

Speech transcript:

Distinguished guests,

I regret not being able to join you in person today to share this moment of celebration. I have asked my Chief Executive, Achmat Dangor, to be with you on my behalf. You will recall that, just a few months after I was released from prison in February 1990, I visited the ILO and spoke at your Conference. At that time I said that, despite the thickness of the prison walls, all of us on Robben Island and other jails could hear your voices demanding our release. We drew inspiration from this. We thank you in the ILO for your support and for refusing to forget us.

Today the ILO continues to promote the values we share, the rights we all must respect and the ideal that progress is only possible through genuine dialogue. You have established these principles under the banner of what you call decent work and today we can say that the principles of decent work exemplify our common values, our shared respect for dialogue and our concerns about the plight of our impoverished fellow citizens.

Decent work is based on the efforts of personal dignity, on democracies that deliver for people, and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and enterprise development. Decent work also underpins the principle that the purpose of creating work/wealth is to eradicate poverty.

We are slowly but surely achieving the reconstruction and development of our country so that our democracy works for all. Our Constitution entrenches the rights of workers with laws, most of them new and unprecedented in our country's history. We cite such gains because they form the backdrop to our acknowledgement that we need still more effective social dialogue and consultation in all areas of policy. Decent work is about the right not only to survive but to prosper and to have a dignified and fulfilling quality of life. This right must be available to all human beings.

We rely on the ILO to continue its struggle to make decent work a global reality. I would also like to salute the ILO for having created the ILO Decent Work Research Prize. Knowledge and understanding of socio-economic relationships are essential for progress. If decent work goals are to be achieved we need better knowledge, more research, better education. It is an honour for us to express once again our support for the ILO, its goals and its values.

I thank you.