

Transcript of the speeches delivered at the opening sitting,
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Mr Eddy Olivares Ortega, Chairperson

Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Secretary of the Regional Meeting, Director-General, Mr Gilbert Houngbo, Distinguished Delegates, special guests, friends of the press, Ladies and Gentlemen, these are my initial words, and I would like to make them a warm welcome from all the Dominican Republic people to all of you. You make us very happy by being here. And we would like to also show the true joy that I have in sharing this moment with all representatives of workers, employers, and governments of the Americas. This 20th American regional meeting of the International Labour Organization that has only just started its work is a very important date in our calendars. And with your presence, you are showing that social justice is not just an ideal or utopia, but an indispensable condition for peace and inclusive and sustainable development for all. We meet today in a context that is rooted in deep transformations like digitalisation, technological innovation, a transition towards more greener economies, demographic changes, as well as recent global crises, which have brought many opportunities, as much as challenges. And as our director general has said, to strengthen the links between growth. And these challenges are the biggest challenge as the region is facing huge challenges like informality, gender inequalities, the lack of social coverage and employment conditions that not always guarantee the dignity and development of workers. And in these contexts, it is up to us governments, employers and workers to demonstrate that the tripartite social dialogue can transform these challenges into opportunities, and to turn our aspirations of decent work and social justice in concrete and effective policies. And within this framework, I would like to share with you the numerous progresses that the Dominican Republic has achieved that show our commitment to decent work and to equality and dignity amongst all workers. The labour market in our country is being consolidated and is set in a sustained growth on formal employments and an improvement in the quality of the work itself. In the last five years of the government's administration, we have generated more than 5,000 jobs, which shows a holistic view, focused in productive growth, social inclusion, as well as the creation of new work possibilities. The collaboration with the private sector has helped to promote insertion and giving access to the youth and bringing a more equitable access with more decent conditions for the youth or women and persons with disabilities. And in 2025 we have reached the record of 5,123,148 people in work, with a 62.8% of workers, which is the highest rate in recent history. And this can be translated in the creation of more than 121,000 new jobs compared to the same period last year. At the same time, the unemployment rate went down to 5%. And the rate of occupation amongst women went beyond the 50% for the first time, which shows how we are reaching labour inclusion, reducing inequality, and achieving a work environment that is more just. Social dialogue is also consolidated as a strategic pillar thanks to the work we have done where we have seen 400 increases in minimum salary per sectors, all achieved through consensus. Today the minimum wage in the private sector in big enterprises covers more than 100% of the primary basket. Whereas in 2024, that minimum wage saw an increase in 9%, nine points, and surpassed the 85%. For 2026, the real minimum wage will have grown 28 points compared to 2018. This is a historic achievement that improves the lives of the population and helps to reduce poverty. In terms of informality, we have managed an inter-annual reduction of 2.2%, which has led to a positive trend towards formality and access to social security. Our objective is to reach the 50% formal employment for 2028 with an inter-annual growth higher than 59%, reducing the unemployment rate to 4.5% and increasing formal occupation of women to more than 51%. All these numbers show that commitment to achieve a work environment that is more just, inclusive, and sustainable, where every person can

develop their own potential in a dignified way and in an equal way. Very much in line with this commitment, the Ministry of Labour is also pushing for the reactivation of the programme Decent Work, Decent Country, key to coordinate more effectively the efforts of all tripartite actors and the ILO ensuring that employment, social protection, and labour rights policies translate into a real improvement for the Dominican population. It is for me a real pleasure to inform you that yesterday the Senate of the Republic passed the reform on the code of work, and we would like to thank our dear friend Ricardo de Los Santos, President of the Senate and all the senators here present. Thank you very much for being here. I would like to ask for a round of applause for them. This is an approval in first session of a code that brings us back into the 21st century, and that gives better guarantees to all workers. A code that is not only good for workers, but also for employers. We will continue working to strengthen the national system of participation based on national fiscal policies at a national level to ensure a good implementation of current legislation as well as responding to the transformations in the world of work. All these transformations require working and implementing labour rights in the different priority areas of work, as well as fuelling the entrepreneurial obligations, which will be key to protect rights and dignity of all workers. And it will be important in that regard to fight against harassment. And the new criminal code in the Dominican Republic punishes that harassment, which helps us to establish a solid legal basis to continue strengthening security and safety within the work environment. This is an important progress towards the ratification of the Convention 190 of the ILO on the eradication of violence and harassment in the world of work. And this is what the new code will include, which will be passed into the next few weeks. The world of work is transforming. Digitalisation, the green economies, and the demographic changes require a just transition with the promotion of decent work and the protection of most vulnerable workers so that nobody's left behind. From the Institute of Professional Training, we have pushed for many programs on digital training as well as training for greener jobs, contributing as such to prepare the workers of tomorrow for a transition towards a more sustainable economy and strengthening their possibilities for a more dignified transition. We have also worked towards the eradication of child labour, working jointly with the regional initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean, free of child labour of the ILO demonstrating as such that the tripartite commitment and transnational corporation bring concrete results. And as such, we're also working to bring the Dominican Republic to the Alliance 8.7 of the ILO that has its objective, the eradication of child labour, forced labour, as well as bringing to the DG in the next few days the Convention 156 on the workers with family responsibilities, ratified recently by the Dominican Republic. Which shows the importance we give to a work and life balance. And we are also discussing other conventions that will be discussed soon in order to start new ratification processes and strengthen our commitment with all the principles of social justice and tripartite work. As a conclusion, I would like to warmly thank the ILO and its director general, all governments, all workers, all employers, thank the Lima office, our regional director, as well as the San Jose office, to all the countries who have come here to plant that seed from which the future tree of the world of work will be born. And very, very specially, thank you, thank you to President Luis Abinader for his utmost support to the world of work. The region of the Americas has a huge potential, and together we will turn that potential into realities of justice, dignity, and social peace. Long live the ILO, long live all countries, and long live the Dominican Republic! Thank you very much.

Mr Gilbert F. HOUNGBO, Director-General of the ILO

Mr President of Labour and the President of the Regional Meeting, and Minister Olivares Ortega, Vice President representing the government, dear Minister Jordan, dear Ms Pena Vice President representing the employers, and Mr Del Rio, Vice President representing the workers, Honourable Ministers, Delegates, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning to all of you and a warm welcome to you all. For me it is a great honour to have the opportunity to speak before you in the opening of this 20th Americas regional meeting here in Punta Cana. The Dominican Republic at the crossroad of the Americas, with its rich history, vibrant culture, and growing economy is a fitting host for this important gathering. Ladies and Gentlemen, we meet at a time of great complexity, shall I say, and profound transformation globally, regionally, and within the multilateral system itself, including within our own organisation. But above all, we are here to exchange and focus on actions to shape practical, forward-looking policies that will advance inclusive, just, and sustainable societies driven by sustainable economic growth, productive employment, and decent work for all. Let me begin by expressing our sincere appreciation to President Luis Abinader and all the government for honouring us with his presence that has just been confirmed by the president of the regional meeting. And also, to you, Honorary Minister Olivares Ortega, as well as to the whole population, the people of the Dominican Republic, for your generous hospitality and the steadfast support. This is the first regional meeting under the ILO new format, reflecting our commitment to making regional meetings more impactful. Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been seven years since we last gathered in the region, particularly in Panama in 2018. Since then, we have witnessed both remarkable advances and persistent, even sometimes deepening, challenges. The Covid 19 pandemic was a defining moment. Disrupted economies and labour market, and exposed deep structural weaknesses. Today we face a convergence of overlapping crises, be it the climate change, particularly in the small island in developing states, the digital and technological disruption, the demographic shift, the rising migration pressure, and the increasing geopolitical uncertainties. So let me highlight some of the most urgent challenges facing many countries in the Americas. First of all, I want to talk about the inequality and poverty, which remain very much entrenched. Despite progress, Latin America and the Caribbean is still the most unequal region in the world. Over 170 million people live in poverty, including 66 million in extreme poverty, which with nearly half of all workers in the informal economy. Talking about productivity, we also know that productivity has stagnated, largely unchanged since the eighties. And this undermines wage growth and the global competitiveness. The growth itself is slowing. Projected regional growth of 2.5% by 2025 is not enough, obviously, to generate quality jobs at scale. Talking also about child labour, on one hand, it has declined by 30% since 2016, which is very good news. But still, 7.3 million children are still engaged in child labour. The employment recovery post pandemic has been uneven in some countries. Up to 95% of new jobs are in the informal economy. 85% of indigenous people are informally employed, despite the region's leadership in ratifying Convention 169. Gender inequality remains, it's also a persistent challenge that we are facing, with women performing 75% of unpaid care work, facing higher unemployment, and earning just 59 cents for every dollar earned by men. Youth unemployment exceeds 25% in several countries. 60% of young workers are in informal employment. And high inflation has eroded real wages. Climate change is displacing jobs and threatening livelihood through floods, droughts, and rising sea levels. Then the digital transformation offers new opportunities, which is also good news, but millions of small and medium enterprises and workers lack the infrastructure and the skills to benefit from the digital

transformations. So, Ladies and Gentlemen, these challenges are serious, but they can be overcome. We must consolidate economic growth so that social progress does not stagnate. Sustainable development is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is the path to productivity, diversification, and shared prosperity. Fighting inequality and poverty is not just a moral imperative, it is a strategic one. One truth remains clear, social justice is not a luxury. It is the foundation of peace, the foundation of stability, and the foundations of dignity. We need bold forward-looking policies rooted in realism, inclusion, and solidarity. We must support not only the most vulnerable, but also the middle classes who too often feel forgotten and unprotected. This means tackling the root causes of informality and inequality, closing the gap in access to education, access to social protection, and access to labour rights, creating enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, investing in the green, the digital, and the care economy to generate quality jobs. And allow me to be clear, tripartism and social dialogue are not optional. They are essential. They are the foundation of democratic legitimacy, resilient institutions, and inclusive policymaking. They are our best tool for navigating the transitions ahead, from informality to formality, and from exclusion to inclusion. And your organisation, our organisation, ILO, is ready. We will continue to offer strong, inclusive leadership in the world of work with our normative and non-normative means of action. We remain a unique and legitimate forum for tripartism, social dialogue and international cooperation. We bring to the table our robust, normative system, including its supervisory mechanisms. Our deep policy expertise, the technical cooperation capacity, and innovative initiative, such as the regional initiative on the elimination of child labour, the Global Coalition of Social Justice, the social dialogue initiatives, FORLAC 2.0 for fighting informality, this core, the Skills Passport, and name it. Ladies and Gentlemen, this meeting is our opportunity to send a strong message from all over the region, and also beyond the region to the world. Productive employment, decent work, and social justice shall remain our compass. They are urgent priorities. Let me use these three days, let us use these three days to shape a shared vision, a roadmap that speaks not only to institutions, but to every woman, every man, and young person in the Americas who seek dignity and opportunity. Thank you so much.

Ms Laura Peña Izquierdo, Employer Vice-Chairperson

Thank you, Excellency, President Luis Abinader Corona, Mr Eddy Olivares Ortega, Minister of Labour, and chairperson of our meeting. Mr Gilbert Houngbo, Director-General of the International Labour Organization. Mr Ricardo de Los Santos, President of the Senate. Ms Mayra Jiménez, Minister for Women. Distinguished Delegates from the governments, workers and employers. Ladies and Gentlemen, it's both an honour and a great responsibility for me to address you at this American regional meeting of the ILO. On behalf of the employers, allow me to warmly welcome all of you here. I am convinced that our meeting will be a forum for communication, discussion and consensus. I would like to especially welcome the Minister of Labour of the Dominican Republic, who as the host of this meeting is reaffirming our country's commitment to tripartite dialogue, social justice, and the promotion of decent work. Similarly, I respectfully welcome the ministers of labour from the various countries in our region. Their presence here underscores the importance of sharing our experience, strengthening cooperation, and strengthening our shared vision of the challenges and opportunities that we face on the labour markets across the Americas. For over 100 years, the ILO has been supporting our countries in our efforts to promote decent work, social justice, and peace in the labour market. One of the most important achievements has been our constant efforts to reduce informality, a phenomenon that affects millions

of workers and restricts their access to their rights, social security coverage, and also restricts competitiveness in our economies. Comparative studies, analysis and recommendations from the ILO have all helped countries and social partners design policies to turn informality into inclusion. Thanks to these efforts, countries like my own have been able to implement concrete measures to encourage formalisation, strengthen labour institutions, and work towards more sustainable economic growth. Experience shows that reducing formality is not just a goal, it's an imperative for social justice. It helps reduce inequality, guarantee decent wages, and build more trust that citizens place in our institutions. We have achieved such feats as reforming our labour code and creating a social security system. Both of these processes stemmed from tripartism, and today we are convinced that this is the best approach to building lasting consensus. But the world of work is changing at unprecedented speed. Digitalisation, automation, climate change, and transformation in production models are all forcing us to review our labour models so that they're more flexible, more inclusive, more competitive. It's a challenge to upgrade our legislation, but we cannot avoid this challenge if we want to ensure modern labour markets that can meet demand in the present and the expectations of the future. Employers in this region are convinced that economic growth and social inclusion are only possible with sustainable businesses, dynamic job markets, and workers with access to their effective rights. Formalisation of labour is crucial to achieve this. We cannot expect cohesion in our societies, nor solid institutions if a large share of our population continues in informal situations. This is why we promote, first of all, the creation of more and better formal jobs. Secondly, protecting businesses and competitiveness. Thirdly, strengthening social protection and strengthening institutions. Fourthly, technological innovation and continuing training for our workers. This is the way to ensure that our economies are more productive, that our societies are more equitable, more fair, and that our institutions can better respond to global challenges. To conclude, I wish to underscore that this regional meeting is an opportunity. An opportunity for us to reaffirm our faith in tripartite dialogue as a crucial tool in the ILO. It is only by a balance between workers, employers, and governments that we can progress towards shared prosperity in the future, where social justice is no longer an aspiration, but becomes a tangible reality for millions of people in the Americas. Once again, the employers of the Dominican Republic and across the region all stand ready to contribute with a spirit of cooperation and a vision for the future. Thank you very much.

Mr Rafael Freire Neto, International Trade Union Confederation

Good morning. Good morning everyone. First of all, I would like to greet President Luis Abinader, and I was chatting with him and I was thanking him once again for the support we got here in Dominican Republic here in Punta Cana during the Congress of the National Confederation of the Americas that we had here in May. A very successful Congress that showed unity. So, thank you very much President for your support and that of Minister Olivares. I would like to also greet the Director-General, Mr Hounghbo. I would also like to greet our Director for the Americas, Mr Eddy Olivares. And as a good trade unionist, I would like to also greet two other ministers. The minister of my country, Brazil, my dear friend, the Minister of Labour, Luiz Marinho. And also greet the minister of the country where I live today in Uruguay, my dear friend Mr Castillo. I also greet Roberto Suárez from IOE, Marta Pujadas, our spokesperson and president of the group. Greet as well all the different trade union members present here in Dominican Republic. And I also greet my dear friend, President of the InfoDev for his excellent work here in Dominican Republic. And also greet all members of the government, different ministers,

authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen, employers, as well as my dear brothers and sisters, worker friends. We are here in this tripartite meeting in a complex moment, a moment of the fragility of democracy, as well as the questioning of the multilateral system. The Director-General has mentioned it in his report as a poly-crisis scenario. Where we see different crises that interconnected and that cover environment policies, etcetera. In the Americas, we have seen this congress as a civilisation crisis, a change of time where inequalities are being strengthened, and we are seeing threat to the democratic life. The historic responsibility is clear. Decades of a search for the utmost capitalism that has left behind it a trail of poverty. And we see how the hatred speech is negating. Climate change is attacking, gender equality is not giving the benefit to safety and health, and are encouraging violence and war. The Covid 19 crisis, all the different miseries of this system not only means more poverty, but also the creation of two realities that we see in our region. On the one hand, the systems without social protection that are being encouraged by democratic governments like the one of Dominican Republic, whether it's social dialogue, but social dialogue with collective bargain where there is respect towards the trade unions and the recognition as well of everyone, including by employers. But on the other hand, there are governments that are not talking, that are incarcerating and imprisoning trade union leaders, and are also persecuting those who raise their voices. And we have to say clearly there is no democracy without freedom of speech. The democracy is not just giving a vote. It requires strong trade unions. It requires a good collective bargaining, their respect to the right to strike, a real social dialogue, vital salaries, minimum wage, tripartite consultations, amongst many others. There will we see a limitation of negotiations or criminalisation approaches, that means there's no full democracy defending the basic rights at the place of work, it's defending democracy. But the crisis is also hitting the ILO. An organisation that was born claiming that work is not a trade-off and that a durable, sustainable piece can only be based on social justice. But those flags are being attacked, and I have no doubt we will do everything to defend ILO. Dear Gilbert, dear Director-General, I want to speak categorically. Workers support your election to lead the ILO because we believe in your leadership and your commitment with the tripartite work. And know that we will always be by your side defending ILO, defending your mandate and the mandate of the ILO. The title of this organisation is democracy, peace, decent work and social dialogue. Joining the Americas in the future with sustainable development and social justice. From now, we say there will be no peace without democracy. There'll be no democracy without trade unions. There will be no sustainable development without social justice. And there'll be no social justice without decent work for everyone. Of course, the report of the Director-General recognises that our region has structural deficits, the inequalities, discrimination, precarious work, and we agree it is time to have a new social contract focused on the people. But that will only be possible if we give its right place to trade unions and we strengthen tripartism, because without it, we will not see that social contract. We defend a Latin American Caribbean as a land of peace. We do not need the presence of military, foreign military bases. We do not need more military invasions. We do not need threats on threats of military invasions. We need peace for all Latin America. And therefore, we reaffirm our commitment to fight against the blockage to our very dear Cuba. And we also support to look towards the future on the basis of three convictions. First, social justice is the basis for peace. It is not just an ideal, it's an indispensable condition for stable and inclusive societies. Freedom to organise is also basic, and trade unions support democracy. We face and fight against those who want to delegitimise social justice and destruct our structures. We do not allow for the encouragement of poverty or the naturalisation of exploitation. My dear comrades, my dear brothers and sisters, this is a decisive moment. We need to defend multilateralism,

ILO, and peace, and this system, or we will see its disappearance. And I conclude reaffirming our commitment with this regional meeting of the Americas, our commitment with social dialogue in the Americas, our commitment to build a declaration that will serve the ILO, that will be the guidelines for tripartism, that will be serving freedom of speech, social justice, and the ILO. Thank you very much.

H.E. Mr. Luis Abinader, President of the Dominican Republic

Thank you very much. Thank you very much Mr Gilbert Hounbo, Director-General of the ILO. Mr Eddy Olivares, Chairperson of this 20th meeting and Minister of Labour of the Dominican Republic. Mr Ricardo Santos, President of the Senate. Mr Luca Bormioli, clerk of the meeting. Mr Colin Jordan, Vice Chair for the governments. Ms Laura Izquierdo, Vice Chair. Mr Gabriel Del Rio, Vice Chair workers. Ms Virginia Moreira, Regional Director. Heads of delegations, ministers, friends of the press, offices of governments, different members of the trade unions, both national and international, Ladies and Gentlemen, we celebrate today two decades of joint work and the leadership of the ILO. And this is not just an ordinary anniversary. This is marking the 20th meeting of the ILO where the ILO has been supporting the Latin American countries or something so basic and important as it is the right to decent work. Because work is not just a contract or an income, work means dignity, freedom. It is what allows for a family to be organised for a community to progress, and for a country to dream with a better future. In Latin America and in the Caribbean, more than 300 million people are part of this labour force, but almost half of those workers are working in the informal economy. This means millions of people without social security, without access to loans, without stability or rights. And this is the reason why we are here today, because we know that real development is not measured only through economic growth, but also through the quality of life of those who are working and producing. Ladies and Gentlemen, ILO has always reminded us that work and labour is the real engine for development. Albert Thomas, the first Director-General said it more than a century ago, real peace can only be based on social justice. That idea is alive, more than alive today. The challenges are huge, but also opportunities are huge. And please allow me to share with you the experience of the Dominican Republic. In the last few years, we have shown how putting employment in the centre of public policies generates real results that give hope. Our country is a leader in economic growth in our region with higher percentages of the average of the region, which might not surpass the 1.5% this year. We have created more than 200,000 formal employments in the last few years, which positions us in amongst the countries who have recovered the labour market after the pandemic. Real salaries have gained in purchase power, and for the first time in decades, the minimum wage, and on the basis of the statistics we have, the minimum wage of the private sector, covers, as an average, the cost of the basic needs in key areas. The tourism, our main industry, more than 11 million visitors in 2024 are allowing to sustain more than 200,000 direct and indirect jobs, which means it's the biggest generator of opportunities in the region. Through our professional training system, our director is here present. we have been able to train more than 3.5 million people since 2005, aligning the preparation of our workers with the digital transformation, the industry of 4.0. as well as value chains. It's important to say that when we got to power in 2020, we have many obsolete structures, but we now have improved this. These are not only numbers, these are real stories of women and men who have today more security, more income, and more capacities, as well as more hope. Ladies and Gentlemen, if we have learned anything from the Covid 19 pandemic is that work is not a luxury or an aspiration. Work must be a right guaranteed by the state, which has to be shown in productive and stable works

with the equal opportunities for men and women. Today in our region, according to the ILO, only 47% of women can participate in that work environment compared to more than 57% of men. And this is not only unfair, but is insufficient. We want Latin America to be competitive, we must be able to guarantee that women have the same opportunities to work and to grow as men. And in the Dominican Republic, we are working to achieve that. We have seen how the participation of women is growing in sectors like tourism and the digital economy, and we continue pushing for policies that allow us to cover that gap. Because we know that an economy with everybody on board is a stronger economy. This meeting is taking place under the theme democracy, peace, decent work and social dialogue, joining the Americas for a future with more sustainable development and social justice. A theme that shows the priorities that will be guiding the discussions that you will be having in the next few days. Those debates will be job creation, social protection, and sustainable development. The strengthening of democratic institutions and social dialogue at a tripartite level, a just transition in the face of climate change, digitalisation, and human mobility, as well as the improvement of knowledge and professional training throughout the life course. And to these priorities, we must also add three pillars that the ILO has named clearly. Gender equality, youth inclusion, as well as their recognition of professional migration as a key to strengthening our economy's sectors that are not vulnerabilities, but rather opportunities for innovation, productivity, and social cohesion. And we must guarantee them that access, access to training, social protection, and participation in the institutionalised social dialogue. At the same time, we must be aware that the current challenges from the demographic transitions, technologies and climate change require of strong institutions that can guarantee that decent work be the cornerstone of our democracies. It's not just about having isolated public policies, but rather a true social contract based on social justice, inclusion, and sustainability. But in this meeting, in this anniversary, we cannot only congratulate ourselves for what we have achieved, but we have to look forward and recognise what there is yet to be done. Too much informality, too many youth still unemployed, too many migrants without rights, too many families trapped in uncertainty. And that is our common challenge to build a region where work means dignity, justice, and prosperity that is shared. The Dominican Republic wants to bring something to the table, and we do that with a clear vision. Our Agenda 2036 with a longstanding horizon that wants to, within a little bit more than a decade, focus on a growth that be translated into more and better employment, more social mobility, more middle class, less poverty, more opportunities for all. We can say proudly that we have cut down poverty in recent years. And in the last quarter, the poverty numbers have gone down to 16%, which is the lowest number. And we hope that, in what's left of the year, that will continue being reduced so that we can achieve a historic record. And that is the true, economic and social indicator for the government. Dear friends, work and employment is not only an economic indicator, it's an act of justice. Every worker protected is a victory of democracy. And every right given is a challenge accepted. ILO is now on its 20th anniversary in Latin American, and from the Dominican Republic we are telling you that there is no possible development without social justice. There's no social justice without decent work, and there's no decent work without a political, social, and business commitment. And this is why this regional meeting will have to be a turning point, a moment where we reaffirm that the future of a work in the Americas will be inclusive, will be resilient, and it will be human or else it won't be. The challenge is huge, but what's also huge is the strength of our people when they move strongly with peace and social dialogue. And I would like to conclude with a thought that is always with me in every decision making. Success in a country can not only be measured on the kilometres of infrastructures of motorways or the height of its skyscrapers, it's

measured by the dignity of its workers, on the smile of those who know that their effort will be an opportunity, as well as the opportunity that those youth will have in that country, in that soil. That's the Americas that we want to have, where decent work will be the measuring level for our future. Thank you very much, and God bless all countries in the Americas.