presenting to the Conference a new ILO Convention and Recommendation on the prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment. Once adopted, these instruments will improve the ILO's body of standards and will make an important contribution to promoting and realizing the fundamental principle and right to a safe and healthy working environment. Let me underline that this Convention constitutes the first binding international instrument that specially and comprehensively addresses biological hazards in the working environment at the global level.

Exposure to biological hazards at work can lead to a substantial number of fatalities, diseases and injuries. Poor prevention increases the economic burdens, disrupts businesses

and challenges governments, ultimately impacting the global economy significantly. Governments, in collaboration with the social partners, can play a crucial role in mitigating these effects. These new international labour standards will provide governments with the necessary guidance to protect workers, support businesses and strengthen their economies.

We appreciate the fact that we discussed most of the issues in a constructive manner, taking into account the different views expressed. This allowed the Committee to find agreement on several delicate and crucial provisions, notably on the definition of biological hazards. However, we reiterate our concern about how some sensitive issues regarding ILO language were addressed by this Committee.

In this second year of the standard-setting discussions, we were able to substantially improve both instruments, including the sections on the national policy, the principles of preventive and protective measures, employers' duties and responsibilities, the rights and duties of workers and their representatives, as well as provisions on reporting and data collection.

We thank the Chairperson, Mr Luís Claudino de Oliveira, for conducting these discussions in an effective and efficient manner, which allowed us to conclude the work on time. We also thank the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons, as well as colleagues of the Government group, for their contributions to developing a common understanding of this crucial matter. Lastly, we want to express our thanks to the Secretariat for its support and guidance and to the interpreters for an excellent job in facilitating our work. We also thank the members of the Drafting Committee for reviewing the language of the instruments at late hours.

Ms Rodrigues Martins

Government (Brazil), speaking on behalf of a group of 32 countries

I speak on behalf of 32 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and my own country, Brazil.

We are glad that after two years of intense discussions, we have found consensus on the Convention on biological hazards. This Convention constitutes the first binding international instrument specifically addressing biological hazards in the working environment at the global level.

Poor prevention increases economic costs and disrupts businesses. The new international labour standard will provide governments with the necessary guidance to protect workers, support businesses and strengthen their economies. We therefore support the Convention, as exposure to biological hazards at work can lead to a substantial number of fatalities, diseases and injuries.

Occupational safety and health is a priority. No one should become sick or die at work. However, we want to express our deep disappointment with regard to the language in Article 4(f) and in Article 16. For us, these terms are non-inclusive and do not represent the world we currently live in. This does not align with our values of inclusivity and non-discrimination. We want to reiterate that the right to be free from discrimination in employment and occupation is a fundamental principle and right at work, and a universal human right intrinsic to social justice and decent work.

Mr Immanuel**Minister of Justice and Labour Relations of Namibia**

I graciously take the floor to record the Namibian voice on behalf of the Government, in support of the adoption of the Convention and Recommendation on biological hazards. I commend the Committee for concluding the second standard-setting discussion. The successful conclusion of the work of the Committee exemplifies the practicality of tripartism and social dialogue in the advancement of social justice. Further, it demonstrates that when social partners respectfully collaborate and build consensus, the outcome can be enormous and mutually beneficial.

The world of work is challenged by a diversity of occupational and environmental factors, as well as public health emergencies. These factors inadvertently pose threats to the safety and health of workers. A case in point is the COVID-19 pandemic that we witnessed a few years ago, which had a profound impact on the physical, mental and psychological well-being of Namibian workers, particularly those in the health sector.

Therefore, the Namibian Government welcomes the adoption of the Biological Hazards in the Working Environment Convention, covering all workers in all sectors and ensuring inclusive rights to a safe and healthy working environment. The Convention maps the international legal framework to safeguard the health of workers against biological hazards, as well as standing as a guiding instrument for Member States to enhance their national occupational safety and health systems and legislation.

The Convention could not come at a better time for Namibia as it is coinciding with the country's conclusion of occupational safety and health legislation, which will, among others, provide protection against occupational hazards, including biological hazards, in the integration of employees' wellness into occupational safety and health, covering mental health, to ensure holistic workers' health promotion and maintenance. As such, the adoption will contribute to the strengthening of Namibia's legal framework on biological hazards. In 2022, Namibia updated its list of occupational diseases to align with ILO guidelines. This list is inclusive of diseases caused by biological hazards.

Therefore, in conclusion, Namibia affirms its full commitment to ensuring a healthy and safe working environment and strongly supports the adoption of the Biological Hazards in the Working Environment Convention and its supplementary Recommendation.

Mr Ramlogan**Employer (Trinidad and Tobago)**

This new standard is a milestone. Not only is it timely but it reflects our shared concern for the health and safety of all workers and our collective belief in practical, balanced solutions that Member States and employers can implement.

For the Caribbean and other regions with higher vulnerabilities to biological threats, this instrument matters. Such threats carry deep social and economic costs, and the strength of our response depends on clarity, preparedness and cooperation across all actors in the world of work.

I am pleased that the Convention recognizes the shared duty to manage exposure to biological hazards, providing duty-holders with clear guidance and a foundation for evidence-based decision-making. Its balanced approach to enforcement, with the inclusion of support measures for enterprises, and strong emphasis on consultation and collaboration, all reflect the shared responsibility.

Yet, I must be candid. The path here was not always easy. There were many divergent views and challenges to assumptions. This is ultimately part of negotiation. But the quality of social dialogue displayed at times, especially during the discussion of the Recommendation, was concerning.

That said, I encourage Member States to consider ratifying this new standard. Doing so is another step towards strengthening national and economic resilience, enterprise sustainability and workforce protection. But let me be clear, given some justifiable concerns of Employers on the process and content of the Recommendation, Member States will also carry the responsibility to carefully interpret and apply the standard through continuous consultation and effective social dialogue, based on national circumstances and real sector-specific risks. Implementation can, and must, deliver tangible improvements without creating confusion or unnecessary burdens.

In closing, I thank the Employers' group for their strong engagement and contributions throughout this process, especially Ms Isabel Maya Rubio and Ms Delphine Rudelli, whose leadership and clarity of purpose have been truly exemplary.

Mr Zuccotti
Worker (Argentina)
(Original Spanish)

Workers today are celebrating having reached agreement on this Convention and Recommendation on biological hazards. This follows on from the adoption by the Conference of a safe and healthy working environment for all workers as the fifth fundamental right. The need for a more specific discussion of occupational safety and health, in particular in the wake of the indelible experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused our work on ensuring that people are looked after and their working environment is safe.

Biological hazards and risks call for employers to take responsibility for, and trade unions to participate in, monitoring systems to prevent serious and unknown consequences. If we learned anything from the pandemic, it was that we need to go to great lengths to provide the greatest protection possible for people against exposure to these hazards, in a changing world in which societal behaviours and manipulation of production are continuing unabated. These instruments that we are proposing to the Conference plenary modernize, update and uphold the protective nature of Convention No. 155, which is the pioneer and cornerstone of the fundamental Conventions on occupational safety and health.

Consensus was achieved on this standard on the basis of an updated text that addresses all productive areas, while highlighting sectors and occupations where workers are at a high risk of exposure to biological hazards. The definitions and scope are broad, which will strengthen the work of trade unions on prevention. The consensus achieved will improve the working environment. The ultimate objective is to protect lives, which is essential to decent work. The commitment and good faith of the Workers' group constituted our wholehearted contribution to building more social justice, strengthening the protection of all workers against biological hazards and minimizing the associated risks.

Mr Sharma
Government (India)

India deeply appreciates the extensive efforts undertaken by all the esteemed delegates and the Office in the development of these instruments.

India remains committed to promoting the safety, health and dignity of workers. We have taken legislative measures, including the Occupational Safety and Health Code of 2020, to institutionalize such protections.

However, after constructively contributing in the Committee, we believe that the instruments in their present form do not fully align with diverse national contexts. We humbly inform the Conference that the substantive and constructive proposals aimed at ensuring scientific clarity, operational feasibility and respect for the national context were not accommodated in the final draft. In our view, we need a risk-based, tiered framework that prioritizes high-risk sectors and avoids disproportionate compliance burdens on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups. We also emphasized the need for a clear delineation between public health responsibilities and workplace obligations, and the need for a gradual, context-specific implementation, especially in resource-constrained settings.

India's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of phased, calibrated responses based on evolving risk and public health data. The current draft sadly does not sufficiently reflect these imperatives. While we remain fully committed to the objectives of workers' safety and health as enshrined in our national legislation, we find that certain provisions in the proposed instruments, including those on workers' withdrawal and employers' liabilities, require further deliberation. In view of these concerns, India believes that further deliberations would be valuable to ensure the practical applicability of the instruments in diverse national contexts. We remain committed to constructive engagement and collaborative efforts moving forward.

Ms Alqahtani
Employer (Saudi Arabia)
(Original Arabic)

I am pleased to join you today as a representative of the Employers' group in this important event. The International Labour Conference offers a unique opportunity for constructive dialogue and strengthening cooperation between the tripartite constituents, which will serve our shared goal of promoting decent work and sustainable development.

We believe, as employers, that overcoming challenges in the workplace, including biological hazards, can only be achieved through close partnership and continuous coordination with governments and workers, as all parties are responsible for shaping legislative frameworks through effective social dialogue, which, in turn, requires compliance with and protection of those frameworks.

We commend the great efforts expended throughout the work of the Committee on Biological Hazards and we commend the Employer Vice-Chairperson, Ms Delphine Rudelli, for her selfless and dedicated work throughout these two weeks. I also thank the International Organisation of Employers and the Secretariat for the support provided to facilitate the work of the Committee. I thank my colleagues in the Employers, for their commitment and their technical and substantive inputs.

This experience has shown that effective social dialogue among all parties is the key to achieving realistic and balanced outcomes and understanding that we need to think globally while being able to apply the outcome locally and adapt it to the economic conditions of each country.

Lastly, I would like to thank all those working behind the scenes who allowed us to concentrate on dialogue and discussion, which has contributed to facilitating and achieving our common objectives and ensuring their success.

Ms Ajam
Worker (South Africa)

On behalf of the Workers' group, to say we are pleased with the outcome of the two-year process is most certainly an understatement. The adoption of the Convention supplemented by a Recommendation is a landmark victory and a necessary step forward, especially with the inclusion for the first time of a comprehensive definition of biological hazards that accommodates both known and emerging risks.

The undisputed power of this Convention lies in its universal applicability, providing an enabling international framework for Member States like South Africa to domesticate and enforce it. But translating this victory into meaningful change will require both deliberate and sustained effort to ensure that no one is left behind.

While biological hazards exist globally, the South African experience is shaped by numerous constraints and systemic underinvestment in occupational health protections due to budgetary limitations. But undoubtedly the social dialogue vehicles that characterize the South African landscape will continue to work collaboratively to establish workplace protocols, improve reporting and ensure accessibility, particularly for high-risk sectors, to ensure that this instrument is realized. Beyond policy advocacy, South African unions will have to build their own capacities to educate workers and monitor compliance, especially in underregulated sectors. While we are flexible, we will insist, however, on commitments to ratifications from Member States to perpetuate the protection of both workers and employers.

In essence, the Convention must be turned into a living document that speaks not only in Geneva but also in every hospital, on all farms, in classrooms and the informal market where South African workers and our global counterparts earn their livelihoods. The principle of consensus, enveloped with compromise, flexibility and good will, must therefore remain the beacon of hope when faced with despair, wherever biological hazards may flare.

Ms Fisher
Government (Portugal)
(Original Portuguese)

The Government of Portugal aligns itself with the statements made by the Governments of Belgium on behalf of the European Union and its Member States and Brazil on behalf of 32 countries.

We are living in uncertain times, in which the world of work is facing increasingly complex and interdependent challenges as a result of consecutive crises. Against this backdrop, the ILO has reaffirmed its unique and indispensable role in promoting decent working conditions, more just societies and social dialogue as a pillar of peace and democracy.

Biological hazards are often imperceptible, but they have a significant impact on our lives, as we witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This calls for increased coordination in responses on prevention and protection of the health of everyone, including in the workplace.

At this session of the Conference, we have produced a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment. This is the outcome of a tripartite standard-setting process which was

opportune and necessary. It is a clear illustration of the importance of tripartite social dialogue and the commitment of the Members of the ILO to social justice and decent work.

It is important to underscore that the adoption of these instruments reinforces the principle that a safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental right, in accordance with the decision taken by the Conference in 2022. Furthermore, it establishes a bridge between two key areas of public policy – occupational safety and health and public health – in a coherent, forward-looking manner. These new instruments provide governments with robust guidance to protect workers, support enterprises and strengthen the resilience of economies.

In closing, allow me to note that, once again, a representative of the Government of Portugal chaired a standard-setting committee of the International Labour Conference. This was a tremendous honour and we applaud the exemplary work of Mr Luís Claudino de Oliveira. His leadership was decisive in ensuring the success of our work within this tripartite setting.

Mr Swanepoel
Employer (South Africa)

Social dialogue thrives on diverse perspectives and compromise. Today, with the adoption of the new ILO instruments on biological hazards, we take a vital step towards protecting people and preparing for future pandemics – a milestone for global resilience. This Convention and Recommendation position us to better anticipate and respond to biological risks. But their strength lies in implementation, which demands collaboration between governments, employers and workers.

As a representative of youth employers and emerging economies, I must highlight a concern. Progressive legislation, while essential, can unintentionally create barriers for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and new work creators. These are the innovators and risk-takers shaping the future of our labour markets. If compliance becomes too costly and too complex, it may discourage entrepreneurship and limit their contribution to economic growth.

To make this Convention truly transformative, we must invest in capacity-building through training, accessible information and tailored support. National strategies must reflect the diversity of our economies. One-size-fits-all approaches won't work. Implementation must empower all actors, especially those building decent work from the ground up.

My sincere appreciation goes to the Employers' group and our associates for their thoughtful contribution. Special thanks to Ms Delphine Rudelli, whose leadership and passion carried us through.

Passion – like biological hazards – is infectious. May the passion we've experienced in these discussions spread beyond this room, inspiring real change in the workplace and communities worldwide. Let it lead to safer, healthier and more resilient working and living environments for all. This has been a privilege.

Mr García Delgado
Government (Mexico)
(Original Spanish)

Mexico welcomes the satisfactory culmination of the standard-setting process, allowing us to adopt today a new Convention concerning biological hazards in the working environment. This instrument represents a significant step forward, as it is the first binding instrument that specifically addresses this type of hazard at the global level.

In an environment in which health threats are continuing to evolve, this Convention will provide key alignments to safeguard the health of working people, ensure the continuity of productive processes, and strengthen States' capacity to respond. Mexico supports the adoption of this instrument, as we are convinced that no workers should risk their life or endanger their health as they carry out their work.

However, it is deeply regrettable that Article 4(f) and Article 16 contain language that does not fully reflect international human rights standards that resulted from a social combat to achieve substantive equality, and that concepts in the multilateral arena have been transformed. The use of the term "gender equality" seeks to counter the discrimination and inequalities that resulted from constructs linked to stereotypes and power imbalances that undermine the full respect and protection of the human rights of all persons.

We trust that this new Convention will not only reinforce prevention and protection against biological hazards but will also drive us to continue building more inclusive standards that are respectful of diversity and geared towards ensuring full respect for the dignity of all workers.

Ms Seguin
Worker (France)
(Original French)

It is with great relief that I take the floor on behalf of the Workers' group.

Our sisters and brothers on all continents can now be protected at work against the large family of biological hazards and their effects on the existence of individuals, work collectives and society. Speaking with three voices, we managed not only to come up with common language, but also a source of rights for the most vulnerable of the tripartite constituents – workers. Governments and employers are not leaving empty-handed either, as they now know what they have to do to address this vast and worrying group of hazards. The division of roles must not be seen as one side defeating the other, but as a balance of the responsibility of those with power towards those over whom they wield it. These two texts primarily establish obligations to take measures not only in terms of prevention, protection and compensation, but also in terms of dialogue and consultation.

Nowadays, when power is so often asserted through arms, the principle of "might is right", the denial of science, the instrumentalization of faith for political ends, and the accumulation of wealth to the detriment of lives and living conditions, the Convention and Recommendation on which we managed to agree are a shot in the arm. With great power comes great responsibility. The world of work and the biological world do not exist on two separate sides; rather, the constant interactions between the two can lead to the best but also the worst outcomes. Not only the recent COVID-19 pandemic but also the transmission of bird flu through migratory birds and the reappearance of poverty-related diseases worldwide are testament to the fact that, in a globalized world, it is impossible to protect some without protecting the others.

We therefore appeal to your hearts and your minds. Bring to life these instruments that protect each and every one of us. Bring to life these instruments that implement the fundamental rights at work. Without peace there can be no social justice.

Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment: Adoption

The President

We shall now proceed with the adoption of the text of the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, which is contained in Record of Proceedings No. 5A. We will go through it Part by Part, beginning with the Preamble.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the text of the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment is adopted, Part by Part?

(The Preamble and Parts I–XII are adopted Part by Part.)

If there are no objections, may I take it that the text of the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, as a whole, is adopted?

(The text of the Convention, as a whole, is adopted.)

Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment: Adoption

The President

We shall now proceed with the adoption of the text of the Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, which is also contained in Record of Proceedings No. 5A. We will go through it Part by Part, beginning with the Preamble.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the text of the Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, is adopted, Part by Part?

(The Preamble and Parts I–VI are adopted Part by Part.)

If there are no objections, may I take it that the text of the Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, as a whole, is adopted?

(The text of the Recommendation, as a whole, is adopted.)

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)

Friday, 13 June 2025, 2.45 p.m.

President: Mr Moyo

Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment: Final record vote

The President

I am honoured to declare open the sixteenth and final sitting of this 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

As per the ILO's Constitution, the formal adoption of this Convention calls for a record vote.

It is my great honour to announce the results of the final record vote on the adoption of the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, the text of which is contained in Record of Proceedings No. 5A.

The result of the vote is as follows: 406 votes in favour and 12 votes against, with 13 abstentions. As the quorum was 312, and the required two-thirds majority, including abstentions, of 279 has been reached, the Convention concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment is adopted.

(The Convention is adopted.)

(The detailed results of the vote may be found on the [Conference website](#).)

Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment: Final record vote

The President

As per the ILO's Constitution, the formal adoption of this Recommendation calls for a record vote.

I have the honour to announce the results of the final record vote on the adoption of the Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment, the text of which is contained in Record of Proceedings No. 5A.

The result of the vote is as follows: 390 votes in favour and 20 votes against, with 21 abstentions. As the quorum was 312, and the required two-thirds majority, including abstentions, of 274 has been reached, the Recommendation concerning prevention and protection against biological hazards in the working environment is adopted.

(The Recommendation is adopted.)

(The detailed results of the vote may be found on the [Conference website](#).)

The President

I note that no delegates wish to take the floor on the subject of the votes.

The adoption this year of the new Convention and Recommendation on biological hazards marks a historic step forward in global labour standards, addressing a long-standing gap in international legislation. Developed through intensive tripartite negotiations, these instruments provide a comprehensive framework to prevent and manage biological risks

across all sectors and occupations. They reaffirm the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment and reflect a shared global commitment to safeguarding workers from invisible and evolving threats. This achievement not only strengthens workplace resilience; it also exemplifies the power of international cooperation in promoting social justice and decent work. These texts are a testament to the ILO's enduring mission to promote social justice and decent work, and to the power of tripartite cooperation in shaping a safer, more resilient future for all. Congratulations to all involved in this great achievement.

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)