

Provisional Record

101st Session, Geneva, May–June 2012

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Special sitting

Wednesday, 30 May 2012, 11.30 a.m.

President: Mr Alburquerque de Castro

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY
MS LAURA CHINCHILLA MIRANDA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COSTA RICA**

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

I now declare open this special sitting of the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference.

Today the International Labour Conference is deeply honoured to receive the visit of Her Excellency Ms Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic of Costa Rica. I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference, Mr Juan Somavia, to welcome and introduce our distinguished guest.

Original Spanish: The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Esteemed Madam President of Costa Rica, doña Laura Chinchilla Miranda, the International Labour Conference has the honour to receive your visit and extend the warmest of welcomes to you. Thank you very much for being with us here today.

You are the first Head of State to come to the rostrum at this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference, but even more importantly, you are the first woman to hold office as President of your country, 60 years after women, for the first time, exercised the right to vote in Costa Rica.

You represent a country which is recognized and respected for its unrestricted respect for human rights. A country which has built a history in which democracy, culture, civic life and the balance between the environment and the economy have defined its identity. But as we know, identity is not only built with words but with actions. Actions which have led to Costa Rica overcoming the impact of the international crisis and resuming sustained growth in a relatively brief time.

Throughout your professional and political life you have demonstrated an understanding that economic growth, social development and public security are interrelated issues and you cannot attend to one without attending to the others.

I would like to emphasize in particular the National Plan for Development 2012–14 which sets out, as you have said, to guarantee young people aged between 15 and 35 decent jobs by strengthening employability and entrepreneurship. We will support and gain valuable experience from your programmes, such as “*Empléate*”, which promotes

job placement of young people in a vulnerable situation, or “*Manos a la obra*”, which provides training for women heads of household and grants financial assistance for community work.

Only a few days ago we received news that the Superior Labour Council in your country, an important tripartite dialogue forum that was relaunched during your mandate, adopted unanimously the national Decent Work Country Programme for Costa Rica 2012–15.

In these times of economic uncertainty, dialogue between the worlds of politics, business and labour is increasingly important. The Decent Work Programme is an excellent opportunity to strengthen social dialogue and tripartism. And you can rest assured that the ILO will assist Costa Rica in this process and will work together with the social partners in drafting the plan implementing the Programme.

Madam President, in the ILO we firmly believe that a commitment to social justice, to decent work, to equity, to the defence of freedom and fundamental rights at work is the right path, the path to development. We understand that you and your Government share these objectives. And allow me to conclude with an invitation to you: let us move towards these objectives together. Thank you very much indeed for being with us here today.

Original Spanish: Ms CHINCHILLA MIRANDA (President of the Republic of Costa Rica)

It is an honour for me to be with you this morning in this symbolic building where you have come to promote dialogue and understanding between the three key sectors in development in our countries: government, labour and business.

All of us come here as partners in human progress. We come to share our views, and sometimes to resolve disputes, but always and above all to build alliances which will enable us to rise above our differences and to commit ourselves together to achieving progress and social peace for our peoples.

Tripartism has always been unique to the ILO within the United Nations system. It means that its proposals are shaped by diverse and contrasting visions, that they are solidly grounded in negotiation and that they are anchored in the legitimacy that comes from the participation of the different social partners.

Tripartite dialogue has always been the hallmark of this institution, which was born in 1919 in response to the grave inequalities that were leading to

revolution and social upheaval. The visionary founders of this Organization knew that inequality and poverty are fertile soil for the seeds of frustration and resentment which can grow into enormous divisions with serious political and social consequences.

The ILO has shaped key paradigms for relations between workers and employers; it has drafted major chapters of labour law, and consequently it has been responsible for some of the most significant advances towards a world of work which is more balanced, just and decent.

Even before the sudden emergence of globalization and internationalization, the ILO had the foresight and vision to establish as a universal paradigm the need to build consensus in the world of work as the foundation of peace and social justice.

One of the most recent and most significant achievements of this Organization is the concept of *decent work*. It is the succinct embodiment of the struggles and the aspirations represented by the ILO. Decent work, as advocated by this Organization, is work that gives dignity to the individual and achieves a balance between the various aspects that make up the world of work. The Organization is right in reminding us that human dignity should be at the heart of all our endeavours, whether as governments, as employers or as workers.

Decent work is the cornerstone of the social contract upon which our democracies are built. In our search for models that will promote inclusive economic growth, our peoples are acutely aware of the need for more and better enterprises to generate more and better jobs. However, there is one task which is still a work in progress – that of ensuring working conditions which guarantee access to full social protection for working men and women.

The rapid spread of, and support for, the decent work initiative internationally speaks well, I think, of the world despite the very serious financial, economic and social turmoil we face at this time. It is in this context of crisis that has hit most of the global economy and our attempts to address it, *inter alia* through the Global Jobs Pact, that it is particularly important for decent work to remain at the centre of our macroeconomic, financial and growth policies.

Making decent work a pillar of government policy has been a signal achievement by the ILO's tripartite constituents, and will be recognized as one of the most important contributions made by the first national of a Latin American country ever to lead this Organization. I would therefore like to pay tribute to the legacy left to the world of work by Mr Somavia, a great professional, a great intellectual and a great promoter of decent work.

To open this important assembly is a distinction which I attribute to recognition of the efforts my country has made throughout our history to make the work of our people our best asset and the best means of generating wealth and prosperity.

Since our Republic came into being, we have never underestimated the value of the dignity of the individual, which should be the ultimate goal of all government policy.

Accordingly, Costa Rica has committed itself to comprehensive development, centred on human beings and imbued with a deep respect for human rights and aspirations, as the prerequisite for democratic coexistence.

In the nineteenth century, on the basis of these values and principles, we declared primary educa-

tion as a universal right, financed by the State for all the boys and girls of Costa Rica. We achieved this much earlier than any other country in Latin America, indeed before the United Kingdom or the United States of America. Today, we allocate 7 per cent of our GDP to financing public education, and added to this is major investment in infrastructure and computer technology, along with making second language tuition universal at all levels of education. Seventy years ago we set up a social security system which today provides universal health coverage to the entire population, including immigrants.

This early investment in social services was strengthened by a decision which we took over 60 years ago to abolish our armed forces. Our unilateral decision to do so freed up financial and human resources which we were able to reinvest in education, infrastructure, science and technology. Investment in comprehensive human development has always been our country's priority. It is thus hardly surprising that the social and productive model of Costa Rica has served as an example to other countries throughout the world.

Through education, health, science, technology, culture and our various state institutions and business systems, we have succeeded in making our people our main competitive advantage, geared to a knowledge economy based on innovation, wealth creation, direct and indirect foreign investment and social justice.

In just a few decades the economy of Costa Rica has stopped depending almost exclusively on agricultural exports and widely diversified its production of goods and services. Forty per cent of our exports are now part of global value chains, with a special focus on the production of high value-added goods. Costa Rica is currently the leader in Latin America when it comes to innovation, and has the highest technology share of manufacturing exports, ranking fourth among exporters of such goods globally. This enables us to generate good quality jobs and to create an enabling business environment for scientific and technological development, which, in turn, stimulates innovation.

We are a society open to the world, an increasingly globalized country that promotes the internationalization of markets while calling at the same time for globalized justice and solidarity, and for high labour standards.

Our vision and our aim is to continue to invest in human development. There can be no progress without freeing human beings from ignorance and poverty. The wealth of nations thus has to be built on the intellectual, moral and spiritual wealth of individuals; we will spare no effort to that end. It is at the very root our history and our convictions for the future.

My Government is committed to respecting and promoting the standard-setting function of the ILO in the promotion and protection of labour rights, and to taking the necessary measures to apply such standards.

We have been working on several issues with ILO support. For example, we have adopted important measures relating to wage policy, such as a minimum wage programme which has been very successful, and the revision of our minimum wage-fixing model for workers in the private sector to take account of productivity and productivity growth.

I am convinced that a policy of linking increased wages to improved productivity will help boost the economy, enable us to achieve more equitable distribution of wealth, and raise our workers' standard of living; hence we have decided to overhaul our current model to take productivity growth into account, and this is already being implemented.

However, perhaps the most significant initiative which we have taken with the assistance of the ILO has been to improve access to the labour market for disadvantaged young people. To do this, we have launched a programme called "*Programa emplaté*", comprising training activities, guidance and job integration measures. This is a public-private initiative with ILO technical support. It is also designed to respond to one of the most pressing ethical imperatives of our time – the need to meet the aspirations of our young people for training, education and quality jobs so that they can enjoy a fulfilled life.

The ILO has drawn attention to the impact of the economic and financial crisis on the world of work, and especially for young people. It has warned of the risks of a lost generation under the onslaught of a crisis which has had devastating consequences – 75 million unemployed young people, more than 200 million young people living below the poverty line, an increase in part-time and temporary work, the growth of the informal economy and a longer and more difficult school-to-work transition. All this has put a whole generation of young people in many countries at risk: the risk to themselves of falling into drug abuse, crime and depression; and the risk for societies of social disruption and violence.

I would like to commend the ILO for its efforts to place the issue of youth employment high on the national and international policy agenda, and for its contributions to the policy debate and the search for ways to meet this major challenge. It has involved thousands of young people in the process of dialogue and consultation on the issue in the recent Youth Employment Forum, held here in Geneva last week.

The ILO Subregional Office was established in Costa Rica over 40 years ago. It has been close to us over the years and its support has been invaluable. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the ILO team, which provided

guidance when we developed our national Decent Work Programme, on which consensus was successfully achieved among all the parties involved in the process.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my most sincere wishes for success in his term of office to the new Director-General of the International Labour Office, Mr Guy Ryder. My Government will always take a stand in the promotion of social dialogue and will continue to embrace tripartism, which Mr Ryder has so strongly emphasized in his statements.

At times like these, when some regions of the world are beset by the uncertainties of unresponsive markets and economies, we can do nothing better, I think, than reaffirm the urgent need for thoughtful dialogue.

I am confident that this Conference will identify ways in which we can better meet the immense challenges of our time, and that its discussions will lead to policies which will guide us towards more socially responsible and environmentally-friendly economies. I am confident that in its debates it will give labour, and the fruits of labour, their rightful place as the most important outcomes that should guide our decisions.

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

Thank you very much, Madam President, for having shared those words which are entirely consistent with the values and objectives of the International Labour Organization. The fact that governments such as that over which you preside are making huge efforts to remain true to these values and objectives encourages us, in turn, to persevere in our common task. Costa Rica is recognized throughout Latin America, and beyond, as a model of democracy, freedom and social justice. Costa Rica and its people have been steadfast in their determination to shape their own future, in conditions of social justice and equity.

Madam President, on behalf of my fellow Officers and all those participating in this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference, as well as on my own behalf, I would like once again to reaffirm our profound gratitude to you for having honoured us with your presence and for your words.

(The Conference adjourned at 12.10 p.m.)

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