

**20th American Regional Meeting
Punta Cana, 1–3 October 2025**

**Transcript of the speeches delivered at the second plenary sitting
devoted to the discussion of the report of the Director-General,
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Mr Lorenzo de Jesús Roel Hernández, Employer (Mexico)

Director-General of the ILO, President of the Regional Meeting, Director for Latin America, Director for the Office of the ILO for Mexico and Cuba, distinguished delegates of the Latin America and Caribbean region. As representative of the employer sector in Mexico, I would like to first of all thank the Government of the Dominican Republic for the warm welcome we have received to all those participating in the work of this very important Regional Meeting. We would like to thank the Director-General for his report, Mr Gilbert Houngbo, which speaks of the importance of reinforcing the connection between jobs, rights and growth and social justice as a basis for a sustainable peace, where it discusses different challenges and opportunities that, in the time we are experiencing, is characterized by a high level of uncertainty, not only in our region but in many other regions, tensions and crises that require the promotion of democratic values, the strengthening of the institutions as well as consolidating social tripartite social dialogue. All of them fundamental in order to advance towards a long-lasting peace that is based on social justice and that at the same time will allow to promote a sustainable and inclusive development. In Mexico we are working towards the strengthening of the tripartite social dialogue that, as the Director-General has said, as the employer sector, we believe will allow our country to grow and develop economically. A challenge that we have, as well as other countries in our region, and that will entail creating the necessary framework that will give us more legal certainty, strengthen the rule of law and allow for the continuity and development of enterprises as well as attracting investment and generating new ways of work, making them more productive and sustainable and to allow them as well to generate more and better employment. We trust that in Mexico, as well as in other countries of the Americas, the tripartite social dialogue which will encourage and allow the representative participation of all workers and employers and, where it is recognized, that freedom of association will also allow to generate agreement among sectors as well as the necessary public policies that will encourage the growth of the formal employment, which is a true engine for development. The employment sector in Mexico ratifies that we have to consider the person as the centre for our decision-making, and in order to do so enterprises have to be sustainable and inclusive. We must in this meeting reach tripartite agreements that will allow us to create employment, reach social protection and sustainable development, strengthening the democratic institutions, respecting the fundamental rights and promoting and strengthening institutional social dialogue, reaching a just transition towards more resilient societies. And we will also have to define the strategies that will allow us to formulate the public policies that will guide us towards an improvement of professional training. Thank you.

Mr Edwin Bedoya Ramirez, ITUC

Director-General of the ILO, members of the delegations of the different employers and government associations, brothers and sisters of the trade union organizations of all workers, warm greetings on behalf of the ITUC and our trade union in Ecuador. This Regional Meeting is taking place amidst a global crisis, but as well as regional crisis, where inequalities and violence are a constant against those of us who are fighting injustice. This means many rights are being enthralled. And on behalf of all workers in Ecuador and different social organizations, I have to say that our country is going through an unprecedented crisis in terms of rights and freedoms. In recent weeks, due to the recent economic and political measures taken by the Government, trade unions and social organizations have to be mobilized permanently until the Government withdraws the measures that are making the situation very precarious. As a

consequence, the Government, instead of calling for a dialogue, has gone against those demonstrations, and as such, dozens of trade union leaders, including myself, we have been imprisoned due to the situations or illegalized. I have been called by the Public Prosecutor, as well as other leaders, and I have been called without a clear basis. We have seen arbitrary detentions, murders and persecution on the basis of terrorism. Many brothers have seen their bank accounts closed, apparently being accused of illegal gatherings. We have been hacked. We have suffered threats. And many university students are also being illegalized. The Government is using the criminal system as a means to persecute us. Hundreds of demonstrators have been hurt, have been incarcerated without any guarantees, and the case of 12 indigenous leaders from the Otavalo region, have been sent to a prison where hours before that there had been a massacre. And this proves that they could lose their lives in these prisons and the risk of death is real. Worst of all, there are deaths, there are dead people, there are disappearances, and this is due to the political repression. We have seen a high, record number of murders and the Government is not bringing any social justice. The Government has not resolved the violent situation. It is actually getting worse. But against social protests, that is when we see repression. The week prior to that, the murder of a leader by the military is the situation that we are currently facing in Ecuador. It is constant repression, and that is why we are calling upon this conference to evaluate the situation in Ecuador. We are calling upon all of you so that the request we had made in a previous meeting that we have a focal point, a delegation from the ILO, sent urgently to the country. Thank you.

Mr Jorge Arturo Ríos Badillo, Government (Mexico)

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, first allow me to convey warm greetings from the Minister of Labour of Mexico and also convey my thanks to the Government of the Dominican Republic for hosting this very important meeting. Historically, the casualization of work and circumstances that work against job creation affect women and persons in vulnerable situations, in particular since the COVID-19 pandemic. The great upheaval on the labour market today with technological changes that are picking up the pace, new models of businesses, new forms of contracts, can either increase inequality or fill the gaps. This will depend on the political will and the joint efforts of governments, workers, employers and civil society so that in our region we can have full employment, productive employment, full respect for human rights, particularly labour rights, and for sustainable development to all work together as inseparable pillars. Given all of these challenges, under the leadership of our President, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, Mexico is experiencing a labour spring with a number of achievements. 13.5 million people brought out of poverty from 2019 to 2024. The minimum wage in Mexico has increased by 132% without raising inflation and without causing unemployment. Outsourcing has been banned, and thanks to this 3 million workers have been recognized by their true employers. We are going through a labour justice reform, creating labour tribunals, reconciliation centres and registering collective agreements and trade unions which can be chosen freely and democratically and confidentially and with gender equality. Over 3 million young people have received training, and 70% of those remained in unemployment after this training. We are reforming the pension system for a decent retirement. We are also consolidating our reform of regulating the platform economy where we recognize platform workers and their rights. These are hundreds of thousands of people benefitting from this tripartite reform. In July we will begin social dialogue to cut the working week from 48 to 40 hours. Since 2018 we have ratified Convention 98 on the right to organize and collective bargaining, Convention

189 on domestic workers, Convention 190 on violence and harassment, and the 2014 Protocol to Convention 29 on forced labour. Mexico is also one of the pioneers of Alliance 8.7 to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. We are a founding member of the regional initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour. And this has led to a number of tangible achievements and we are indeed the region that has made the most progress in this. These achievements are the result of a tripartite engagement which strengthens democracy, peace and social dialogue. This is in line with the objectives of the Panama Declaration and addresses the many challenges laid out in the Director-General's report. We shall continue to work to ensure that in our continent we have a people-centric approach. With our vision, we continue to work on building a progressive, dynamic social contract that promotes a more just and equitable world of work. We welcome the decision taken at the last International Labour Conference to work towards a Convention on the platform economy. In this era where international cooperation has been called into doubt, the ILO remains a space that demonstrates that it is through tripartism and multilateralism that we can make progress and address these challenges. Let us work closer together to ensure that social justice in our region becomes a reality.

Mr Alfonso Palacios Torres, Employer (Colombia)

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Colombian employers' organization I would like to begin by saying that social justice must be the central objective of any sustainable development policy. We must take account of the transition economies and the adaptation that we must see in the world of work. And there are many essential elements that should be taken into account. One is decent work and the other is the reality that decent work cannot exist if we do not have sustainable businesses. One cannot go without the other. As such, the employer sector calls for joint policymaking through social dialogue so that all partners can play their role in accordance with their position in society and their role therein. All the weight and all the cost of social justice cannot be placed on the shoulders of the business sector. We need policies for sustainable production, industrial conversion and stable regulations. There must also be facilities for opening up new markets. Without this, we will create an imbalance and we will not be able to achieve our ultimate goal, which is social justice. We agree with the Director-General on two fundamental points in his report. First of all the role of education to close social gaps. Without education for work that is modern, that is scalable, we will prevent social mobility for workers. This depends on the education policy. If we are to achieve such a policy, we need tripartite social dialogue where the employers are consulted and where we are training people not only for today's needs but for future challenges. And this is impossible to achieve without a tripartite process. The second point in the DG's report that we agree with is that democracy is a crucial component for the sustainable development and just development of any country. Stable rules of the game and restrictions on the excessive use of power and a respect for the rule of law are all prerequisites to achieving social justice. Any efforts to replace the institutions by the will of an authoritarian leader will work against the ability to create a productive, stable economy and job market. As such, it is the ILO's role to call upon States to recognize the legitimacy of actors in the world of work and to work constructively, especially on standards and labour policies. This is certainly a long road, but it is the only road to ensure stability and to actually put in place the kind of public policies that will close the gaps and remove the barriers to social justice. Currently in Colombia we are facing uncertainty with high unemployment, rising violence, including political violence, and repeated attacks against business leaders and trade union

leaders. All of this is undermining confidence in the institutions. This is why Colombian employers reiterate the importance of strengthening tripartite dialogue institutions. This is how we can work to achieving the social justice that we all desire.

Mr Wills Rangel, Worker (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

Chair of the Regional Meeting, Director-General of the ILO, Mr Hounbo, as a representative of the workers from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I must stand here before you to protest against the situation my country is facing. Faced with the permanent threats and the campaign of aggression from the United States of America, we have suffered 12 years of the illegal imposition of more than 1,050 unilateral coercive measures that have been struck our economy and society, which means our country must constantly struggle to be self-sufficient and to protect its economic sovereignty and to create jobs. We have managed to continue to strengthen our democratic institutions thanks to the participation of our entire population in the decision-making process. Local communities are involved in this. This is a great effort that we have made to reinstate production and to address many of the matters that will be covered in this Regional Meeting. We stand here to inform you that we are being absurdly accused by the President of the United States of North America, claiming that our country is a production centre for drugs in the region. The reports presented by the United Nations confirm that Venezuela is not a production centre for narcotics and that the traffic from other nations represents 5% only of all drugs entering the United States. These false accusations that have been made against the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, as they allege that he is the leader of a non-existent cartel, this has also been denounced by the President of Colombia, Gustavo Petro. The President of the United States has sent a fleet of naval warships threatening fishing vessels in our exclusive economic zone. They have bombed other vessels without previously identifying themselves. They have murdered the people on board these vessels. Our fishers are constantly under threat and unable to enjoy their labour rights. This situation of threats and aggression has been condemned by most countries in ECLAC, which has issued a statement calling for compliance with the declaration that Latin America is a territory of peace that is free of nuclear weapons and any type of aggression. We are grateful for the trade union movement's solidarity with Venezuela as well as for BRICS and other movements that have all taken their position against these threats. In our country we have freedom of association. We uphold the right to freedom of association. And Venezuela has been adopting Conventions, and also we have authorized a new trade union centre, ASI, as well as a trade union federation in the food sector. In Venezuela we ensure the full application of these Conventions. Our President, Nicolás Maduro, has backed a minimum wage system that is indexed with a monthly increase for the Venezuelan working class. This is the only such measure in the world. And this has included providing social benefits such as housing, healthcare, education, leisure and food as well. We in Venezuela stand as an independent country which has built its Bolivarian socialism. Venezuela is not a threat. We aspire to a world without slavery and exploitation, a world of peace and equality. We are an example in the world of work where workers can hold the power, as President Nicolás Maduro has shown. We have demonstrated this and we also demonstrate our solidarity with the people of Palestine and their right to be free and free from genocide. Long live the workers. Long live Cuba and Nicaragua.

Ms Ivonne Nuñez, Government (Ecuador)

Distinguished officers, distinguished delegates, on behalf of my country, Ecuador, Director-General of the ILO, we congratulate you on your detailed report on strengthening the connection between growth, jobs and rights, social justice as the basis of lasting peace. We agree that social justice is a fundamental principle in order to reduce inequality and also to ultimately achieve the Sustainable Development Goal No. 10, which calls that by 2030 we see social and political inclusion for all irrespective of their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, origin, social status, with guarantees of equal opportunity and reduced inequality. This includes eliminating laws, policies and practices that discriminate and also reducing gaps when it comes to income by giving people access to work and to their human rights and access to a decent life. As the Director of the ILO says in the preface to his report, social justice is a collective responsibility and it is a prerequisite to lasting peace. The Director-General has identified a key driver and a key factor as being informality in Latin America and in the Caribbean. This, on average, is 47% in the region. This shows how important and how crucial it is that we implement a strategy for formalization in Latin America and the Caribbean. That is the FORLAC 2.0 strategy of the ILO for 2024 to 2030. The gender gap in the labour market was recognized. In 2024, on average, women were making only 60.4% of what men were making at work. We must address this gap, and we have done this in Ecuador with our organic law on the purple economy. The report recognizes deficits in decent work that exist, particularly for young people aged between 15 and 24. Our President, Daniel Noboa, and his government has made it a priority to pass legislation for young people to foster employment contracts for young people aged under 29. I would like to thank the Director-General of the ILO for the work done with Ecuador to support public policies on equal opportunities, job protection and reactivating the economy to address the new and diverse forms of employment, and also to eradicate child labour and address labour migration. All of this is done following the guidance we receive from the ILO. And in so doing, we can build a lasting peace in this world. Thank you.

Mr Roberto Recalde, Employer (Paraguay)

Excellencies, governments, employers' and workers' representatives, on behalf of the employers' sector in Paraguay, we would first like to welcome the Director-General's report which points to the need to strengthen the connection between growth, jobs and rights, social justice as a foundation for lasting peace. This is the fundamental principle that underpins the ILO, and this is a particularly relevant call in our region where informality, low productivity and inequality remain structural challenges that place limits on our opportunities to progress. In Paraguay the employers' sector fully agrees that it is not enough to have growth. We need favourable environments for businesses to be sustainable, productive and to generate formal high-quality jobs. Social justice and labour rights are only feasible in the presence of clear regulatory frameworks, access to funding and sustainable investment conditions. Ratifying international conventions and promoting standards is important, but real development is measured in terms of reduced informality, the increase in quality employment and sustainable social protection. One central aspect that I would like to underscore is tripartite dialogue. In recent years, in Paraguay and in the region, we have seen initiatives that, while they have had good intentions, have not had tripartite support and have therefore been rejected or fallen by the wayside. Genuine tripartism is not an end in itself. It is the only tool by which we can build a sustainable consensus and effective public policy. In Paraguay, as in most countries in the region, we depend on our MSMEs, which make up

over 90% of the business community. We need to formalize them and support them with long-term strategies. We need policies that drive productivity, digitalization and integration in value chains instead of frameworks that stifle innovation. We would like to recognize the ILO's role through ACT/EMP and the International Organisation of Employers for their role that they play in Paraguay. Again, it is only through authentic tripartite dialogue and the right frameworks for business that we can see the growth in formal employment and effective rights that we need. This is the way to achieve social justice and therefore lasting peace. I thank you.

Ms Milexys Guizado Faez, Worker (Cuba)

A good afternoon, everybody. Director-General Gilbert Houngbo, Chair of the 20th American Regional Meeting, delegates, guests, Excellencies, I bring warm greetings from the CTC of Cuba and the global trade union federation. On the 3rd of October we will be celebrating its 80th anniversary. I take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this event and for the warm hospitality we are receiving in the Dominican Republic. In order to contribute to tripartite dialogue and seek solutions together to address the challenges in the region, this is a fundamental meeting. The Director-General's report draws attention to the persistent challenges in upholding workers' rights in order to address the current challenges and achieve our vision for future societies and economies in our region. As we hold this 20th meeting we are doing so against a backdrop of high uncertainty and tension. As such, promoting democratic values, strengthening institutions and building tripartite dialogue is crucial if we are to achieve lasting peace based upon social justice. It is only through regional integration, the fair distribution of resources, that we will be able to save humankind. Today in the world of work there are cruel realities, injustice and inequality, and as such, we need a tripartite process based on mutual respect as we work to find solutions to the problems our workers face. Cuba is not isolated from the international reality. Unlike other countries, we are increasingly suffering from the aggressive effects of the unfair economic trade and financial blockade imposed by the Government of the United States. This is the main obstacle to economic and social development in our country. We are experiencing very difficult times. The economy is greatly impacted and the Government of the United States has stepped up its strategy of aggression against Cuba and Venezuela. The US Government has included us on a list of sponsors of terrorism without reason. The majority of workers are, nonetheless, actively seeking solutions to the problems that we face. We all have a role to play as we actively take part in the ILO, and we are called upon to continue to fight for a different world with equal rights and equal responsibilities for all. We call for peace, cooperation and solidarity as well as dialogue. We would like to thank our friends and trade unions around the world for their messages of encouragement and hope, and we stand committed to keep working for international solidarity. And we will always continue to defend our region as a zone of peace and we will strengthen our solidarity with the people and workers of Palestine. The people of Cuba will prevail. Thank you.

Ms Miriam Catarina Roquel Chavez, Government (Guatemala)

Director-General of the ILO, Regional Director of the ILO for Central America, Haiti, Panama and Dominican Republic, delegates, ministers, representatives of workers, employers, distinguished participants. For the Government of Guatemala, it is a true honour to participate in this 20th Regional Meeting of the Americas and to share socio-economic progress and government actions that have been aligned with the commitments of the Declaration of Panama, implemented since 2024. 68% of the

population is working in the informal sector. In rural areas this percentage goes up to 78%. And in 2024 only 17.5% of the 7.7 million people working were affiliated to social security. The internal GDP grew by 3.7% in 2024. It is projected to grow to 4% for 2025 with an emphasis on growth of decent work. In 2024 we saw inflation at 1.7% and 1.2% in August 2025. Also in 2025, minimum wages went up to 10% in agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, 6% in export and maquila. Between 2021 and 2024 the educational fees grew by 8.2%, growing to 4,298,837 students. We have seen professional training and decent work being strengthened through the strategy for the attraction of foreign investment, and that has generated new employment in telecommunication, manufacturing and services. Through competitiveness policies, we have seen how supporting female entrepreneurs and financial inclusion can support MSMEs with incentives and technological assistance. If we promote principles and fundamental rights at work, we can get a lot. We have updated our decent work policy, and we have also prioritized the transition between school and work. 1,400 students benefitted from a new employment, My First Employment programme, 30,000 people were included in the work programme, and between 2020 and 2025 the temp work programme overseas has reached more than 13,000 people. Social dialogue also is encouraged through the National Tripartite Committee on work relations and freedom of association. And we have hired 17 more inspectors between January and August 2025. We have also implemented the road map for collective bargaining and have also published guidelines on freedom of association. We have brought new resources to environmental policies and climate change. \$6.5 million has gone to the climate change fund. We have updated our national contributions and we have emitted sovereign bonds for the alliance on action for a green economy. We have, in 2025, designed a new, inclusive and equitable social protection scheme focused on rural women, young people, people with disabilities and human development. Between 2020 and 2025 our programme for adults has benefited more than 1,704,000 people and we have priorities on just transition as well. Thank you very much.

Ms Kim Aikman, Employer (Belize)

Chair and members of the head table, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to speak to you today on behalf of the Employer delegates from the Caribbean. We have appreciated the report presented as it provides an analysis of the main challenges in the region. However, I wish to take this great opportunity to briefly highlight some of the most pressing labour and development challenges facing the Caribbean where stronger collaboration with the ILO will be vital to our subregional development. Workforce development and skills gaps. Across the region, we are facing a widening skills mismatch. Industries like technology, manufacturing and green energy are growing but our education systems and training programmes are not keeping pace. Employers are calling for closer coordination between governments, schools and the private sector to align curricula with industry needs and build capacity areas like renewable energy and digital transformation. Low productivity. Productivity in the Caribbean lags significantly behind the global competitors. In 2024 GDP per worker in the US was nearly six times that of CARICOM countries. Without sustained productivity growth we cannot remain competitive, create decent jobs or achieve long-term development goals. Informality and brain drain. Nearly half of workers in Latin America and the Caribbean are in the informal economy. Most affected are women, youth, migrants and marginalized groups. This undermines job security, tax revenue and social protection. At the same time, high levels of migration and brain drain are draining talent just when we need it most to transform our

economies. Climate change and just transition. The Caribbean is among the world's most climate vulnerable regions. Rising seas and extreme weather threaten jobs, especially in tourism, agriculture and energy. Climate change is a consistent crisis for us with many of our economies devastated, such as Dominica, St Vincent and my country, Belize. Transitioning to greener economies is urgent but it requires capacity-building, strong labour environment partnerships, employer involvement and government investment in climate resilience to ensure that the transition creates new decent work opportunities and improves livelihoods in the region. Finally, labour law reform. Many of our labour laws remain outdated and fragmented. A modern, consolidated labour code is necessary to ensure flexibility, fairness and relevance in today's workplace realities. In closing, as small economies in the Caribbean, we are sometimes unfortunately limited in our flexibility and finances. However, we consistently advocate for the important work of employers' organizations in improving institutional capacities and enabling economic environments for the creation of decent jobs. We welcome the Director-General's report and encourage pilot programmes in the Caribbean that take into account the realities of small economies. With the right policies, data and partnerships, we can close skills gaps, build stronger economies, boost productivity, formalize jobs and build resilience against climate and economic shocks, ultimately preparing future generations for a stronger and more sustainable Caribbean. Thank you.

Mr Eduardo Jose Gil Quiros, Worker (Panama)

Good afternoon, everyone. Greetings Director-General, Chair, Vice-Chairs, Regional Director, all delegates of governments, workers and employers. We would like to thank the Government of the Dominican Republic and thank them for guaranteeing this meeting. We would like to start by thanking the Director-General for his report on our region. It shows very precisely the realities that our countries are going through as well as the challenges of the current context that is so uncertain, as the report says very accurately. An uncertainty that is only due, as the confederation of workers of the Americas said, to the dispute between those who want to create hope through durable peace and those who want to see us going backwards, attacking multilateralism and attacking, as such, the ILO as well as all the system of standards that it has set up. This is characterized in our countries very specifically by those governments who are incarcerating trade union leaders, who are using the legal system when our leaders are using stereotypes or discrimination against the leaders and trade union organizations. Those who are being incarcerated because of demonstrations, this is precisely what is taking us back in time. In its more than 100 years of history, the ILO has demonstrated that societies can progress when there is a real social dialogue. It is not just about economic growth when we see a real balance between the needs of the workers and the generation of growth. But we do not progress when we try and disarticulate human rights and labour rights. And if we take what our colleague and brother has said, it is not possible to define democracy only by an electoral process but as well by the participation of trade unions in all areas of the democratic sphere. The different Conventions, and in particular 87 and 98, are clear and establish that only workers can define who is to represent them and lead them. The national council of workers CONATO and the national independent trade union confederation CONUSI would like to thank the solidarity shown by our brothers and sisters towards those brothers and sisters who have been incarcerated and have helped us to defend ourselves against the international attacks, like trying to take over the Panama Canal. Today, more than ever, we need social dialogue, not only in Panama but in the whole of our Latin American

region because we need to be able to continue with a prosperous region that we have. Thank you.

Mr Jesus Otamendiz Campos, Government (Cuba)

Good afternoon, Director-General, Chair, Excellencies, heads of delegation, dear guests. I would like to start by thanking, on behalf of the delegation of Cuba, our hosts, organizers and to all the people of the Dominican Republic for the warm welcome and organization of this 20th American Regional Meeting. We would also like to thank the Director-General for his very thorough report that gives us a clear diagnosis and an urgent call to action in our region. The report we are discussing today establishes a complex regional situation, and we agree fully that social justice is not an abstract aspiration but rather an indispensable condition for a durable peace. For Cuba this will be a fundamental pillar of our social project. We believe firmly that we cannot see a sustainable economic growth if it not translated into productive employment, decent work and, in particular, the full respect of rights of all workers. In the document it is identified the different structural challenges that our region is facing. Not only informality but as well the gender gap, youth unemployment as well as the work deficit of decent work that is affecting those that are most vulnerable, including indigenous peoples, peoples with disabilities and migrants. All these are not isolated problems. They are the symptoms of a model that is giving priority to capital over human dignity. And we would underline here the importance of two very important elements. Firstly, the defence of tripartite social dialogue. We reaffirm that genuine participation of governments, employers and workers is the only, most efficient mechanism that will allow us to build consensus and to design the policies that will respond to national realities. And it is in this context of multiple transitions, whether it be digital, environmental, demographic, social dialogue is the only tool to guarantee that nobody be left behind, and we refuse any aim at weakening this fundamental principle. Secondly, solidarity and international cooperation are key. The challenges we face from climate change to development cannot be resolved through the isolation or unilateral measures. It is important and imperative that we strengthen South-South cooperation and that we fulfil the commitment of the 2030 Agenda. Unfortunately, my country continues to suffer the economic blockade as well as the trade and financial blockade imposed by the United States. Lifting these economic measures will be an essential condition in order to advance and progress to our national development goals. According to information, between 1 March 2024 and 28 February 2025 the impact on Cuba rose to \$7.5 million, and this is something, Chair, that we do not see in any other country. Despite the huge difficulties suffered by Cuba, our commitment with social justice is unbreakable. We have given priority to universal and free access to health and education, pillars of our society, and we continue working towards these efforts to strengthen growth, employment and rights and we defend a new social contract that puts human dignity in its centre. Let us work together to make sure that the Americas will be an example that another future is possible, a future of peace, social justice and decent work for all. Thank you.

Ms Maria de la Paz Jervis, Employer (Ecuador)

Good afternoon. It is a real honour for me to be here. Greetings to all. As the report we are discussing today reminds us, Latin America and the Caribbean are going through a crucial key moment, not only politically but also because the structural challenges persist, like informality, social inequality, low productivity and institutional weakness that limit our capacity to guarantee decent work and build more democratic societies.

From the employer sector, we believe firmly that in order to face these challenges we require a more shared and sustained vision. And in this sense, tripartite social dialogue is not only a technical mechanism but rather a strategic tool for democratic governance and productive development. And this is why I would like to mention three areas of the report. Firstly, we agree that we must strengthen tripartite dialogue as one of the institutional pillars. And in order to make this work, we need a stable, predictable mechanism with high representativity. All employer organizations are ready to bring the analysis, the data, the sector knowledge and the realistic proposals that will really enrich our discussions and propose the necessary solutions. Those countries which have institutionalized tripartite dialogue, as Uruguay has said through their salary council, have established more stability in terms of norms and labour policies. Second, social dialogue must be connected with strategic development priorities like digital transition or green economies or equality of opportunities. All these issues must be put on the table and we must not continue with the political instability that does not reflect 21st-century challenges. And thirdly, and this is very important, we must strengthen the capacities of our social partners because let us not forget that both workers and employers are social partners. And it is indispensable to invest in the analysis, in evidence to make sure that we hear all the voices of the different sectors, that we include MSMEs and that we represent the majority of formal employment in the region. And in order to conclude, I would like to make mine the words of the Director-General. For a strengthening of the ILO, which is an institution that represents us all, also to the employers, we must make sure that it is also our home. And I think a little bit of readaptation will be necessary, but I continue thinking that all the challenges of Latin America can be summarized into strengthening democracy. And I would like to refer here to what is happening in my country. Once again, we have been kidnapped. We have been kidnapped figuratively but also literally. We have seen how violent demonstrators, linked probably to illegal activities, which is what thrives in our region, they want to impose their truth by force. And they have closed roads. They have kidnapped political leaders. They have kidnapped their own communities, which are no longer receiving foods. We must learn how to dialogue. We need to know how to reach consensus. And this is not something we will ever be able to do through violence. And that is why institutions, organizations like the ILO are so valuable to strengthen democracy, to guarantee growth and to remove the painful gaps existing in our region. Thank you.

Mr Mauro Joel Dominguez Almendares, Worker (Honduras)

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished representatives of governments, workers and employers, greetings on behalf of all workers from Honduras, and in particular from the trade union organizations that every day are fighting for dignity, social justice and democracy in our country. Today we are here in this 20th Regional Meeting of the Americas of the ILO at a time in which the world of work is facing huge challenges like precarious labour, youth employment, forced migration and the impact climate change has on our economies, challenges that require a collective response within the tripartite dialogue and effective dialogue. In Honduras we have opened spaces for that social dialogue, and there workers have found a voice with governments and employers. We recognize that this is a process that has had its hurdles but is a pathway that will be indispensable to achieve more just societies. To support dialogue mechanisms is not giving up but rather strategically going forward for social peace. And I would like to underline here three issues that we believe are indispensable. Number one, defending fundamental labour rights. We cannot have a real dialogue if we do not see freedom of association, the right to strike and other basic fundamental rights. Without that,

tripartism is void. And two, promoting decent work. Our economies cannot be sustained on informality or on the sacrifice of those generating growth through their effort. We demand public policies that strengthen decent work, with social security, salary equality and humane working conditions. Three, building regional consensus. The problems that we are facing in Honduras are also the problems of Latin America and the Caribbean: inequalities, violence, migration, exclusion. The ILO has the mandate to accompany our countries in the search for collective solutions, putting the workers at the centre of those solutions. And for the Honduras Government, we would like to recognize the opening of consultation and dialogue spaces. But we also remind them that the real, true measure to see that commitment is the implementation of the agreements reached. It is not about making speeches. It is about making the decisions that change the lives of our workers. And finally, I would like to call on this 20th Regional Meeting of the ILO for it to be a turning point. Let us not stay in a diagnosis or theory. Let us get concrete and guarantee social justice and advance and progress towards a future of work that be decent work for our region with the strength of the working class, with the hope of our people and with our true conviction that a different world is possible. We reaffirm our commitment with social dialogue, always from the point of independence and strength of trade unions. Thank you.

Ms Jackeline del Carmen Muñoz Cedeño de Cedeño, Government (Panama)

Good afternoon. Allow me to convey the warm greetings from the Government of the Republic of Panama, led by His Excellency President José Raúl Mulino Quintero, and in particular from the Ministry of Labour. It is an honour to attend this 20th American Regional Meeting. This is a forum where we reaffirm the fact that sustainable development is only possible if it is based on a solid foundation of institutional stability, legal certainty, freedom of association and quality job creation. The Director-General's report reminds us that economic growth is only legitimate and sustainable if it comes accompanied by formal employment, productivity and respect for labour rights. The greatest challenge that our government is determined to tackle is to establish true freedom of association. We are putting trade union monopolies behind us, those that upheld vested interests rather than the legitimate interests of Panama's workforce. We are working with great determination to benefit workers. For example, just 15 days ago our constitution has included the right to trade union training, and we are also taking unprecedented steps to provide these resources to social organizations that were ignored for decades, and we are doing this through our commission of trade union studies. We have a historic commitment to the workers in our country. Even if some are not welcoming our decisions, we work for Panama's workforce to ensure that they are valued, respected and considered, and we are working proudly towards this to manifest real social justice. Collective bargaining, within a legal framework, with a healthy balance between private businesses and workers, this has always guided us. In Panama, currently there are 544 registered social organizations, including 477 trade unions, 55 federations, seven confederations and five central organizations. Labour rights are part of democratic balance and they must be used responsibly by everyone resident in our country. We must guarantee freedom of association, education and the freedom of circulation in our country. We take part in tripartite fora, such as our national council for occupational safety and health and other organizations. We welcome the ILO's technical support and we reiterate our commitment to keep working closely with employers and workers. The Government of Panama believes that the future of work must be based upon the principles of productivity, inclusion, equity and respect for labour rights. We are in favour of a new social contract that combines economic growth, formal

employment, sustainability and a just transition that promotes competitiveness with no one left behind. And we believe that working together we can strengthen and democratize a free social movement in Panama. Thank you.

Mr Daniel Safayeni, Employer (Canada)

Thank you very much, and thank you to the Government of the Dominican Republic and the ILO for hosting us here. My name is Daniel Safayeni. I am the President and CEO of FETCO, which is Canada's national association representing federally regulated employers in transportation, telecommunications and finance. So, definitely want to start by thanking the Director-General for a very thoughtful report, and we especially welcome the call for a people-centred social contract. And we believe that that is a legitimate and necessary aspiration but it is also a two-way street. Labour rights and equal opportunities can drive productivity and sustainability but only when the right conditions exist, conditions like clear rules, access to finance, training that meets real market needs, institutions that people can trust. When those pieces are in place, we get the virtuous cycle that the DG describes. Investment creates formal jobs, jobs build social cohesion, and that social cohesion goes on to strengthen growth. But without those conditions, rights remains words on paper and not realities in people's lives. And that is why employers do stress the need for enabling environments, not as an excuse but as the foundation for ambition because when business conditions and labour rights advance together, everyone wins. And Canada has seen this first-hand, domestically and internationally. Higher global standards raises competitiveness, builds trusts and makes our markets stronger. So I am very pleased to be here today on behalf of Canadian employers. But I am not here alone. I join our Canadian tripartite delegation alongside senior representatives of our federal government and the Canadian Labour Congress. That in and of itself, to a degree, reflects what is unique about the ILO. The ILO's tripartite model is not just a process. It is actually a lesson for a wider multilateral system, especially at a time when cooperation feels fragile and fraught. It shows that legitimacy is earned when governments, workers and employers share responsibility for writing the rules. Just last week we saw four of the world's most influential business institutions, including the IOE, reaffirm private sector support for an inclusive, effective and trusted multilateral system. This was done through a rare joint declaration. For Canada, a mid-sized, trade-dependent economy, this engagement is vital. Our prosperity depends on predictable rules, open markets and investment frameworks that both reward innovation while promoting and protecting decent work. Employers are ready to invest in this system because we know the costs of disorder are not abstract. They show up in supply chains, in prices, in investment decisions. So I will just close by saying what might be obvious, which is the ILO is not just about labour standards. It is also proof that multilateralism, while not perfect, can still work because it recognizes that legitimacy is earned when all the parties that have to live with the rules help write them. That is a message Canadian employers are proud to stand behind and a future that we are ready to champion and help build. Thank you so much for your time.

Mr Salvador Medina Torres, Worker (Mexico)

The Confederation of Mexican Workers welcomes the Director-General's report to this Regional Meeting, and especially where it details the serious problems that the various aspects of the world of work are facing. It shows how a democratic framework is a crucial factor in achieving the transformations we need to improve justice systems, social and economic protection and also multilateralism. The report also, in its second part, lists a series of policies and says that the countries in the region are progressing

on this. And this is where I think we need some nuance to be objective and to look at the institutions with this perspective. The policy recommendations that we see are one aspect, and the Director-General's report to the last ICT reminded us that for billions of people they rely on work for their daily life. Very often they are facing challenges due to casualization in labour relations and the state's inability to find a balance. This is a complex reality that is also affected by national and international policies and international situations, including wars that are having major and serious impacts. We are also in a very unfortunate situation with the current trade wars which are threatening millions of jobs and the livelihoods of millions of families. This is incompatible with democratic values and the rights that create cohesion in societies. There are also serious wars where any ceasefire seems to be out of grasp. It is a paradox that all nations seem to strive for peace but none seem to be able to stop wars and genocide. In many countries there is a lack of dialogue and tripartism, and these democratic deficits are impacting both the present and the future of the world of work. The DG's report to the last international conference in Geneva mentioned growing threats and concentrations of power and wealth in many places and markets where there are dominant actors setting the rules, the prices, distribution and mentioning high rates of inequality. A human-centred approach where we strengthen democracy, guarantee decent work and social protection is what we work towards in trade unionism. It is clear that, as we work together, we can only achieve this through structural changes and policies that will achieve this. If we do not work in this direction, year after year we will always be on the same path, hearing the same messages but seeing little change in people's daily lives. In Mexico, CTM has been insisting for many years on the need to reinvent and revitalize tripartism, both in the ILO's programmes and in its constituent countries. This is essential if we wish to strengthen the democracy that underpins our efforts and ensure a balanced participation of the social partners. The future of work is the future of democracy and of social justice. Thank you.

Mr Juan Castillo, Government (Uruguay)

Director-General of the ILO, Chair of the 20th American Regional Meeting, representatives of countries, of employers and of workers, ladies and gentlemen. We welcome the document that the Director-General has submitted for the 20th Regional Meeting. This is particularly useful for our discussions over the next few days as we work on a proposal to guide future labour policies in a world that is full of upheaval and uncertainty, as the report correctly says. The connection between growth, jobs and rights was already discussed at the 113th International Labour Conference where our government made its remarks on behalf of the Deputy Minister of Labour and also myself at the Conference as one of its vice-presidents. The document we have before us underscores the connection between growth, jobs and rights from the perspective of the Americas. And we agree with the views that identify structural challenges and the impact of informality, the deficit of decent work for young people, persistent gender gaps and the link with labour migration. We also agree that it is important to have robust and resilient institutions that can not only respond to adverse situations but also promote inclusive and sustainable transitions in the labour market. We especially underscore the role of vocational training and the work that is done by CINTERFOR, which has always promoted a close link between tripartism and national training systems. We value a dialogue between the technology sector and finding ways to adapt to these changes through vocational training. There is a close link between the fight against poverty and not seeing work as a commodity, in accordance with the Philadelphia Declaration of 1944. Our country is currently in a tripartite collective

bargaining process which involves almost all groups in the private sector. And also in the public sector, we have recently reached a collective bargaining agreement which merely remains to be formally legalized in our five-year budget legislation which will be adopted at the end of the year. On the development of the workforce and employment, our ministry has launched extensive consultations in the production sector across the country in order to draft new employment legislation. We are also committed to a tripartite process and a vocational training institute. We have a training programme called Uruguay Impulsa to support people who have no other income and are in need of this training. On social protection, the previous government adopted a reform of the social security system that creates a mixed system and includes individual savings. We have now organized social dialogue in order to take a broader approach to people's needs in terms of social protection, and this includes problems faced by underprivileged children and also the national care system. It is clear from the report that labour policies, social dialogue and tripartism are at the centre of our approach, and our government reaffirms again that we need to work towards social justice and fairer distribution of wealth. And we also need to defend multilateral fora like the ILO in order to support these fundamental human rights and work towards social justice in our continent and across the world. Ladies and gentlemen, everything that we are saying here, all the debates and all the contributions from previous speakers at this session will amount to nothing if we do not all contribute to the fight for peace. What is at stake here is the world, our planet and humanity. Upholding peace is something that must be our absolute priority. This cannot be solved by embargoes. This is not how we will address the unfair distribution of wealth. Peace must always be placed under the auspices of multilateralism. Thank you.

Mr Marcio Monzane, UNI Américas

Good afternoon. I make these remarks on behalf of UNI Global and a number of trade union federations, and we thank you for inviting us and we are determined to actively participate in this meeting. Chair of our meeting, Minister Oliveras Ortega, Director-General of the ILO, Mr Hounbo, Regional Director and the representatives of governments, employers, and especially greetings to the workers' delegations. Our region is in a complex situation. There are many forces that are trying to drag us backwards and under authoritarian influence. Many countries are working hard to build a future based on solidarity. I think this Regional Meeting is very timely. There are many challenges to multilateralism and yet this is the way to protect and uphold democracy and development. This was reaffirmed in Chile, and we invite many other governments to support this call. The ILO plays an essential role with its Conventions, for example on freedom from harassment, Convention 189 which protects domestic workers' rights. This has opened the way for broader agreements on the care sector in general, and we know that countries like the Dominican Republic are working currently on a national care plan that could inspire other countries in the region. As we work for a fair transition, for democracy, for employment, none of this can be achieved if anyone is left behind. We must work to support Conventions like Conventions 98 and 154 on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. We need policies that eliminate discrimination, that boost trade union representation and protect the right to organize which is under threat in many countries. We have extreme inequality in Latin America where 50% of the poorest population lives with barely 15% of the wealth. In countries like Colombia or in Mexico, where they are working against informality, and efforts that we see in Brazil are all important, but this can only succeed if it involves the participation of all. This is a huge task. It is clear that we must strengthen democracy, uphold labour

rights and trade union rights and work towards a model of social justice that offers hope to our populations. Thank you.

Mr Keoma Griffith, Government (Guyana)

Mr Gilbert Hounbo, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the American Regional Meeting, distinguished delegates, good evening all. It is a distinct honour and privilege to address this 20th American Regional Meeting on behalf of the Guyanese tripartite delegation, and in particular the Government of Guyana. Allow me from the outset to convey our deepest appreciation to the Government and the people of the Dominican Republic for their gracious hospitality and for extending such a warm welcome to their regional brothers and sisters. In his report, the Director-General has issued a very strong call to action which resonates powerfully with Guyana's national trajectory. Notably, Guyana's GDP's growth is projected at 10.3% in 2025, which undoubtedly makes us one of the fastest growing economies within this region. But we have long since recognized that economic growth, job creation and labour rights are not mutually exclusive elements. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing concepts inherent in the grand scheme of social justice. To this end, we have strategically positioned ourselves as one of the world's most attractive investment hubs in order to safeguard the future of work within our country. We will therefore continue to build on this foundation by making aggressive investments in human capital and skills development in order to prepare our people for opportunities in the digital and green economy. Just recently, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly our very own president, His Excellency Dr Irfaan Ali, sought to outline his vision for Guyana as being both an energy leader and technology innovator. This vision is reflected in our national approach to the three major transitions shaping the world of work, as highlighted in the Director-General's report. Notably, our green energy investment plan is not only designed to ensure that growth is clean, inclusive and resilient but to also ensure the effective creation of new industries and decent jobs to facilitate a smooth ecological transition. I wish to point out that our digital transition strategy, anchored by the establishment of an AI hyperscale data centre, will ultimately bring new job opportunities by building on a fintech ecosystem, modernizing the service delivery platform of government and accelerating private investment. Lastly, we have recognized the importance of divesting our energies towards preparing our youth demographic to participate fully in these emerging opportunities through the delivery of world-class education and technical vocational training. My esteemed colleagues, these are our objectives for the next five years, but we cannot do this on our own. We are therefore thankful to the ILO for assisting us in the development of Guyana's third Decent Work Country Programme 2025-2030. This strategic partnership will enable us to fully prioritize the expansion of employment opportunities within the green and digital economies as well as the advancement of workers' rights, social protection and social dialogue. In the same vein, we must acknowledge that labour migration is a vital part of building resilience and sustainable growth, especially when faced with threats of brain drain. As such, we are diligently working alongside our CARICOM brothers and sisters to develop a comprehensive labour migration policy within our subregion. Needless to say, Guyana, and by extension the CARICOM community at large, fully embraces the ILO's call for a human-centred social contract. And as small as we may be, our ambitions are pretty clear: to demonstrate to the world how rapid growth, job creation and labour rights are interconnected drivers of social justice, and extension, global competitiveness. Thank you all.

Mr Donovan Williams, Government (Jamaica)

Good evening, everyone. Permit me to acknowledge Director-General Hounbo, Vice-Chair Jordan, honourable ministers, delegates and other distinguished guests. Jamaica continues to strengthen its democratic structures through social dialogue by reinforcing the role of tripartism in advancing decent work, addressing erosion of trust in institutions and strengthening collective bargaining frameworks. Our Labour Advisory Council, comprising government, Jamaica Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Trade Unions, has been established as a platform for dialogue and consensus building on legislative and labour policy reforms. The LAC serves as a national focal point for promoting tripartite dialogue, contributing to the maintenance of a stable and harmonious industrial relations climate. Jamaica herein reaffirms its commitment to the tripartite framework which continues to ensure inclusive decision-making. Through the legislative and executive arms of government, we have introduced policies and enacted laws that demonstrate our dedication to fostering decent work environments. The Sexual Harassment Act enacted into law 2021 is an example. Our occupational safety and health draft bill is currently under review by our Chief Parliamentary Counsel, and we hope to enact same soon. Jamaica underscores the importance of its longstanding overseas employment programme and its collaboration with CARICOM partners on migration frameworks. The Government of Jamaica has seen it fit to establish liaison offices in destination countries the United States and Canada. Their primary function is to protect the welfare of the Jamaican migrant workers while they are employed in these countries. We support the development of coordinated responses to protect migrant workers' rights and enhance labour mobility within the Americas. Jamaica is also recognized as the Caribbean lead in just transition with lessons to share from national experience in resilience and green jobs creation. And we are currently representing the Caribbean at the South African global dialogue on just transition. The objectives are being pursued under a two-year project supported by the ILO and the UNDP, aimed at balancing economic activities with greater environmental awareness and responsibilities. We continue to promote and support future labour markets through vocational training and lifelong learning systems. Steps are being undertaken to strengthen our technical and vocational education and training institutions to equip workers with skills for the digital and green economy. Our initiatives include training our youth, and most of our programmes are geared towards the development of skills and training amongst our youth. As a result of these initiatives, our youth in Jamaica have been experiencing a steady reduction in youth unemployment, which now stands at between 10 and 11%. Our general unemployment level is down to a historic low of 3.3%, and our poverty index is also down. We have increased our minimum wage and we have encouraged our private sector to create a decent work environment. In conclusion, Jamaica reaffirms its commitment to the principles of social justice, tripartism and the Decent Work Agenda. We also take this opportunity to appeal for sustained ILO technical support to small Caribbean island States to support digital transformation, platform economy regulation and productivity growth. I thank you.

Mr Oscar Rolando Castro, Government (El Salvador)

Distinguished colleagues, ministers of the region, representatives of employers and representatives of workers, please receive the greetings of the Government of El Salvador. And we would like to thank the Director-General for his report which calls to strengthen the connectivity between economic growth, employment and rights through social justice for the basis of durable peace. And we agree with this invitation to respond

to the problems and challenges we face through our democratic institutions, protecting fundamental rights, and of course, through tripartite social dialogue that is effective. And this is the reason why El Salvador today speaks from a point of conviction and from history. We are one of the founding countries of the ILO and we believe firmly in its mandate, dignity of work, centring our work in rights and social dialogue as the way to build peace and prosperity. In our country tripartite social dialogue is one of the cornerstones of public policies. We have institutionalized it to resolve the problems specifically affecting our society as a defined priority of our government, and we share with employers and workers numerous progresses. We have established a council for labour which has established a transparent and participatory process. We sit down, we discuss and we agree clear rules and legitimate standards. 95% of the employment sector. More than 70% of the workers give us that legitimacy. Workers where, as I said, 70% of the trade union movement and employers are represented in this council with a 95% representation, which is a historic mark. This labour council has also established a road map with long-term and medium-term objectives with seven strategic priorities and measurable results. All the agreements are public in order to make sure for the population of El Salvador of those decisions. This is why the joint declaration of this event is associated to an implementation plan that is defined in time and has a clear mechanism for its progress to make sure that the declaration is not just left to a document in a drawer but rather that is measured in time. And I can conclude with a certainty. Labour democracy is built upon every day. In El Salvador tripartism is an active practice, social dialogue is a tool that is being used, and we invite the ILO to accompany those processes to guarantee solid rights and social justice. Only like that will we be able to have political stability and peace for everyone. Thank you.

Mr Jimmy Eduardo Bermúdez Perdomo, Government (Honduras)

Good evening, Vice-Chair, clerk and representatives of governments, workers and employers of the Americas. Greetings from the Honduran people, from our President, Xiomara Castro Sarmiento, and the Labour Minister, Wilmer Fernández. We are present here in this 20th American Regional Meeting at a crossroad, not only for the world but for my country, Honduras. The Government has set, before and after, in the defence of labour rights and social justice. It is a starting point, and I take here the words from the workers a minute ago. This is a starting point to continue working in a tripartite way in favour of social justice. And this is the reason why we fully agree with what has been expressed by Director-General Gilbert Houngbo who says that it is not enough to grow, it is necessary to make sure that this economic growth is translated into productive jobs, effective rights and common well-being for all. Honduras and the whole of the Americas should establish a process to democratize economy. And what do mean by that? We mean to open the doors to all workers. Platform workers, a discussion that has been had in Geneva, a debate for which we are maybe advancing in a Convention. To democratize economy means that we include those people, those persons who have been excluded in the past: women, youth, indigenous peoples, rural workers, afro-descendent people. And we have also given incentives to make the private sector grow and strengthen. We are working together but we have also shown our determination for the urgent need to reevaluate the situations in which some small economic centres have all the richness of the country. They do not grant rights and they do not protect democracy. All growth, if not inclusive and sustainable, will reproduce inequalities and destroy our democracies. The government of the country is fully convinced that social justice is also labour policies. Only with progressive legal systems and tax systems will we be able to finance education, health, social protection and decent work. Only through

social and tax justice can we make decent work a reality and not just an aspiration. Social justice at an international level is what calls and summons us here in this meeting of the Americas. The Americas cannot remain silent before the genocide that Israel is committing against the Palestinian people, against the productive workers. But the Americas cannot be silent to the different military interventions and sanctions. Without peace in the world, it is not possible to speak of development nor democracy. Only through decent work, fair and just salaries and labour rights will we be able to build the free independent Americas that we want. Thank you.

Ms Alison Elcock, Government (Barbados)

Chair, Director-General, distinguished delegates, Barbados thanks the Director-General for his timely report on the connection between growth, jobs and rights within the context of the critical and foundational role of social justice and the relationship to peace. Barbados frames the connection between growth, jobs and rights using the phrase 'protection and production'. As a Small Island Developing State with very limited land mass and natural resources but with an abundance of human capital, we are acutely aware that the separation of protection and production is unsustainable and will lead to failure at the level of the state. Protecting workers is a right in itself. Workers are human beings. Protecting workers is also a critical means to an important end. That end being social and economic development for the benefit of workers and the nation generally. For my country, protection is inextricably linked with production. Recent actions are passing of a Family Leave Bill granting paternity leave and extending maternity leave. Our increasing of the national minimum wage, our new annual forum promoting wellness in the workplace, among other policy interventions demonstrate that Barbados recognizes the essential connection and reflects our determination to reinforce that connection. The seventh edition of the protocol that governs the relationship among the social partners, centred on the 2023 Declaration of Mission Barbados is now before the social partners for their final comments. The foundation of social justice is critical. We posit that social justice relates to what is expected of employers, what is expected of workers as well as what is expected of government. It must also reflect what is expected of other governments who are part of the family of nations. This is necessary for policy cohesion and fairness at the multilateral level and will be demonstrated in the development of rules-based systems of global governance and adherence to the rule of law. As the ILO navigates various challenges, including that of funding, the role and work of the Global Coalition for Social Justice is more important than it has been so far. We must leverage our assets and our relationships in pursuit of social justice in all areas that relate to the world of work. In the Caribbean, the area bounded by the Caribbean Sea, we have long treasured our region as a zone of peace. We do so because we are aware that any instability will affect our countries. And among the first casualties will be the workers in our countries, either their jobs or their access to goods. We must not allow our workers to become collateral damage. We therefore call for adherence to the rule of law while we work simultaneously to safeguard our countries from the various scourges that exist around us. Chair, all that I have said so far will be of no consequence to Small Island Developing States if particular attention is not paid to ensuring there is a genuine justice in transition in the areas of climate and technology. We urge the ILO, even at this critical juncture in its existence, to stay true to the Declaration of Philadelphia and stay focused on its mandate to deliver for the workers of the world, those whose labour, whose brain and muscle are the foundation of the development of our nations. Thank you.