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RESTORING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ILO:

social dialogue as a beacon of social justice in a changing world

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The International Labour Organization (ILO) is at a crossroads. If the current crisis persists, the only major international organization to have preceded the League of Nations and survived the Second World War, lighting the path to social justice, will face an existential threat to the fulfilment of its mandate and to its relevance as the main institutional project built to ensure that social progress is achieved in parallel with economic development.

Now is not the time, therefore, for maintaining the status quo, but rather for a strategic change in direction guided by a clear vision that enjoys the consensus of the tripartite constituents—rooted as it is in the ILO's principles and values—and that will effectively enable the Organization to overcome this budget and programme crisis. The issue here is whether or not the international community wishes to preserve the only universal system created to place social justice at the heart of world governance, by means of the corpus of international labour standards and social dialogue between workers, employers and governments.

The crisis afflicting the ILO

In addition to the financial crisis caused by the decision of certain States to default on their contributions, the Organization suffers other deficiencies which are causing a fragmentation of its technical capacity as compared with other multilateral actors, such as the World Bank or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It is also urgently vital to strengthen the ILO's role in less advanced economies, and prevent any flagging of efforts in the fight against climate change, the reduction of inequalities and the elimination of discrimination against women.

At this moment in history—marked by major challenges such as the disruptive emergence of artificial intelligence, automation in the workplace, and the need to ensure a just transition and to prevent the informal economy from becoming a permanent, structural reality—the ILO must be able to lead the international debate and thus minimize the risks and maximize the opportunities arising from these changes as regards decent work and sustainable enterprise.

To achieve this, the ILO must offer ambitious and coherent responses to the major challenges of our times while at the same time strengthening the democratization of the Organization's internal functioning and its presence on the ground in order to increase its effectiveness, and **guarantee its financial sustainability without undermining its independence**—even considering new formulas for public-private collaboration compatible with its autonomy.

The Organization must be aware, moreover, that it constitutes one of the very few multilateral spaces in which the countries of the Global South and workers and employers participate under the same conditions as other Governments in establishing the rules of the international system. Overcoming this crisis, which is similar in many ways to that afflicting the entire international system, is a singular opportunity to strengthen multilateralism as the only possible path toward a world based on peace.

Responding to the crisis calls for a shared vision of the ILO's future

The ILO needs to refocus its efforts from managing its decline to exercising strategic leadership, stepping up its transformative ambition. This will first entail defining priority programmes focused on the contribution of social dialogue to global challenges. As a starting point, we propose that action be taken in the following thematic areas:

1. Addressing the digital and climate transitions:

- Regarding governance of artificial intelligence, the adoption of Convention No. 193 marked the beginning of a new era for the standard-setting capacity of the ILO as regards governance of technological transformations. But the ILO's response must go further still. The general discussion of the 2027 International Labour Conference must result in progress toward a tripartite strategy for governance of technology and artificial intelligence.
- We propose launching a new initiative focused on the socio-economic impacts of climate change.

2. Sustainable enterprise and inclusive development for international fair competition:

- In view of the current resurgence in protectionism, ILO standards may serve as guidelines to guarantee international fair competition in the framework of free trade agreements, which favours corporate productivity, innovation and better worker remuneration. We would do well, therefore, to analyse this contribution in greater depth.
- Development of industry and inclusive growth for the creation and advancement of sustainable companies, through investment and innovation policies that pay particular attention to small and medium-sized enterprises, the transition from the informal to the formal economy and the promotion of an agenda for the social and solidarity economy.
- The contribution of macroeconomic policies to decent work, both in times of expansion and of crisis, represents an opportunity to collaborate with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

3. Decent work, social protection and lifelong training:

- Strengthening social protection must remain an essential priority for the ILO in a context marked by the transformation of work, the demographic transition, the spread of new kinds of work, and the persistence of large gaps in protection. Our proposal is to strengthen the identification of policies that work to promote universal systems and effective financing systems.

- Lifelong training and learning are essential to address the profound transformations taking place in the world of work. The ILO must foster accessible and inclusive training systems linked to quality work, with effective participation of social partners in their design and implementation.

4. The fight against inequalities and progress toward equality between women and men:

- The fight against inequalities must constitute one of the ILO's main lines of action going forward, pursuing policies on decent salaries, collective bargaining, equal opportunities and redistribution, paying special attention to vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities. Combating inequalities also requires addressing their structural causes.
- The ILO must pay priority attention to equality between women and men, expanding its transformative programme to achieve gender equality in the world of work. Apart from the pay gap, obstacles remain with respect to employment, professional advancement, the distribution of care work, social protection and participation in decision-making spaces. In addition, the values of feminism offer the ILO a decisive opportunity to build a more inclusive, democratic and representative organization. Social dialogue will only be fully legitimate if the voices and experiences of women are heard on equal terms.

5. Toward a Global Charter of Labour Rights a decade after the ILO Centenary Declaration:

- In the face of global challenges, it is crucial to reaffirm the existence of a universal minimum level of labour rights protection. A Global Charter of Labour Rights, adopted in the form of a Convention, would enable the systematization of the main principles developed by the ILO throughout its history, while also addressing the new challenges of the world of work in the 21st century. The preparation of this charter through tripartite dialogue could become a major mobilizing initiative in favour of social justice and decent work. A global charter of labour rights would offer a universal model for governing a global economy which must be centred on people's rights, representing a great leap forward for the Organization following the Centenary Declaration, the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Improvements in management supported by three strategic pillars

To undertake its responsibilities effectively, the ILO must address its own fragmentation. To achieve this, we propose that synergies be sought and fostered around the three pillars that sustain the ILO's action, with measurable outcomes.

The first pillar must be **standard-setting action**. International labour standards are the Organization's DNA and its main comparative advantage in the multilateral system. This pillar must be allocated the resources necessary to strengthen the ILO's supervisory system. The ILO must not allow this action to be weakened for budgetary reasons; rather, its standard-setting action must be modernized to respond to new forms of employment, to the disruptive emergence of artificial intelligence and to climate change, ensuring that international labour legislation remains a protective force of global validity.

The second strategic pillar consists in drivers of decent work and sustainable enterprise. Quality employment, with rights, and social protection ensure that industry is dynamic and responsible. The programmes designed under this pillar must aim to provide technical cooperation to tripartite constituents to design **public policies that work**. We must offer practical tools to ensure that economic growth furthers social development and equity, and vice versa, to **transform the ILO into a global knowledge hub**.

The third pillar is **development cooperation**. This area must be understood as the enforcement and operational arm of the other two pillars on the ground. Cooperation programmes must be redesigned to more efficiently channel the ILO's technical knowledge toward developing countries, adapting instruments to local realities. This reform will require that the ILO's development cooperation activities no longer be dispersed among small, unconnected local projects, but focused instead on large national and regional framework programmes for decent work, with clear objectives and rigorous systems for evaluating the real and sustainable impacts for beneficiary communities. As a general rule, and building on the ILO's Development Cooperation Strategy for 2026–29, the Global South must have a greater say in the present and future action of the ILO, and in decision-making processes.

Changes in governance

Furthering the Organization's democratization is an urgent task. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work calls for "full, equal and democratic participation in its tripartite governance". This is, therefore, our vision.

Improving governance also entails revitalizing social dialogue within the ILO itself. In this regard, it is vital that no one feel displaced and that social dialogue not be perceived as a slow and ineffective method for decision-making. The Organization must strengthen its tripartism, thus contributing to overcoming recent polarization.

We are aware that internal financial adjustments will be needed, but these must be made, as per the ILO's principles, in permanent consultation with the ILO staff union, respecting collective agreements. Improving the Organization's efficiency is another of our aims: we can do much more without requiring greater resources.

The search for new sources of financing

Given the difficulty of significantly increasing Member States' assessed contributions in the short-term, the ILO must begin to seek voluntary contributions. These contributions, from traditional government donors, development agencies, regional investment banks and public-private cooperation, must become a financial driver of the Organization.

To prevent voluntary contributions from fragmenting the institutional agenda even further—owing to the desire of donors to fund specific projects in which they have a particular interest—the ILO must encourage multiannual voluntary contributions that are fully unearmarked, to be channelled directly into the common funds of the three major strategic pillars described above.

To conclude, I consider that the ILO's role as a champion of global social justice could be decisively strengthened by this vision, supported as it is by my governmental experience in a country that has enjoyed an exceptional period of expansion and creation of quality employment as a result of numerous agreements based on social dialogue. The ILO has faced other major crises, and it has survived them under the guiding light of its principles and values. I trust that, once again, it is this well-lit path that we must follow, spurning that of weakening the ILO's mandate. It is for these reasons, and out of the conviction that the time has come to trust in a woman's leadership, that I have the honour of requesting your support for my candidacy.