

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi Appeals to the ILO to Expand its Activities in Myanmar

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the former General Secretary of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar, spoke via video message to the delegates of the 100th International Labour Conference of the ILO. She expressed her hope that the ILO would expand its activities in Myanmar and help usher in an era of social justice. The International Labour Organization's current activities in Myanmar include efforts to ensure the elimination of forced labour.

Transcript:

The Preamble to the Constitution of the International Labour Organization starts with the very strong and simple statement that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice. Further on, it declares categorically that the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve conditions in their own countries. This is a magnificent assertion of the linkage between the destinies of different nations made at a time when globalization was hardly recognized as a word, let alone a concept.

The ILO showed itself thus to be an organization for all times, its mandate firmly rooted in a pragmatic assessment of what needs to be done if our world is to be regulated by peace and justice. Moreover, member States of the ILO are represented not only by government delegates, but also by delegates of employers and workers, thus making the Organization not only unique among international agencies, but uniquely geared towards the future when international agencies and organizations would need to be the voice not only of governments but of the true representatives of nations – the people.

In choosing the need for a new era of social justice as the theme of this 100th Session, the ILO has shown itself once again to be not just in sync with the times, but perhaps even to be running a little ahead.

Universal and lasting peace has certainly not been assured for the human race and there is an urgent need to try to find new and better roads towards that goal which must be kept in sight, even if all too often it seems to be unobtainably remote.

Globalization presents new opportunities but it also poses new dangers which include, to focus on the most obvious, the easy dissemination of the propaganda and weapons of hate and terrorism. It is therefore imperative to intensify the quest for peace if we are to keep the earth secure for us and for coming generations.

When the ILO was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1969, the Chairman of the Nobel Peace Committee recalled the Organization's founding principle, that social justice was the base of lasting peace as stated. There are few organizations that have succeeded as the ILO has in translating action the fundamental, moral ideal on which it is based. Moral ideas vitalize to become the driving force of practical change is an exhilarating and, as the ILO has proved, not an impossible dream.

The current guiding philosophy of the ILO, the Decent Work Agenda, based on international labour standards, employment, social protection and social dialogue, could constitute enormous strides towards social justice, and, hence, progress and peace. We look to the Organization to uphold its record of success through the achievement of these objectives and,

in keeping with its credo, to ensure that no nation must be allowed to fail, if all nations are to triumph.

Here I would like to make a special appeal for my own country, Burma. Once upon a time it was considered the nation most likely to succeed in South-East Asia. But now it has fallen behind almost all the other nations in this region. The work of the ILO in our country has highlighted the indivisibility of social, political and economic concerns. In its attempt to eliminate forced labour and the recruitment of child soldiers, the ILO has inevitably been drawn into work related to rule of law, prisoners of conscience and freedom of association.

Six months ago, the National League for Democracy and other organizations and individuals who have been struggling for political change in Burma established a people's network that incorporated social and humanitarian projects into a broad programme for democracy and human rights. The growth, rapid beyond our expectations, of this network is evidence of the indivisibility of social, economic and political concerns, and of the hunger of our people for a society secured by acceptable norms of social justice joined to political and economic progress.

We look to the ILO to expand its activities in Burma to help usher in an era of broad-based social justice in our country. We are particularly concerned that our workers should be enabled to form trade unions, concerned with the highest international standards as soon as possible. Labour rights are integral to the triumphant development of a nation and, once again, may I reiterate the declaration of faith of the ILO that failure in one nation raises obstacles in the way of progress in all other nations. Burma must not be allowed to fail and the world must not be allowed to fail Burma.

I would like to conclude with a heartfelt expression of appreciation for what the ILO has been able to achieve in Burma, in spite of many difficulties. I hope that a progressively closer cooperation can be developed between the Organization and all those who sincerely wish for lasting peace solidly founded on social, economic and political justice, not just in our country, but throughout our world.