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International Labour Conference – 113th Session, Geneva, 2025

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Plenary sitting: Opening of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference

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Monday, 2 June 2025, 11.15 a.m.

Presidents: Mr Yun, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and Mr Moyo

Opening of the session

Mr Yun

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

Welcome to the first sitting of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Seong Deok Yun. I am the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea here in Geneva. In my capacity as Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office for 2024–25, it is my honour to declare open this 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Allow me to start by extending to all delegates a warm welcome to Geneva and to our Conference. The agenda of this year's session is of high institutional importance. Likewise, the topics selected have been deemed to be of worldwide relevance to the ILO's tripartite constituents. Therefore, I am confident that this year's session will live up to the expectations that have been placed on it.

Election of the President of the Conference

Mr Yun

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

Let us begin with the first item on our agenda today, namely the election of the President of the Conference. For this, I would like to give the floor to Ms Méndez Escobar, the Government representative of Mexico and current Chairperson of the Government group, to put forward the group's nomination.

Ms Méndez Escobar

Government (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Government group

(Original Spanish)

In my capacity as Chairperson of the Government group, and on behalf of the entire group, I am honoured to nominate His Excellency Mr Edgar Moyo, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, as President of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference. The election of Mr Moyo as President of this session of the Conference has the unanimous support of the Government group.

Mr Moyo brings a wealth of experience in the world of work, having been a dedicated public servant for over 30 years and a committed trade unionist. Prior to taking up his current role, he served as Minister of Energy. In his current position, he is also President of Zimbabwe's Tripartite Negotiating Forum, a corporate body that brings together the Government, employers and workers to engage in social dialogue on socio-economic issues of concern to Zimbabwe. In addition, he is the Chairperson of the Employment and Labour Sector of the Southern African Development Community and the Chairperson of the African Regional Labour Administration Centre.

Mr Moyo's career began in the education sector, where he worked as a teacher and later as the head of a school for 30 years. During that time, he was a staunch advocate for education and for teachers' rights, striving to ensure fair wage negotiations. Given his decades of experience in public service and education, and in view of his current strategic leadership roles, the Government group has every confidence that Mr Moyo will be able to lead the work of the Conference effectively and bring it to a successful conclusion. It is therefore an honour for me to formally present his candidature to this assembly.

(The proposal is supported by the Employers' and the Workers' groups.)

Mr Yun

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

The nomination put forward by Ambassador Méndez Escobar, with the unanimous support of the Government group, has met with the agreement of the Employers' and the Workers' groups. As there is no other proposal, I take it that the Conference wishes to elect Mr Edgar Moyo, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, President of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

I offer Mr Moyo my warmest congratulations and invite him to come up to the podium and take the chair.

(Mr Moyo, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, is elected President of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference and takes the President's chair.)

The President

I would like to begin by thanking you for having entrusted me with this honourable duty. Please rest assured that I shall spare no effort to ensure that this session of the Conference contributes to fulfilling the Organization's mandate and once again highlights its relevance and the valuable contribution it makes to our multilateral system.

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference

The President

Our next task is the election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference, in accordance with article 3(2) of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference. The Clerk of the Conference, Mr Bormioli, will read out the names of the candidates proposed by the three groups.

Mr Bormioli

The Clerk of the Conference

The nominations for the positions of Vice-President of the Conference are as follows: for the Government group, Mr Castillo (Uruguay); for the Employers' group, Mr Diop (Senegal); and for the Workers' group, Ms Arfaoui (Tunisia).

The President

If there are no objections, may I take it that these proposals are approved?

(The proposals are approved.)

I am therefore pleased to invite my fellow Officers to come up and join me on the podium.

Nomination of the Officers of the groups

The President

It is now time to receive the nominations of the Officers of the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups. The groups are, of course, autonomous in their choices. The names of the candidates proposed by the groups are displayed on the screen, as indicated below:

Government group

Chairperson	Ms Méndez Escobar (Mexico)
Vice-Chairperson	Ms Durbin (Australia)

Employers' group

Chairperson	Mr Thorns (Germany)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Furlan (Brazil)
	Ms Janahi (Bahrain)
	Mr Matthey (Switzerland)
	Mr Zouanat (Morocco)
Secretary	Mr Suárez Santos (International Organisation of Employers)

Workers' group

Chairperson	Ms Passchier (Netherlands)
Vice-Chairpersons	Mr Amenu (Ethiopia)
	Mr Lamas (Belgium)
	Mr Martínez (Argentina)
	Ms O'Neil (Australia)
Secretary	Ms Llanos (International Trade Union Confederation)

Constitution and composition of Conference committees

The President

The next agenda item concerns the constitution and composition of the standing committees and technical committees that will consider items on the agenda of the Conference. The Standing Orders of the Conference provide for the establishment of the following standing committees: the General Affairs Committee; the Credentials Committee; the Drafting Committee; the Committee on the Application of Standards; and the Finance Committee.

As regards the General Affairs Committee, its composition mirrors that of the Governing Body. It is therefore composed of all the regular and deputy Government members of the Governing Body and all the regular and deputy Employer and Worker members, as nominated by the respective groups.

Concerning the Credentials Committee, the groups have informed the Secretariat of the nominations of its members for endorsement by the Conference in plenary. They are as follows: for the Government group, Mr Roca-Rey Ross (Peru); for the Employers' group, Mr Yllanes Martínez (Mexico); and for the Workers' group, Mr Norðdahl (Iceland).

As regards the Drafting Committee, in accordance with article 9 of the Standing Orders of the Conference, its composition shall be determined by the committee that refers a text to it. At this session, that will be the two Standard-Setting Committees.

The provisional composition of the Committee on the Application of Standards as published on the Conference website is subject to the approval of the Committee at its first sitting.

The Finance Committee is composed of one Government delegate from each Member of the Organization represented at the Conference. There is therefore no need to register for this Committee.

In addition to these standing committees, the Conference may wish to establish the following technical committees to consider and report on, respectively, items IV, V and VI of the Conference agenda: the Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards; the Standard-Setting Committee on Decent Work in the Platform Economy; and the General Discussion Committee on Promoting Transitions Towards Formality.

The composition of all the committees is communicated to participants on the [Conference website](#).

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves the establishment of the committees and their composition as proposed?

(The proposals are approved.)

Requests for representation in Conference committees submitted by international non-governmental organizations

The President

In accordance with article 2(2)(k) of the Standing Orders of the Conference, the Governing Body has invited certain international non-governmental organizations to be represented at the 113th Session of the Conference. It is understood that it will be for the Conference to consider their requests to be present at the sittings of the committees dealing with items on the agenda in which they have expressed a particular interest.

In accordance with article 36(6) of the Standing Orders, the Conference may wish to invite the organizations listed in document [ILC.113/D.3](#) to be represented in the committees concerned.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves this proposal?

(The proposal is approved.)

Arrangements to allow employers' and workers' representatives from Myanmar to contribute to the work of the International Labour Conference

The President

I now invite the Conference to turn its attention to document [ILC.113/D.4](#), as published on the Conference website.

As recalled in that document, at its 352nd Session (October–November 2024), the Governing Body examined possible arrangements that would allow employers' and workers' representatives from Myanmar to contribute to the work of the Conference, in the absence of a tripartite delegation from that country.

In accordance with the recommendations made by the Governing Body on that occasion, the Conference is invited to request its Officers and, through the respective committees, the Officers of the General Affairs Committee and of the Committee on the Application of Standards to approve any request from an international employers' or workers' organization to make a statement through representatives of employers or workers of Myanmar, and permit the statement to be made under conditions analogous to those granted to Employers' or Workers' delegates or committee members, as the case may be. The Conference is also invited to request the Committee on the Application of Standards to grant to international employers' or workers' organizations wishing to make a statement through representatives of employers or workers of Myanmar the same speaking rights as Employer and Worker members of the Committee.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves the proposal to address those requests to its Officers and to the committees concerned?

(The proposal is approved.)

Opening address by the President of the Conference

Mr Moyo

President of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference

Having concluded our administrative business for this sitting, and with your indulgence, I would like to say a few remarks on the high expectations we share for the work of our Conference in the coming two weeks.

It gives me magnificent pleasure to address you this morning, as we gather to begin the work of the International Labour Conference at its 113th Session. At the outset, allow me to express on behalf of Zimbabwe's tripartite delegation our profound appreciation to the Government group for having nominated Zimbabwe to preside over the session, and to the Employers' and Workers' groups for their endorsement. Zimbabwe is honoured to assume the presidency of the Conference and I wish to assure you of my commitment and dedication to ensuring that the Conference will achieve all its objectives.

We embark on this two-week journey of the work of the Conference amid various developments in the world of work, many of which provide both opportunities for us to leverage and challenges that we have to address collectively. These include the growing informal economy across the world; unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people; the rapid pace of technological advancement, including digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence; demographic shifts; and the impact of climate change on

the world of work. This current session of the Conference will provide us with an opportunity to take stock of these developments and challenges and provide solutions for tackling them.

As you will have noted from the committees that the Conference has constituted, we have before us a full agenda that will require a lot of dedication and collaboration as we work towards building consensus in our engagements. As you may be aware, this year's session is unique in that we have two standard-setting items; the work under these items is expected to contribute to the body of international labour standards.

The Standard-Setting Committee on Biological Hazards will conduct its second discussion, following up on the robust and intense discussions held last year. The Standard-Setting Committee on Decent Work in the Platform Economy will begin its work this year. Given the strategic role that international labour standards play in building our economies and societies, the work of these Committees should culminate in the recommendation to the Conference in plenary of instruments that can be universally applied, taking into account regional differences while upholding fair, just and inclusive standards for all the employers and workers of the world. The work of these Committees will therefore require maximum effort from the tripartite constituents to ensure positive outcomes.

The Conference will also receive and deliberate on the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body for the period since the last session of the Conference, providing it with an opportunity to be apprised of the work of the Governing Body. It will also review the Report of the Director-General, *Jobs, rights and growth: Reinforcing the connection*, in which the Director-General provides the Conference with insights on the current situation of the global labour market and suggestions on what we need to collectively work on to address the challenges facing the labour market today and to ensure socio-economic growth in our countries, the protection of workers' rights and sustainable enterprises.

The work of the Conference will also include a discussion on the application of international labour standards through the Committee on the Application of Standards, which is a standing item on its agenda. The work of this Committee remains critical to ensuring that we continue to give effect to fair labour standards in our countries. It is my hope and expectation that the discussions will be constructive and will positively contribute to strengthening social dialogue, which is important in the resolution of disputes.

When all is said and done, the work of the ILO relies on a supportive budget. The Conference will also receive the programme and budget proposals for the biennium 2026–27. We look forward to adopting the budget to enable all the objectives and aspirations of this Organization to be realized.

Finally, while we will differ in our respective views in the work before us, let us remain united in our resolve to see this Conference succeed. Its success will positively impact the global labour market. I wish you all very fruitful deliberations in the course of the next two weeks.

Presentation of the reports of the Director-General of the International Labour Office

The President

It is now my great honour to give the floor to Mr Gilbert F. Houngbo, Director-General of the ILO, so that he may present his vision for the work to be accomplished at this session of the Conference as well as his report entitled *Jobs, rights and growth: Reinforcing the connection*

(ILC.113/Report I(B)), together with its appendix, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories* (ILC.113/DG/APP).

Mr Hounqbo

Director-General of the International Labour Office and
Secretary-General of the Conference
(Original French)

I welcome you all and extend to you my heartfelt and respectful greetings as well as my gratitude for your presence here at the opening of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Allow me to begin by congratulating the President and the Vice-Presidents on their election and by thanking them for agreeing to guide our work in this crucial exercise in tripartite democracy.

At the outset, I would like to refer to the latest ILO publications that provide some insights into the current trends in the world of work. The update of the World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) flagship report forecasts that 53 million jobs will be created in 2025, which is 7 million fewer than we had projected in October 2024, largely because of the slowdown in global growth against a backdrop of geoeconomic tensions – notably trade tensions.

The International Monetary Fund has, in fact, revised its global growth forecasts for 2025 downwards, from 3.3 to 2.8 per cent.

In addition, the ILO has just published a new study on artificial intelligence (AI), introducing for the first time an exposure index measuring the level of vulnerability of different occupations to AI. Overall, a quarter of jobs or activities are highly exposed. Our research shows and confirms that today's highly digitized jobs, such as computer programming, software development and jobs in finance and the media, are increasingly vulnerable, even though repetitive tasks continue to be the most exposed. I invite you to draw on these two reports, which are available on our website and confirm the central role that must be given to employment and decent work in our national and multilateral agendas. The reports also reaffirm the strategic importance of the ILO's mandate in a world that is undergoing profound transformation.

We are going through turbulent times for multilateral institutions like ours. I understand the sense of apprehension that uncertainty about the future of multilateralism brings. You know that we cannot afford to be nostalgic for some romanticized, golden age of the past. Rather, we must root ourselves in a deep understanding of our distinctive constitutional *raison d'être* and sustained contributions in the world. As an institution, we must have the courage, the humility, the ability to listen and to adjust, and the vision necessary to move resolutely forward. The current context imposes on us a duty to reform: we must reform to become more effective, while seeking ways to be more efficient.

In the context of this reform of multilateralism in general, and of the United Nations system in particular, our reform at the ILO has a twofold imperative: we have to optimize the efficiency of our operations, while also strengthening our capacity to support our constituents on the ground in areas such as the fundamental principles and rights at work and provide technical support in the field alongside Member States and the social partners.

Our standard-setting mandate is more relevant than ever. It is not just a matter of developing international labour standards and ensuring their implementation and supervision; there is also a vital need to ensure a level playing field in an increasingly

interconnected and rapidly changing global economy. We can, and we must, act decisively and consistently to promote social justice by striking a better balance between economic, social and environmental considerations.

This requires both consistency and creativity, two qualities that we constantly demonstrate, including, to take one specific example, in the research work and guidance on international labour standards that we have made available to our constituents to help them take better account of labour rights and other social considerations in new bilateral and/or regional trade agreements.

Your Conference will examine an important draft resolution in preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Doha in November. This is an opportunity to underscore the strides that you, tripartite delegates, have made to inform the vision of decent work for social justice that is infusing the draft resolution. This resolution embodies a collective ambition: expanding universal access to social protection, with a clear aim – increasing social protection coverage by at least two percentage points per year.

Consistent with our mandate under the Programme of Action of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, our Organization stands ready to renew its role on implementation of the results of the Doha Summit going forward, using the richness of our tripartite dialogue as a basis.

Permit me now to turn to our programme and budget, which the Governing Body recommended in March for adoption by the Conference at the level of zero nominal growth. I would be grateful if you could show the spirit of responsibility which you have always demonstrated, in order to ensure a smooth adoption of the budget and to enable the ILO to continue to fulfil its mandate.

It is time to be rigorous. We must show the resolve and strength of purpose necessary to identify the efficiency measures required to reduce our expenses, with the surgical precision necessary to make us stronger, by adopting a human-centred approach which attaches unambiguous importance to social dialogue with the staff, in order to build a more agile Organization, devoid of any attempt to turn in on itself, but always with an acute sense of humanism.

So now I turn to my report to the Conference this year, on our evidence-based approach to engaging with vital issues such as jobs. My report establishes that jobs cannot be reduced to a mere outcome of economic growth. Rather, jobs must be an active component of such growth. Jobs, workers' protection and economic growth must be understood to be mutually reinforcing. Moreover, promotion of inclusive economic growth, workers' rights and robust institutions relies on the defence of democratic values in the world of work.

Allow me, as we deal with the examination of the agenda items for this session, to acknowledge the work of our impartial system of normative control, reflected in the relevant report. I wish also to mention our grounded innovation seen in the further amendments before the General Affairs Committee to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended. These amendments seek in particular to ensure that seafarers' right to shore leave is effective, and to prevent violence and harassment on board, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault.

The agenda of this Conference session is replete with other questions, not all of which I am able to mention. Permit me nevertheless to underscore the importance of what is set to be the groundbreaking first standard-setting discussion on decent work in the platform economy. It offers one fine example of our institutional commitment to engage in rigorous, respectful

and constructive tripartite dialogue on issues that are critical to a human-centred future, fully aware of the opportunities presented by technological progress.

Finally, I wish to conclude by thanking you for the abiding support that you all provide to the Global Coalition for Social Justice. We will succeed in promoting fairer globalization by moving together beyond the institutional silos of the past. This year, our ambition is clear and simple: to review with you the progress made in all 14 priority areas of action defined in the context of the Coalition.

I wish you all a fruitful 2025 Conference session, one that brings hope.

Presentation of the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body

The President

It is now my pleasure to call on the Chairperson of the Governing Body for the period 2024–25, Mr Yun, to present his report on the activities of the Governing Body for the period of his tenure. The report is available on the Conference website as document [ILC.113/Report I\(A\)](#).

Mr Yun

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

In my capacity as Chairperson of the ILO's Governing Body for the last year, I am honoured to present to the Conference my report, published as document ILC.113/Report I(A). The report contains a summary of the most salient discussions that took place in the Governing Body since the 112th Session of the Conference last June. Its purpose is to keep the Organization's tripartite constituents informed of the decisions taken by the Governing Body.

First and foremost, allow me to commend the tripartite members of the Governing Body for the dedication with which they carried out their work this past year. Governing Body sessions can be intense and demanding. Nevertheless, we all strived to ensure that complex discussions could be held in the best possible conditions. Certain debates were, at times, arduous. However, thanks to everyone's dedication and steadfastness, we have succeeded in bringing most of them to successful conclusions. I thank you all for your resolute, purposeful and unwavering commitment and support.

The report I present to you today speaks for itself insofar as it contains a detailed account of subjects examined by the Governing Body at the three sessions of work involved. I will therefore not repeat the contents of the report, but limit myself to a few additional comments that will hopefully give you an overview of the matters we considered and of how the work was conducted.

From a strategic point of view, I should like to start by mentioning that the Governing Body was kept informed of the work undertaken by the Global Coalition for Social Justice and its more than 360 partners. The result of the Coalition's work this year will come to fruition during the high-level Forum of the Coalition at this session of the Conference. This event will provide a platform for the review of the Coalition's achievements since June 2024 and set a road map for action for the year to come.

In its role as an oversight organ, the Governing Body reviewed a number of progress reports this year, on issues ranging from the implementation of the ILO strategy on decent work in supply chains to the ILO's efforts in the United Nations (UN) development system

reform process. Although work remains to be done, the Governing Body recognized the progress in many of the Organization's initiatives and provided the Office with useful feedback.

Furthermore, the Governing Body also performed its supervisory role by reviewing a number of cases of alleged non-observance of ILO Conventions by ratifying Member States. Various follow-up measures were taken in each case. In this regard, I would like to echo the Governing Body's recognition of the progress made in some cases and encourage further engagement where relevant.

As far as internal governance is concerned, the Governing Body held rich debates on the democratization of the ILO's governance organs. Furthermore, during my mandate, I also chaired the Tripartite Meeting on the Review of the Functioning of the Governing Body. The Meeting, which stemmed from a Governing Body decision, was held in May this year. The Meeting's recommendations will be submitted to the Governing Body at its 355th Session (November 2025).

I should like to conclude by reiterating the great honour and privilege it has been for me to serve as the Chairperson of the Governing Body of the ILO over the past year. As I hand over this duty to my successor in a few days, I remain confident that the Organization will continue to deliver its ever more relevant mandate of social justice for lasting peace.

Before I close, I would like to thank the Employer Vice-Chairperson, Ms Hornung-Draus – and her successor, Mr Thorns – and the Worker Vice-Chairperson, Ms Passchier, for the work we have done together over the past year. As Officers of the Governing Body, we have shared a common sense of duty and responsibility for the work of the ILO. This sense of collective responsibility can only be achieved by working collegially in the best interest of the Organization and its tripartite constituents.

I look forward to meeting Governing Body members again at the 354th Session of the Governing Body, which will take place on Saturday 14 June, at which point my successor will be elected. With these words, I present to you my report on the work of the Governing Body for the period 2024–25.

Opening statements by the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Conference

The President

Let us now turn to the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups, to hear their views on the work ahead of us.

Mr Thorns

Chairperson of the Employers' group

Mr President, you assume your role at a time when many long-standing assumptions about international cooperation, economic resilience and institutional legitimacy are under pressure. The global economy faces considerable headwinds. The Director-General has just spoken about global tensions, climate disruptions, inflation and weak investment flows, which are straining labour markets and testing the endurance of enterprises and workers alike. Meanwhile, confidence in institutions is eroding and the multilateral system is struggling to respond effectively.

This context only underscores the vital role of the ILO. What distinguishes this Organization is its tripartite nature, a space where governments, employers and workers come together to find consensus on practical solutions. In an increasingly fractured world, such a space is not only valuable, but essential. Credibility must be earned, not given. This session of the Conference must demonstrate that tripartite dialogue can deliver tangible outcomes that respond to the real challenges, respect institutional mandates, and reflect diverse national contexts.

I am very honoured and highly motivated to represent the Employers' group here at the ILO for the first time. I can assure the Conference that the entire Employers' group stands ready and committed to contribute constructively to the success of this session of the Conference. The ILO is a vital partner for the Employers, and they want to see it succeed and lead. We acknowledge the financial pressure confronting the United Nations system at the current moment, and this is also affecting the ILO's ability to deliver.

Against this background, adopting a focused, credible and results-driven programme and budget is a political imperative. Resources must be directed towards areas where the ILO has a clear mandate, real impact and added value. This includes supporting employers' and workers' organizations, and ensuring that development cooperation remains impactful, practical and responsive. Mr Moyo already stressed the need to adopt the ILO's Programme and Budget for 2026–27. This is key to ensuring that the Organization remains operational and constituent-driven. Achieving this requires financial clarity, strategic prioritization and institutional focus.

The Employers' group will remain very active with constructive proposals for the future of the ILO. The programme and budget discussion is not a forum to reopen policy debates on sensitive matters. Now is the time for all of us to show responsibility towards this Organization. The budget must be adopted promptly, especially in these turbulent times. That said, this urgency should not prevent the necessary policy discussion from taking place in due course, in line with the debates and decisions of the Governing Body.

This year's session of the Conference addresses critical areas which receive a lot of attention not only from the Employers, Workers and Governments in the house, but from companies, as external stakeholders on the outside. Let me just elaborate very briefly on the different committees.

The General Discussion Committee on Promoting Transitions towards Formality is the first opportunity since 2015 to find innovative ways forward and review progress under the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204). Progress on addressing informality has been much, much too slow, and it is critical that this session of the Conference provides a much-needed boost in momentum to tackle one of the key root causes of many decent work deficits. For the Employers' group, formalization is not about extending regulation, it is about removing barriers that keep businesses and workers outside the formal economy. We advocate for an approach centred on productivity, simplification and support. Policies must help micro and small enterprises to access skills, financial markets and digital tools. Formalization strategies must be tailored to national and sectoral realities. Legal pressures alone are insufficient without opportunity and institutional trust. We come here to learn from practical experience and we commend the work done by the Office to prepare for this discussion.

The Director-General spoke about the importance of the standard-setting discussion on decent work in the platform economy. This is the first opportunity to identify consensual global policy frameworks for new realities of work, and we should not fail in this consensus. The

platform economy connects millions of individuals worldwide with access to the labour market, delivering enormous socio-economic and formalization impacts, especially in developing countries. Policies must therefore protect workers without undermining entrepreneurship and their ability to establish new platforms. Crucially, it is essential to distinguish between those in an employee relationship and those who are self-employed, tailoring responses accordingly. The diversity of business models, worker preference and legal frameworks obliges us to take a flexible approach in the answer we give in this Committee. A Recommendation is the right tool to promote good practice and foster innovation to protect workers in this area.

Third, I would like to mention the discussion on biological hazards. In this Committee, we must deliver a science-based and practical outcome. Business needs certainty in this area. Who is responsible for what? Governments have the duty to manage public health risks. Employers have the responsibility to mitigate biological health and safety risks to protect their workers, but their responsibility must be clearly defined and proportionate. The future Convention must support the prevention and management of hazards by means of a flexible framework, complemented by a guiding Recommendation suited to the diverse national contexts. It must build on a clear definition, and avoid vague and controversial concepts and unworkable expectations. The Employers' group is aiming for consensus that strengthens workers' health and safety protection without imposing unnecessary burdens, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). But let me be clear, we cannot support an instrument which is completely unrealistic with regard to its expectations of employers.

As for the Committee on the Application of Standards, this Committee must remain a credible supervisory body; we have acted responsibly and agreed on several cases to be discussed. Many of these cases affect fundamental situations such as the lack of freedom of association, interference, threats, intimidation, even violence towards employers' and workers' organizations. I want to be very clear that the Employers' group stands firm and will act with determination to ensure full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work. This includes taking a firm stance against all forms of discrimination on any ground, on child labour and forced labour, or basic health and safety conditions, and of course on freedom of association and collective bargaining. Especially now, these principles and rights have taken on heightened importance in view of the growing questioning of globalization and trade integration that has brought so much prosperity, decent work and growth to so many of our countries. I will elaborate on this in my response to the Report of the Director-General.

The discussion in the Committee on the Application of Standards can only have an impact if it is firmly grounded in international labour standards and in facts and evidence. We need the willingness to engage and overcome difficulties, and we should avoid the instrumentalization of the supervisory system for the sake of domestic politics or geopolitical agendas. Constructive dialogue informed by fact is essential.

This session of the Conference also feeds into the 2025 United Nations Second World Summit on Social Development, to which the Director-General referred. The Summit must produce tangible priorities that shape policies globally and domestically, not just declarations. The ILO has a distinctive and leading role, and its contribution must be rooted in the strength of the tripartite nature of this house. The Employers' group calls on the Director-General to take a clear and balanced leadership role in shaping the Summit's substance. The ILO should champion solutions that drive productivity, support enterprise growth and decent work, steering clear of vague and ideological narratives. Equally important is coherence, to which the Director-General also referred. Messages delivered to the World Summit on Social Development must reflect the resolutions of this Conference session.

In this context, we also welcome progress in and support provided to the Global Coalition for Social Justice, which can be tremendously helpful for the ILO, employers and workers and other stakeholders, including companies, to build alliances and strengthen collaboration for decent work. At a time when all United Nations agencies are under extreme pressure of resources, collaboration between all of us becomes more important than ever.

The Employers' group comes genuinely prepared to discuss and engage constructively in all committees. We do not seek agreement for its own sake, but outcomes that matter and which are grounded in national realities that strengthen decent work and enterprise growth. We must all recognize that without an enabling environment for enterprises and thriving business, particularly SMEs, there can be no sustainable social protection system, no meaningful transition from informality to formality, and no prospect of decent work. Regulation policies are often far from what is expected to promote job creation, decent work and business growth. We call on all constituents to bring ambition, respect and a shared commitment to results. The world expects us to move beyond rhetoric. Let us show that, even in these challenging times, the ILO remains a place where impactful consensus can be reached.

Before I close, I would like to also thank Mr Yun for his great leadership in the Governing Body. We will have a moment on 14 June to acknowledge his achievement during this time, but I would like to use this opportunity to really thank him for his leadership.

Ms Passchier

Chairperson of the Workers' group

Let me start by congratulating the President and the three Vice-Presidents on their election and by thanking the Secretary-General for his pertinent remarks. Allow me also to welcome Matthias Thorns to his first session of the Conference as the Chairperson of the Employers' group; I am looking forward to our good cooperation.

It is an honour to address this assembly today on behalf of the working people of the world, especially the millions without a voice and without protection at work. For more than a century already, they have looked up to the ILO as their beacon of hope for a better future. At the end of the first devastating world war, the ILO was created, with the recognition that universal and lasting peace can be achieved only if it is based on social justice. To this end, a unique tripartite global governance structure was established, and the setting and supervision of international labour standards was recognized as being at the core of the ILO's mandate to prevent a race to the bottom at the expense of workers' rights, to create upward convergence and to ensure a level playing field for business. The first international social contract was born.

In 1944, towards the end of the second devastating world war, this mandate was reaffirmed by the famous Declaration of Philadelphia. Now, when faced with multiple major crises in the world, we must ensure that the ILO remains true to its core mandate. While there has been social and economic progress indeed, major decent work deficits remain and there is a worrying trend in many countries and regions to reverse positive gains from the past.

First, an alarming rise in war and conflict is leading to the highest level ever recorded of world military expenditure, while millions of civilians of all ages are suffering from starvation, disease, death and destruction, resulting in involuntary migratory flows. Second, the unfettered and unregulated growth of corporate power in the digital era is increasing inequality, insecurity and the violation of workers' rights, especially in the global South, while profits for big business are soaring, with almost 70 per cent of global wealth held in the global North. Third, democratic space is shrinking, with the fundamental right to freedom of association and expression being the first to fall victim. A stark signal of this is the number of

trade unionists and journalists killed on a daily basis. Fourth, while women in the last few decades almost everywhere have entered labour markets and public space and are there to stay, determined to contribute to economies and societies with all their talents and capacities, there is a strong backlash against gender equality and non-discrimination policies. And last, but not least, the sense of fear and insecurity caused by all this, coupled with sentiments of unfairness and lack of a positive perspective for the future, is a recipe for major unrest and recourse to nationalism, protectionism, racism and xenophobia.

The best recipe, as the ILO has shown over its 100 years of existence, is social justice that provides protection to all, a level playing field and a fair sharing of the planet's opportunities and resources. However, climate change is causing poverty and instability and threatening the survival of the planet. The challenges facing the world of work are huge, and inaction is simply not an option. This Conference is presented with a resolution for adoption, calling for bold and ambitious action to renew the social contract once again. The Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Qatar later this year, will offer an important opportunity to take up the unfinished business of the Declaration of Philadelphia and to more effectively ensure policy coherence with a leadership role for the ILO in the multilateral system to promote social justice through decent work and social protection for all.

Let me now touch on other important items on the Conference agenda. The Committee on the Application of Standards has an essential constitutional task, which is to monitor the effective implementation by Member States of the Conventions they have voluntarily ratified. The debates in this Committee are crucial. According to the Global Rights Index, published today by the International Trade Union Confederation, in an increasing number of countries, the realization of decent work and social justice is jeopardized by the violation of labour rights, in particular the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. A case in point is that the Committee will unfortunately already hold its second special sitting to discuss the situation concerning the total lack of progress in Belarus, despite the measures taken under article 33 of the Constitution. Furthermore, the Committee will discuss the General Survey entitled *Achieving comprehensive employment injury protection* and the report of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel.

The General Affairs Committee will, among other things, address two important matters. First, the persistent refusal of the military regime of Myanmar to engage with the ILO on the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry regarding the severe violations of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). The draft resolution, based on article 33 of the ILO Constitution, proposes a list of measures aimed at stopping, first and foremost, the indiscriminate violence against workers, trade unions and civilians, including the bombing of villages, forced conscription and arbitrary arrest of workers from their workplaces, which continued even during the recent earthquake. Second, we have before us the final steps to be taken on recognizing the status and participation rights of Palestine as a non-Member observer State with equal participation rates for its social partners within the ILO, to align the ILO with the recent United Nations resolution on this subject. This step is long overdue and more urgent than ever against the background of the catastrophic developments in the occupied Arab territories. I call on all delegates to support the adoption of both resolutions and, on behalf of the international trade union movement, I want to voice a deep respect for the resilience of the workers, trade unions and peoples of Myanmar and Palestine, who have been standing up for decades already against violence and repression, and express our strong solidarity for their fights for social justice and peace.

This year, exceptionally, we have two standard-setting committees on important matters. We call on all delegates this year to support the adoption of an ambitious and binding global Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation, to protect all workers in all countries and across all sectors against biological hazards. From cotton mills to agriculture, from fruit processing to construction, workers are exposed daily to harmful substances and organisms, from allergens and toxins in plants to bites and stings from animals. The instruments must reflect the reality of biological hazards in their full and broadest scope. Be aware that biological risks are not limited to labs and hospitals, and neither are they limited to coronaviruses.

The other instrument we are discussing is standard-setting on platform work. It is the ILO's constitutional mandate to ensure that labour is not reduced to a commodity, and this also applies to algorithms and digital platforms. Millions of workers in the global North, as well as in the South, nowadays work through some form of digital platform without any social or labour protection, while the businesses for which they are working reap enormous profits. The message is clear: if the ILO is to remain relevant and uphold its historic mandate, it must urgently regulate platform work and extend full social and labour rights to all digital workers now. The fundamental rights guaranteed by the ILO are universal and must be applied universally. This also means that the ILO's notion of a worker, which is a non-legal term, must remain inclusive, covering old and new forms of work regardless of employment status, with adequate protection, including the right to organize, which is so fundamental to this house.

Ten years ago, the Conference adopted the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), to facilitate and promote the transition to formality and prevent further informalization. This important instrument must be our guiding star when we are discussing this year's innovative approaches to informality. This year's discussion must reaffirm this framework from transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, firmly embedded in the broader body of ILO standards, and identify innovative approaches to strengthen its impact. This cannot be merely about facilitating administrative procedures and lowering thresholds for business. It must first and foremost be about providing all workers, regardless of their employment status, with social and labour protection. This includes providing them with a means to take action themselves, through freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, also in less formalized realities, towards improving their living and working conditions, including through formalization. To quote Ela Bhatt, the founder and inspirational leader of the Self-Employed Women's Association of India, who said, "Poverty is powerlessness. Poverty cannot be removed unless the poor have the power to make decisions that affect their lives".

I will address the important Report of the Director-General *Jobs, rights and growth: Reinforcing the connection*, and its appendix, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, separately in our plenary discussion starting on Wednesday.

To conclude, I want to say this: we must show that the ILO is ready and capable to lead and deliver on social justice as a precondition for peace and prosperity, especially now when the multilateral system is under extreme pressure and people are turning away from politics and politicians that do not answer to their most basic needs. Together, we must be the drivers for a change that should be human-driven, gender-balanced and planet-oriented. This is about recognizing work as bringing value, dignity and influence to those contributing their labour, and bringing social justice and stability to their economies and societies. The ILO must seize this opportunity and show the key role it can play in the global governance structures. We urge all tripartite delegates to be ambitious while seeking consensual ways forward and going beyond national and regional perspectives to support a strong role for the ILO in tackling the challenges.

In this context, I cannot avoid a reference to the programme and budget that must be adopted. At the Governing Body session in March this year, the social partners came up with a joint proposal to separate the debate on political issues regarding the ILO's non-discrimination policies from the adoption of the programme and budget. This proposal was endorsed by the majority of Governing Body members. I call on all Governments present at this session of the Conference to consider this proposed way forward as the best possible outcome for all of us, recognizing divergent views and providing a platform for further discussion at the next session of the Governing Body (November 2025) without jeopardizing the programme and budget. The workers of the world on all continents and in all regions need the ILO to be fully equipped, including financially, to continue addressing all the challenges in the world of work. Please do not let them down.

Last but not least, the ILO's strength is in the high-quality expertise and commitment of its staff, both in the field and at headquarters, who are delivering on a daily basis to the constituents the expertise and advice they need to put the ILO's mandate into practice. In these times, when military spending at the level of countries and regions is, at an alarming speed, superseding and replacing spending on social and environmental needs, including spending on the international organizations that must drive the necessary progress and change, we must ensure that the ILO can continue to play its pivotal role. We all expect the ILO to be the centre of excellence in the world of work. Therefore, it must also practice what it preaches, showing that change, including when painful and maybe also including possibly dramatic cuts in costs, can be achieved with strong and inclusive social dialogue practices. This may require a bit more time and energy than a top-down approach, but will without any doubt deliver the least disruptive and best possible outcomes.

As I said in 2024, and will repeat even more strongly today, a world in turmoil requires leadership. This is what the ILO can and must offer, as it did in 1919 and in 1944, with social justice as its guiding principle and primary goal to ensure lasting peace and stability. The world of work outside is watching us with high expectations. I wish you all a fruitful session of the Conference and very successful outcomes.

Closing of the sitting

The President

That brings us to the conclusion of the opening sitting. We have put in place the structure that we will need to accomplish our work over the next two weeks.

I declare closed this opening sitting of the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference and thank you all for your participation.

(The Conference adjourned at 12.40 p.m.)