

Committee on the Application of Standards

Date: 1 June 2026

▶ Statement by Ms Corinne Vargha, representative of the Secretary-General

I. Preliminary remarks

As the representative of the Secretary-General for your Committee, I have the privilege of leading the Secretariat team that stands ready to support your work and ensure the effective functioning of this Committee – one of the permanent Committees of the International Labour Conference.

Allow me in turn to warmly acknowledge the presence of Judge Alain Lacabarats, Chairperson of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (Committee of Experts), as well as Professor Evance Kalula, Chairperson of the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA), who will present the annual report of the CFA.

My intervention will begin with a brief update on key developments in the ILO's normative work since the previous session of the Conference. Thereafter, as this year marks the centenary of both this Committee and the Committee of Experts, the second part of my statement will reflect on this important milestone.

II. Updates on the ILO's normative work

1. Ratifications of international labour standards and anniversaries

In the past 12 months, the Office registered 58 new ratifications, including 19 of fundamental Conventions. The Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 received 3 ratifications, while the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) each received 1. Occupational safety and health Conventions accounted for the majority, with 14 ratifications – 8 for the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and 5 for the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). These two Conventions are currently the subject of a global ratification campaign, carried out as part of the implementation of the [ILO Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health and its Plan of Action \(2024-2030\)](#).

As regards governance Conventions, three ratifications were recorded – two for the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) and one for the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), which marks its fiftieth anniversary this year. Among technical Conventions, the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), saw strong momentum, with seven ratifications.

The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006), which, this year, marked its 20th anniversary, received three ratifications in the past 12 months. Through social dialogue and international cooperation, this landmark instrument plays a decisive role in promoting decent work at sea worldwide. It strengthens protection for more than 1.9 million seafarers and contributes to ensuring a level playing field for shipowners. With 112 ratifications covering over 96 per cent of the world's gross tonnage, it is the most ratified maritime standard in the ILO's history. By consolidating, updating and modernizing 66 maritime instruments into a single framework, it has enabled a comprehensive approach to the regulation of seafarers' working and living conditions and facilitated a coherent monitoring by the ILO's supervisory bodies. Indeed, since its entry into force in 2013, the Committee of Experts has played a key role in guiding Member States towards a harmonious implementation of the Convention.

2. Standards policy

I would now like to briefly mention a couple of recent developments concerning standards policy of the Organization aimed at promoting a body of standards that is robust, clear and up to date and at modernizing the ILO's normative activities.

In March this year, the Governing Body undertook the fifth evaluation of the functioning of the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group (SRM TWG), as requested by the Governing Body. In the evaluation, the Governing Body reiterated the importance of the SRM TWG in contributing to a clear, robust and up-to-date body of international labour standards, and stressed the need for timely follow-up to its recommendations by Member States, social partners and the Office. The Governing Body also requested the SRM TWG to take its guidance into account in continuing its work in line with its work plan, and to keep it informed of its functioning, with a view to a further evaluation in March 2029. The tenth meeting of the SRM TWG is scheduled for September this year, during which it will examine working time instruments.

The Governing Body further took note of the outcome of the meeting on the follow-up to outdated Conventions held in February of this year, which concluded with the adoption of an agreed framework for selected outdated Conventions. This framework will guide the formulation of SRM TWG recommendations going forward on certain outdated standards, particularly for standards where: the subject matter remains relevant, there is a related up-to-date Convention and the instrument continues to have a significant number of ratifications.

In November 2025, the Governing Body adopted measures to modernize the reporting system under article 22 of the ILO Constitution. The modernization introduces a thematic approach to reporting, designed to streamline reporting while preserving meaningful supervision. Instead of submitting separate reports for each ratified Convention, governments will provide a single Thematic Implementation Report (TIR) which will cover groups of related Conventions and Protocols organized into 15 thematic areas.

This shift will be introduced progressively from 2027 with requests for reports staggered over time in line with the established reporting cycle.

This change goes well beyond a simple technical adjustment: it reflects a clear intention to simplify the reporting burden, make the preparation of reports smoother, more structured and coherent and facilitate access to information. By strengthening the transparency and readability of information, this change enables Member States to draw fully on the sharing of experiences and good practices among peers, responding to a long-standing request.

To support this transition, reporting will be done through a new, user-friendly web application.

While this major reform will not affect the work of your Committee at this session of the Conference, it is expected to have an effect on your work going forward, as well as on that of the Committee of Experts. Both supervisory bodies will have the opportunity to consider these implications in due course, including through your respective discussions on working methods.

III. A centenary of supervision

I will now turn to the second part of my intervention, which pays tribute to the centenary of the Committee that you are chairing. Since its creation in 1926, this standing committee of the Conference has met every time the Conference was in session since its creation in 1926. Its mandate has been to examine how Member States give effect to international labour standards and to bring these issues to the attention of the Conference.

Looking back at the reports of your Committee, as well as the general conclusions it has adopted at each major milestone, it is clear that the time has not weakened the reasons that led constituents to establish this mechanism a century ago. On the contrary, it has only reinforced the relevance, usefulness and added value of the mandate entrusted to you. Over the years, the supervisory and promotional functions exercised by your Committee, on the basis of the comments of the Committee of Experts, have made a tangible contribution to encouraging governments to make progress in the effective implementation of international labour standards.

If this system has continued to remain authoritative over time it is not because it remained unchanged, but because it has evolved while staying true to its fundamental principles. Year after year, every discussion and every conclusion of your Committee serves the Organization's mandate: advancing social justice through decent work. Some regret that progress takes time, that it does not always follow a linear path and that it is sometimes called into question. Nevertheless, without a system of regular supervision, the very prospect of progress and social justice would be significantly diminished.

The uniqueness of your Committee also lies in its composition and the way it operates. Today more than 370 delegates – governments, employers and workers – from some 115 countries are accredited to your Committee to discuss the application of standards. Through its composition and working methods, your Committee gives a human face to the application of standards by enabling the sharing of experiences, the confrontation of realities, and the possibility to question and engage. This human dimension should not be overlooked. The discussions held here are not abstract; they concern the realities of working life experienced daily by workers and employers. The Committee has heard testimonies from social partners who have been imprisoned or killed for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of association, of victims of slavery, and of exploited children. These accounts can be difficult to hear. Yet they are essential. They remind us that supervision is not only about compliance – it is about understanding realities and creating space for progress.

As early as 1937, little more than a decade after its creation, the Committee affirmed that it was not intended to function as a tribunal before which governments would be called to account, but rather as a mechanism of mutual verification, based on reciprocal confidence and goodwill.

This year marks ten years since I have had the privilege of being a close witness to your work as representative of the Secretary-General. If I had to summarize that experience in just

two words it would be “dialogue” and “cooperation”. It is through dialogue that you learn about national realities and analyse them in the light of international labour standards. It is then through cooperation and technical assistance that effect is given to your conclusions.

In a world where differences of views can increasingly lead to polarization, the value and reach of this dialogue, and of the cooperation it generates, are invaluable and must be strengthened, both at the international and national levels.

From its earliest years, the system was conceived as a mechanism of mutual confidence – in the words of Alfred O’Rahilly, the 1932 Chairperson of the Committee on the Application of Standards, the Committee regarded itself as an “organ of international public opinion with the object of securing mutual encouragement and emulation in striving for social amelioration”. In other words, the spirit of your Committee is to encourage progress through scrutiny and exchange.

The history of your Committee has not been without tension. It was marked by periods of disagreement and even crisis. Yet, these moments have also shaped it. What matters is not the absence of disagreement, but the capacity – your capacity – to maintain dialogue and cooperation in pursuit of a shared ambition.

The centenary we mark today is certainly a moment for reflection, but also a time to renew your common commitment.

At a time when positions become more divergent, the relevance of this Committee lies precisely in its ability to provide a space where differences are not avoided but addressed openly through structured tripartite dialogue.

As some of you have often heard me say, as long as dialogue and cooperation continue, a solution is always possible. This Committee specific mission is to ensure that international labour standards can, over time, be translated into reality and that social justice continues to advance in the world of work.

On the occasion of the Committee’s Centenary, you may wish to continue the tradition established by your predecessor and include, at the end of your General Report, one of two paragraphs of general conclusions on the work of your Committee in this special year.

IV. Final observations

Let me now conclude by saying that the International Labour Standards Department is pleased and honoured to place once again this year its expertise at the service of your Committee.

Mr Tim de Meyer, Chief of the Freedom of Association Branch, and Mr Horacio Guido, Chief of the Application of Standards Branch will accompany me in guiding the Secretariat of your Committee this year, along with the two coordinators of the Committee’s Secretariat, Ms Rosinda Silva and Mr Carlos Magalhaes – whom I would like to thank for their outstanding work.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the fact that this will be Mr Carlos Magalhaes’ final session of the Committee. As Head of the Chancellery and coordinator of this Committee, his role has been instrumental to its efficient and effective functioning, as well as to that of the ILO supervisory system as a whole. His dedication and hard work have been essential in ensuring the smooth conduct of its work. I would like to express our sincere recognition and gratitude for his outstanding service.