

# Provisional Record

101st Session, Geneva, May–June 2012

11



## Special sitting

Friday, 8 June 2012, 12.20 p.m.

*President: Mr Alburquerque de Castro*

### ADDRESS BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF ASTURIAS, FELIPE DE BORBÓN Y GRECIA

*Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT*

Today the International Labour Conference is honoured to receive the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias, Felipe de Borbón y Grecia. I now give the floor to Mr Somavia, the Secretary-General of the Conference, to welcome and introduce our distinguished guest.

*Original Spanish: The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE  
CONFERENCE*

Your Royal Highness, Prince of Asturias, what an honour it is for me, once again, to welcome you to this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference. Five years ago I was also privileged to welcome you to our House.

I would like to thank you for your loyalty to ILO values.

Spain, and the world at large, has changed a great deal over this intervening period, and certainties that once marked the way ahead have disappeared. But what still holds true, as you said yourself at the Conference in 2007, is the need “to give a social dimension or a human face to the major changes in the global economy”. And I am delighted, Your Highness, to see that you remain committed to the ILO. I think that this is due, to no small extent, to our shared history.

In 1979, the young King of Spain, who was almost the same age as Your Highness, and who had played such a historic, central role in Spain’s transition to democracy, addressed our Conference and spoke of the central value of social justice. His words referred to the process of transition which Spain was then undergoing but could just as well be applied today to the process of transformation which the world is experiencing.

Your Highness, your visit is particularly important for me, as it affords me the opportunity to thank Spain and the Royal Family for their cooperation with the ILO over the 13 years I have served as Director-General.

First and foremost, Spain is the member State of the ILO which has ratified the most Conventions so far, 111 to date.

Spain is also one of the donors committed to technical cooperation in many areas, primarily in Latin America, which means that your country is in fifth place in terms of extra-budgetary cooperation.

This Conference will be approving a Recommendation on social protection floors, which will be a major instrument in promoting social justice; and once again, with Spain, the ILO is undertaking a project to establish social protection floors in those Latin American countries which do not yet have them.

Furthermore, Spain is one of the countries which has contributed most to tackling child labour in the world, and the Royal Family – and you yourself – have been involved in these efforts. His Majesty King Juan Carlos in fact visited us in that context.

We have closely followed the outcome of the National Conference on Youth Employment and Decent Work, which was held in Madrid on 16 April, in which the employers’ and workers’ organizations of Spain, together with the Youth Council for Spain, were involved.

The conclusions of this Conference, which were adopted by consensus, were taken into account during the Youth Employment Forum, which we held here at the end of May, and are being considered in the discussions at this Conference. There is thus a direct link to youth, and a consultation with them, before the ILO governance system takes decisions.

These discussions, as might be expected, have mentioned the harsh reality experienced by Spain, where employment has been hard hit – especially among young people.

Your Royal Highness, we are all aware of the difficult times which Spain is undergoing. You will find here, at this assembly, not only solidarity but also the conviction that social dialogue and tripartism – so crucial in the construction of Spanish democracy – will once again serve as a foundation on which to build a national response to the crisis.

Your Royal Highness, your voice has been heard in the world for many years now; it speaks with conviction and decisiveness. Some weeks back you quite rightly noted, and I quote, “we must set aside the sense of fatalism, of defeatism, we must face the challenges ahead with courage, determination and flexibility and we must tackle problems with intelligence and with a view to the future.”

It goes without saying that the ILO – and its office in Madrid – stands ready to pursue its fruitful alliance with Spain in favour of social justice and decent work; but let me conclude by expressing once again my affection and my esteem for the ties of friendship between Spain and the ILO and, above all, my personal respect for you and for all that you represent.

Thank you very much for being with us today.

President of the International Labour Conference, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the ILO, Director-General, delegates, good afternoon.

I would like to begin by saying that it is an honour indeed for me to have this opportunity to address all of you at this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference. At these pivotal moments for the future of our countries there is a pressing need to find solutions together which will enable us to overcome the crisis. That means fostering well-being, promoting economic growth and finding solutions which have the capacity to create stable and decent jobs, particularly for young people.

This is one of the principal goals of this Conference: building a future with decent work. And it is a goal to which I am convinced a major contribution will be made through the proposals put forward and the solutions found at the ILO, an intergovernmental organization in which the three main players in the labour sphere are represented: governments, workers' organizations and employers' organizations.

Before I continue, however, I would like to thank the Director-General of the ILO, Mr Juan Somavia, for his invitation and his kind words of welcome. In doing so, I should like to echo what has already been said by many people and express my sincere gratitude for his fruitful work in leading this Organization over the past decade and for his contribution to the development of labour relations throughout the world. I would also like to congratulate him on the care and attention with which he has discharged his mandate. On a personal level, dear Director-General, thank you for the consideration and respect that you have always shown.

When His Majesty the King of Spain addressed this Conference for the first time, he stressed the key contribution which the ILO has made towards giving a human face to work all over the world. That task is still of key importance today, at a time when millions of people are suffering the consequences of the current economic crisis.

Since it was founded, the ILO has made a vast contribution towards defending the vulnerable, fighting unemployment, promoting human rights, developing democratic institutions and improving the working lives of women and men around the world. In the words of the current Director-General, "working for social justice is our assessment of the past and our mandate for the future". Thanks to its multilateral efforts the Organization will be able to continue in its pivotal role of promoting employment and labour-related human rights.

The modern era is so different from the one in which the Organization came into being and took its first steps, but many of the challenges which existed then are still facing us today. Changes are occurring at a frantic pace and we have to be able to adapt in order to contribute effectively towards the goals the ILO is seeking to achieve.

The current process of globalization involves a movement of capital, goods and individuals which is unprecedented in history, enabling the emergence and development of new economic powers. At the same time, economic globalization and developments in information and communication technology are bringing about enormous changes and massive challenges, which call for an urgent global re-

sponse to which this Organization can make a vital contribution. While recognizing that millions of people are emerging from poverty throughout the world and that considerable progress has been made in many countries, at the same time major tensions in the area of competition have arisen, calling into question the mechanisms that guarantee the protection of human rights around the world.

We must therefore be able to find effective responses to these new challenges. Accordingly, the ILO continues to be mindful of its commitment to making an effective contribution to improvements in labour relations. The ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, which was adopted unanimously by the Conference in 2008, reflects the consensus on the need for a strong social dimension in globalization to enable better results to be achieved and enjoyed on a fairer basis by everyone.

Moreover, the impact of the international financial crisis on employment is inescapable, and while some countries have shown signs of recovery, others are still suffering its effects. At times like these, we must pay special attention to those without work, to the entire families who are unemployed, and focus in particular on the future of young people who are unable to find jobs. It is only right that we find solutions for both present and future, and there is an urgent need to tackle the painful consequences of the economic crisis felt by the labour market.

Faced with this difficult situation, the Organization has adopted an active role, turning its specialist vision into recommendations for overcoming the economic crisis and creating jobs. The search for solutions is a joint task, one to which the ILO has again shown itself to be firmly committed.

Indeed, in June 2009 the Conference adopted the Global Jobs Pact, in which it discussed the repercussions of the economic and financial crisis on the social and labour spheres. I would like to underline the importance of that agreement, since it represents a concrete response jointly adopted by representatives of governments, employers and workers to the dramatic increase in unemployment, underemployment and informal work around the world, which has exacerbated the existing problems in the labour market.

It has been said that global challenges require global solutions. Consequently, the Global Jobs Pact, which pays particular attention to developing countries and countries with limited fiscal space and policies for countering the crisis, has issued a call to coordinate policy initiatives at the global level to maximize the positive impact on employment throughout the world, promoting productive recovery based on investment, employment and social protection.

Previous crises have shown us that there is usually a significant time-lag between economic recovery and jobs recovery, and that is why measures for boosting growth need to be accompanied by others to curb job losses and ensure social protection for the most vulnerable members of society.

Nor should we forget that the success of the Global Jobs Pact will also depend on the decisions taken at the national and international levels by governments, employers, trade unions, national parliaments, local authorities, civil society, donors and multilateral institutions.

Allow me now to make specific reference to my own country.

As you recalled earlier, Spain has been a member of the ILO since it was founded in 1919, and its relationship with the Organization has been marked by a great sense of harmony with the ILO's objectives and by intense and fruitful collaboration. All of this is reflected in the fact that Spain is the member State which has ratified the greatest number of international labour Conventions and is one of the biggest donors to the ILO's technical cooperation programmes, particularly in relation to the Ibero-American countries. Nor should I miss this opportunity to recall the fine work which the ILO is doing in conjunction with the Ibero-American Social Security Organization, helping to improve the social protection of workers in all the Ibero-American countries.

The current difficulties in the Spanish labour market, with its unacceptably high level of unemployment, especially among young people, call for a strengthening of the commitment shared with the ILO and the harnessing of the great potential which Spain has to offer.

I am referring to the Spanish people's desire to overcome difficulties. I am speaking of other objective realities, such as the considerable sectoral and geographical diversification in the Spanish economy, its high level of competitiveness, with leading companies in many sectors, and the excellent level of training of many young Spaniards, who, nonetheless, are unable to find jobs. I would also like to emphasize that since 2008 we have managed to increase real productivity per employee to above the European average.

Accordingly, in line with the Global Jobs Pact, the various administrations at the European, national, regional and local levels responsible for driving economic growth and promoting job creation are promoting measures to alleviate the situation in the Spanish labour market and to propose improvements in the legal framework that are conducive to job creation. These measures will facilitate economic growth and will allow jobs to be preserved despite economic peaks and troughs. Such policies will help growth to be reflected in job creation, promote the sustainability of social benefits and ensure that the conditions in which people work are decent and fair.

For Spain it is quite clear that greater progress in the future requires us to take vigorous action against unemployment, so that our young people can gain access to sustainable, high-quality jobs. It is a joint challenge that calls for the continued work of the administrations in conjunction with the whole of civil society, and for entrepreneurship of young people.

We need to overcome obstacles to entrepreneurial initiatives, particularly among young people, and give them greater capacity to develop new projects and ideas which will enhance the well-being of our societies. In short, we need a strategy that is conducive to entrepreneurship and employment, allowing young people to develop their own projects and become drivers of growth and job creation themselves.

The outlook presented in the report *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012* is a good indication of how the ILO is pursuing its quest for solutions to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis on the job market. I trust that the work of the ILO will lead to specific solutions and help to improve the situation faced by young people.

Although there is no single solution to the challenges of youth employment, we need to adopt an integrated approach which combines macro- and microeconomic measures and is geared to supply and demand in the labour market, as well as to the quality of jobs. In such a rapidly changing world, it is also essential to coordinate education policies with employment policies; they have to be a key component of economic strategy. It is quite clear that better trained workers enjoy more opportunities and that companies need constantly improving human capital in order to make progress. For this reason our regulations should look at training as a right to which workers should have access throughout their working life. People need opportunities to adapt their skills to this changing environment, and we have to make sure they obtain them. It is also essential to provide vocational training and lifelong learning geared to the changes in skills required by the labour market. In this context, companies play a vital role, particularly where investment in training is concerned.

When I addressed the Conference for the first time five years ago, I mentioned my concerns about the future of youth employment. On that occasion I referred to the situation of young people in developing countries, where more than half the population at that time was under 25 years of age.

Five years later, this problem has become more serious, and the employment difficulties experienced by young people are now also affecting many developed countries. We need to identify measures that will enable young people to adapt to the new economic context of a global economy. Young people are our future: we need to be able to offer them prospects and give them hope so that they can achieve their life goals.

Globalization has given a universal dimension to the economy, and the same is true of the challenges that we face. This is why the existence of institutions such as the ILO which are seeking global solutions is so important. It is highly relevant that one of the items on the agenda of this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference is the youth employment crisis. This is an issue which affects millions of young people all over the world and will also be addressed by the Eighth Ibero-American Conference of Employment and Social Security Ministers, to be held in Madrid in July, in preparation for the 22nd Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government which will be held in November in Cadiz, where this year we are also celebrating the 200th anniversary of the first Spanish Constitution.

I have referred to some of the major challenges facing us which you have been addressing in your sittings and I wish you every success in your work. I am convinced that the adoption at this Conference of an action plan laying down priorities in terms of fundamental principles and rights of work for 2012–16 will contribute to finding solutions to these challenges.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate my thanks to the Director-General for his invitation and to convey Spain's immense gratitude for his sterling work over more than a decade at the helm of this Organization.

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*Original Spanish:* The PRESIDENT

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Thank you, Your Royal Highness, for these words, which attest to your support for the Interna-

tional Labour Organization. Spain and the ILO have a long history of working together to uphold social dialogue and decent work. We are convinced that the strength and determination of the Spanish people will enable it to overcome the difficult challenges it is currently facing, guided by a sense of solidarity and social justice.

On behalf of my fellow Officers of the Conference, all those present and on my own behalf, I would like once again to convey to Your Royal Highness our profound gratitude for having honoured us with your visit.

*(The Conference adjourned at 12.50 p.m.)*



## CONTENTS

*Page*

### *Special sitting*

|                                                                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Address by His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias, Felipe de Borbón y Grecia..... | 1 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|

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