After the ILO-IMF conference in Oslo, what's next?

In the wake of the historic ILO and IMF conference in Oslo on "The Challenges of Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion", what's next for the two Organizations' campaign to address the global jobs crisis? ILO Online spoke to Stephen Pursey, Director of the Policy Integration and Senior Advisor to the Director-General, about the outcome of the Conference and the road ahead.

09/20/2010
FTR/oslo

This was the first joint conference of the ILO and the IMF. What was the primary significance of this meeting?

It was significant because it took place at a time when the economic recovery isn't producing badly needed jobs in a number of countries. With global unemployment – especially among youth – at its highest point ever, governments, workers and enterprises all around the world are asking what can be done to reduce the human cost of the jobs crisis and create decent jobs. The conference also heard first-hand accounts from the leaders of three countries – Greece, Spain and Liberia – that have been severely hit by the crisis and are employing courageous and innovative measures to tackle its consequences. In effect, it marked the first time in 66 years that the ILO and IMF have traded their respective organizational blinkers for a convergent vision of how the world's primary international financial agency can work with the world's leading labour organization to address the impacts of this very complex crisis.

What were the main messages coming out of the Conference?

The main message was that employment creation needs to be at the heart of the economic recovery. In fact, it was generally agreed that full employment should become a key macroeconomic objective alongside low inflation and sound fiscal accounts.

Another very important – and related – conclusion was the need to stop treating employment and social policies as separate from macroeconomic issues. The global economy is a lot more complex than that. We need better, deeper coordination between policies, as well as enhanced coordination between institutions and nations. This Conference marked an important step in that direction.

What policy measures could emerge as a result of this Conference?

As a result of this Conference, the ILO and the IMF have agreed to work together on two specific areas. First, we will explore the idea of a minimum social protection floor for the most vulnerable in all countries. This is a concept the UN as a whole and the ILO in particular have been working on. The idea now is to bring the financial expertise of the IMF into the equation. Second, we will focus more, and work more closely together on, policies to create employment focused growth.

There was also a general agreement that social dialogue plays a key role in times of crises, both as a way of building consensus around difficult issues and of ensuring that the social consequences of the crisis and its aftermath are taken fully into account. Finally, both institutions will continue and deepen their cooperation in support of the G20 and its Mutual Assessment Process aimed at ensuring strong, sustained and balanced global growth.

What are the next steps in terms of ILO-IMF agency cooperation?

This is a process that started when IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn visited the ILO Governing Body in March 2009 and that will continue in the weeks and months ahead as we take part in the Millennium Development Goals Summit in New York later this month and the November G20 meeting in Seoul. The Managing Director has also agreed to address the International Labour Conference next year. But most importantly, this Conference has shown us the need to start working more closely together on issues that are far too complex to be looked at through only one lens.