



Special sitting

Wednesday, 13 June 2012, 4.15 p.m.

President: Mr Alburquerque de Castro

TRIBUTE TO THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

My fellow Officers and myself would like to pay a public tribute to Mr Juan Somavia in recognition of his extraordinary work as Director-General of the International Labour Office since his election in 1999. Accordingly, we have decided to bring together here in this room those who know and appreciate Mr Somavia, having worked side by side with him over the years on many occasions.

We shall now hear from a speaker who, although not present physically with us in this room, will be with us virtually: Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization, who has agreed to transmit his message by in a video recording.

(A video recording of the message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations is shown.)

Mr BAN KI-MOON (United Nations Secretary-General)

The ILO is unique in the United Nations system. Every year, at the International Labour Conference, the world sees your tripartite power on full display. Your gathering this year comes at a vital time. We are just days from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I am glad that you are using your own forum to send important messages about decent and productive work, the imperative of youth employment, the crucial importance of social protection floors, and fundamental rights at work. I stand with you in focusing on budget deficits. The world must not lose sight of the even more troubling deficit in decent work.

This year, the International Labour Conference has a special meaning for me for another reason: it is the last session with Juan Somavia at the helm. I congratulate Mr Guy Ryder on his victory. I look forward to working closely with him.

Director-General Somavia leaves much to build upon. He has moved ILO issues to the heart of the global agenda. Just before the financial crisis, Juan focused on the social dimension of globalization. Long before the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, Juan put the spotlight on people's aspirations for a fair chance for dignity and a decent job.

The first word that comes to my mind when I think of Juan is "decent", not just because of his signature Decent Work Agenda, but even more be-

cause of his strong sense of decency, compassion and heart, and he has matched that decency with work, hard work, delivery, results.

Juan Somavia leaves behind a strong product line. Decent Work Country Programmes, the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the Global Jobs Pact – his impact reaches far beyond the ILO. He has served twice as President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and also as President of the United Nations Security Council. He was the driving force behind the World Summit for Social Development and he has been a pillar of the United Nations System's Chief Executives Board.

From his days fighting for democracy in Chile to his central involvement in the upcoming G20 and Rio +20 meetings, Juan Somavia embodies the ILO's motto: if you want peace, promote social justice. I am proud to join with all of you in saying, "Thank you!"

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

We have just heard a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-moon, who has thus joined us here at this special sitting of the Conference in paying tribute to Mr Juan Somavia.

The representatives of the Employers and the Workers have also expressed their wish to participate in this tribute, as have the Government delegates of the four regions and the Arab States.

Original Spanish: Mr FUNES DE RIOJA (Employer, Argentina; Chairperson of the Employers' group)

Juan Somavia, my dear friend, many years have passed since you first came to this House having the clear support of the Workers following the Copenhagen Summit. While campaigning for support, you visited me in Buenos Aires and said something to me that I have to repeat: "I have the support of the Workers, I have the support of the Governments, but this is a tripartite House, so I also want to work with Employers."

That is how we set out on this journey, which, like all journeys in life, had good days and bad days, but we maintained a common conviction throughout: the values and principles of the ILO. I think we have to say with absolute intellectual honesty that Juan Somavia is a man who loves his ideas and who is respectful of the principles for which he has been working over these years. That is not an insignificant thing in the world we are living in.

Over the years we discussed the subjects of decent work, sustainable business, the social dimension of

globalization, etc. When the 2008 crisis led us to the discussion of the Global Jobs Pact, we were all aware of the fact that behind these debates lay central issues: how to generate enterprises and jobs, how to ensure that fundamental rights at work were respected and how to connect the world of productive labour with the strategic decisions in the economic and financial spheres of the world.

During this struggle, you steadfastly gave this House visibility and leadership. You returned visibility that, perhaps, had begun to diminish and fade, and leadership that placed the world of work and the issue of employment at the centre of the international agenda.

You did so with respect not only for these fundamental rights and principles at work, but for tripartism, which is something you took on not just in your pre-electoral message, but in how you exercised your mandate. I wish to make this clear because I had the role of Employers' Vice-Chairperson in the Governing Body almost every year. We had many discussions and we had many differences, but we were always able to enter into dialogue and seek concertation and agreement with our Worker colleagues: Bill Brett, Sir Roy Trotman and now the distinguished Workers' spokesperson, Mr Luc Cortebecq. Many of these agreements were built around a table, a table where spokespersons and the Director-General could settle their differences or discuss their differences in order to find common ground.

Finally, I would like to underscore the fact that this spirit of cooperation was not restricted to internal work, rather there has been a tremendous amount of work done outside with multilateral bodies, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and with regional development banks and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other bodies involved in coordinating policy agendas, a task which Juan Somavia initiated, and which is a legacy that he is leaving to us today. We are now on a journey together for an ILO which is better known, more relevant in its policy agenda and more pertinent in its structure of governance, because, throughout these years, we started the task of reforming the ILO from within. The first great contribution we made in close cooperation was the reform of the Governing Body.

Juan, on behalf of the Employers' group, I would like to express our appreciation. I cannot leave, however, without saying a few words about an individual who has left an indelible mark on the success of the management of Juan as Director-General. I am referring to Ms María Angélica Ducci, his Chief of Cabinet, because behind every great leader there is a team, and María Angélica, with her presence, her friendliness and her efficiency, has played a large part in his success.

I, personally, am very pleased that on the day of your retirement we can pay you the tribute you deserve, Juan, and I feel deeply moved to say this.

Mr CORTEBEECK (*Worker, Belgium; Worker Vice-Chairperson*)

This is the last time that I have the pleasure to officially address a message to you, Director-General, in my capacity as Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Body, before you leave your post in September, after 14 years of leadership at the ILO. A great deal has been achieved in these years, and thanks to you

work and commitment there is no doubt that the lasting legacy of the Director-General will be the "decent work" concept. The ability to capture and explain in two simple words, the values, principles and standards of the ILO is a remarkable achievement. This has allowed us to win increased support for our mission, at both national and international levels.

Allow me also to mention the advances made in developing new international labour standards during your mandate. I refer to the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183); the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006; the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182); the HIV/AIDS Recommendation, 2010 (No. 200); the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189); and the Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198) – and, tomorrow, the Recommendation on the social protection floor.

You demonstrated great leadership in organizing the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization in response to the concerns about the impact of globalization.

The 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization was also an important contribution under your impulse. It is also under your leadership that the ILO developed its response to the global, financial and economic crises with the adoption of the Global Jobs Pact in 2009, in a manner that enhanced the ILO's standing as a global partner, and now, with the conclusions of the Committee on Youth Employment.

Dear Director-General, Juan Somavia, your vision, dynamism and creativity have brought the ILO to a much more visible level – recognized internationally, and within the UN and other international organizations.

You have been able to put labour issues at the heart of the global development debate, moving employment and job creation onto the agenda of the IMF, World Bank and G20.

Your mandate period has been a time of changes, or even turmoil in many parts of the world; either political, social or economic.

At this very moment, we can only but be happy with the encouraging developments in a country like Myanmar, where concrete, positive evolutions towards eradicating forced labour are envisaged for the people, and for an independent, free trade union movement, in particular.

Another element of hope are the changes towards democracy and greater openness in the Arab world where people are calling for democratic changes and social justice.

The free Arab trade union movement that you have supported in the most critical times, deeply values your historical positions that concretely embody Pablo Neruda's words, and I quote, "You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming."

(Speaker continues in Spanish.)

On behalf of the Workers' group, I would like to express my thanks to you for all the efforts you have put in to fight for the rights of working men and women in the course of the last 14 years.

Thank you very much for the solidarity you have shown, and for your support to the rights of peoples. Many trade union activists and leaders have been

helped to avoid threats to their physical safety and integrity, thanks to your support.

I wish you success in your future life in your beautiful home country of Chile, with your family and, of course, with your wife, whom I have had the privilege of meeting and whom I would like to thank for supporting you in your role.

I hope, Director-General, that we will have the chance to meet again. I bid you farewell.

Original Spanish: Mr VILLENA PETROSINO (Minister of Labour and Employment Promotion, Peru, speaking on behalf of GRULAC)

It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), to address these few words to you during this well-deserved tribute to Mr Juan Somavia as a sign of our gratitude for the work he has done as the Director-General of this Organization over the past 13 years.

I do not intend to use this opportunity to paint an exhaustive picture of the Director-General of the ILO. The statements that have been made during the course of this 101st Session of the International Labour Conference have most eloquently portrayed the recognition and gratitude that employers, workers and governments from around the world feel for his work at the helm of the International Labour Office.

The famous Mexican author Juan Rulfo said that the creative impulse comes from the very depths of the heart, and this is why our achievements can only come from deep within us. The achievements of Juan Somavia and his contribution to the building of a new world order are such that it is impossible not to be impressed by the person responsible for encouraging all of us to find tripartite solutions to the problems we face in the world of work.

His CV will show you that he is a distinguished lawyer with solid democratic convictions, whose early concern for the situation in his country and in the world led him to move into a diplomatic career and an academic life which was very closely linked to the social dimensions of the development process. In keeping with his democratic convictions, the choices he has made throughout his life have always led him to places and into jobs where human dignity was at stake.

The qualities and skills of Juan Somavia are well known to all of us who have had the opportunity to see him in action. However, what is special about him is the natural way in which his skills and abilities have been put to the service of social causes.

He is, above all, a human being who has used his personal and professional skills to serve humanity, resulting in a resounding success for the ILO. His contributions to the Organization under his leadership have been very significant for a world that tends to turn everything it comes across into a tradable commodity and shows little regard for human sensitivity and solidarity.

Among his achievements I must highlight the concept of decent work, which he launched almost as soon as he took office as Director-General in 1999 and which culminated in 2008 in the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. This concept and the 2008 Declaration have made it possible for the Organization to adapt its basic positions to the dynamism of the global economy and to put social justice at the heart of national policies.

I should also highlight the creation in 2002 of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. This allowed us to alert the world to the fact that unrestrained globalization only exacerbates imbalances in the world economy and also exclusion.

To this I must add the Global Jobs Pact, which was preceded by his astute appraisal of the ethical aspects of the financial crisis and the risks associated with the new and sophisticated ways in which labour was being turned into a commodity.

The constant presence of the ILO in the G20, which you encouraged, has made it possible for leaders worldwide to recognize the importance of investing in social protection floors designed at national level, and to confirm their clear commitment to promote and ensure full respect for fundamental rights at work.

Director-General, your energy and your prudence have made it possible for this Organization to develop solid responses to the challenges of the global economy. Your firmness and your clarity have enabled the ILO to show the world, as you yourself indicated when you took over this position, that efficiency is compatible with justice, that freedom is compatible with order and that change is compatible with stability.

Your ever judicious reading of the global outlook has enabled this Organization to anticipate developments in the world before they occurred. Thus it has managed to maintain its leading role by making proposals which, while rigorous, can be entirely adapted to suit the whole spectrum of global situations and contexts.

I should not wish to conclude this address without putting on record the pride that we, as Latin Americans, feel at the fact that the destiny of an organization as old and important as the ILO has been shaped with creativity and skill, and for the first time, by an illustrious son of Latin America.

Ms ZAPPIA (Head of the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the Office of the United Nations and other international organizations)

It is an honour to pay tribute to you and to your work, as Head of the ILO.

We did some research and when you addressed the Conference for the first time on 1 June 1999, you said you had four strategic objectives.

The first one related to the fundamental principles and rights at work. You said the ILO had an historic mission to promote social justice and dignity at work through its Conventions. This year, a report analysed interconnections between the eight fundamental Conventions and their links with the human rights framework. The eight Conventions are now firmly established as core labour standards and serve as benchmarks for respect of labour rights. So I believe you met your first objective.

The second strategic objective you identified back in 1999 was the creation of employment. You called it the ILO's political mandate. You wanted to see the ILO commit itself to the creation of more and better jobs. Now, in a structure which brings together employers and workers, we know full well that creating employment depends on a favourable climate for investment and business creation. You said that the two areas were inextricably linked. Of course, creating jobs in the current global economic crisis is an even greater challenge. You have strived for quality employment, particularly for the young.

Under your leadership, the ILO has laid the groundwork for tackling the challenge with the Global Jobs Pact in 2009 and continuing efforts to promote employment at the global level, as we have seen during this Conference.

Your third objective was social protection. You called it the ILO's ethical mission. You said the concept was foreign to the vast majority of people across the world, who had no social protection in their daily lives. This session of the Conference is adopting a recommendation on social protection floors and that is a step in the right direction.

The fourth priority you identified was tripartism and social dialogue, which you called the ILO's organizing mission. You said that social dialogue could not exert any influence without strong employers' and workers' organizations. Tripartism cannot be effective without strong labour ministries and modern labour administrations.

This session is showing again how much influence social dialogue can wield and how strong the employers' and workers' organizations are.

You said that development and gender equality for women would be cross-cutting issues for all four strategic objectives, and you said that the concept of decent work encompassed all four strategic objectives. In 2008 we adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization which encapsulates all four strategic objectives.

So your achievements have been remarkable. From the start you made clear what you wanted from the constituents and you guided us towards meeting those objectives. As you said, we have reduced the waiting time between hope and reality.

Dear Director-General, dear Juan, I make an appeal again to Pablo Neruda who wrote a beautiful poem called "*Si tú me olvidas*" (If you forget me). The foundations that you have laid are sound and the ILO can continue to build on them, so very simply, we will not forget you.

Original Arabic: Mr AL-RUBAYE (Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Iraq, speaking on behalf of the Arab group)

I have the honour to put on record, on behalf of the Arab group, our admiration and our gratitude to Mr Juan Somavia, the Director-General of the ILO, for his intellectual and diplomatic skills and creative leadership of the ILO. We are proud that he was the first Director-General, who is from a country in the South, and who was elected nearly unanimously, for three consecutive mandates.

The intellect and behaviour of Mr Somavia took shape and evolved throughout a long history of political struggle. It was not accidental and it did not result from a post he assumed. He fought for democracy in his country. He was the President of the International Commission of the Democratic Coalition in Chile; of the South American Peace Commission; and of the International Committee for *Development Dialogue* within the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation for a quarter of a century. He coordinated the Third World Forum, and was Chairman of the United Nations Committee of Parliamentarians for Global Action, to name but a few.

The life of our distinguished guest has been marked by a series of responsibilities with a noble aim: his struggle for freedom, social justice, dialogue and peace, whether in his country, his region or in the world.

The outcome of his efforts was not an intellectual luxury; it was set in the heart of problems from

which humanity is suffering, not on account of a crime committed, but due to its thinking capacity. Thus, his achievements will remain as luminous steps on the path of the ILO, and a pressure force towards the future, because Mr Somavia has adopted daring strategies in our contemporary world, in an attempt to rebalance justice, equality and dignity. He had a vision in dangerous areas which have not been addressed before, such as the promotion of the Social Dimension of Globalization; the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization; and the Decent Work Programme. He worked in favour of the freedoms of the social partners, and sought the adoption of standards which protect disadvantaged persons, so as to address crises, and establish a legal basis for the creation of recovery conditions, and economic growth for the sake of job generation. The final aim is to overcome poverty and unemployment, which are considered to be challenges to be addressed by policy-makers. These are challenges which are not less important than the task of reforming the Organization at all levels, in response to the requirements of the forthcoming period.

This historic personality has engaged in dialogue with the intellect of the strategic thinker who aims to adapt the ferocious international forces, and bring different viewpoints closer together in a civilized dialogue between the social partners as a philosophical approach so as to enrich North-South dialogue and South-South dialogue. This is a historical process whose fruits benefited the world, as well as international, and multilateral cooperation.

The policy of Mr Somavia was aimed at fighting injustice, dictatorship, colonialism and occupation. To this effect, he defended the rights of the weak, be they individuals, groups or countries. No one can deny his heroic role when he delivered speeches in support of the struggle of peoples towards self-determination. At each session held by the International Labour Office, during his mandate, he showed his enthusiasm as a wise activist in support of the International Solidarity Day held on the occasion of the struggle of the workers and people of Palestine.

He continued to be a just defender of the rights and suffering of the Palestinian people. He expressed his personal admiration, in one of his Reports at this session, of the struggle of the Palestinians and his confidence in that the winds of history will help them achieve their right to life, and to work in dignity, and in security, in the State of Palestine, in a lasting manner.

Mr Somavia approached our just issues in his usual wisdom, which got him close to our Arab group. He even initiated important international decisions on issues which have been long forgotten in the ILO, and followed with interest the work of the international fact-finding mission which revealed the violations and inhuman practices perpetrated by the Zionist entity. In this regard, we would like to praise Mr Somavia for his courageous and honourable stand vis-à-vis the case of Palestine.

He extended his collaboration with, and offered understanding to, the Arab Labour Organization, and with the countries of our region. His office was always open to the Arab Labour Organization and to Arab delegates.

We thank Mr Somavia.

Original French: Ms SABO (Minister for the Civil Service and Labour, Niger, speaking on behalf of the Africa group)

On behalf of the Africa group, I wish to add my voice to the previous speakers in paying tribute to Mr Juan Somavia, who has been at the head of the International Labour Office since 1999. You were already a recognized intellectual and politician when you were appointed Ambassador of Chile to the United Nations in New York, prior to your election as Director-General of the ILO.

It is an honour and a privilege to pay tribute to your career, characterized by your incessant quest for social justice and by your unswerving commitment to achieving a better world. Director-General, thank you.

Throughout your mandate, you have always paid particular attention to Africa and we are deeply grateful for that. Thank you for having projected the developing world into the limelight and for having given a voice to those who had no voice. Thanks to you, decent work, your brainchild, is now a universally recognized concept and is on world's development agenda, in Africa in particular.

You have accompanied and supported our region unswervingly from our very first African Regional Meeting with you in Abidjan in 1999, to the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union on Employment and Poverty Reduction, in Ouagadougou in 2004, and in our most recent African Regional Meeting in Johannesburg last October. The Ouagadougou Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government on the promotion of employment and poverty alleviation is now the rallying point for African countries in their efforts to resolve the problems of poverty and unemployment.

Mr Somavia, you will always be most welcome in Africa. We have noted the extremely important part you have played in transforming the ILO into an institution able to respond urgently to basic needs for technical support and this was demonstrated in North Africa through the response to the Arab Spring.

Rest assured, Director-General, that you leave behind you an institution in excellent shape to rise up to the challenges of our times. The 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization and the 2009 Global Jobs Pact have established a solid ground for the future.

The Africa group is proud of you, Director-General, and pays tribute to you as a visionary, a great man and a friend of Africa. We wish you all the very best in your new life, which we are convinced, will never take you far from the values and principles of the ILO. Thank you once again, Mr Somavia.

Mr RAJA (Federal Secretary, Ministry of Development and Human Resources, Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Asia and Pacific group)

It is an honour for me to deliver this statement on behalf of the Asia and Pacific group.

Esteemed Mr Somavia, it seems like a matter of a few days since, on 23 March 1998, you assumed your responsibilities as Director-General of the ILO. With your imaginative ideas and endless energy, you were soon able to transform the ILO into an organization that espoused and professed social justice and freedom.

Now that you have announced your departure, it is time to recount every single contribution you have made as part of your great service to the world

of work. Today you can proudly say that you have succeeded in reconciling the ILO with its original mission of promoting the free flow of ideas, and in establishing the Organization as a forum for reflection and action in the service of freedom of association and, more generally, of democracy and of respect for fundamental principles and rights at work.

Please allow me to say that your belief in these values has been steadfast and your philosophy pure, which has endeared you to us all. For many years, you warned us of a crisis underlining the need for job-driven recovery. Today the problem is not resolved, but you have set us on the right path. In a few months' time you will be gone from the ILO, but your name and your legacy will remain.

Workers around the world will remember you for your Decent Work Agenda and your campaign for fair globalization. You preferred to lead by example, rather than instruction. You gave us ideas such as South-South and "triangular" cooperation. The world will remember you for your ability to reach out and forge bonds with the G20, the International Monetary Fund and the World Economic Forum, your astute and skilful handling of the global economic crisis, and especially your vision that at the heart of sustainable development lies job creation.

You have made us all proud of the rightful trust we placed in you some 14 years ago. May the help you have given to the ILO in difficult times, with such grace and calm, stand as testament to your abilities as a leader.

Let us therefore pay tribute to you for your will and dedication; let us pay tribute to you for your honesty and hard work; and, above all, let us pay tribute to you for your abiding faith and love for social justice.

Now that you have decided to move towards a new phase of life, we all wish you happiness, health and every success in the days to come.

Original Spanish: Ms MATTHEI (Minister of Labour and Social Provision, Chile)

Speaking about work and social security necessarily means speaking about the respect, dignity and protection that every human being deserves – hence the great importance of the ILO, which throughout the long years of its history has fought to bring dignity to work and to protect human rights in the workplace. For Chile, for all Chileans, and for the Government of Chile, it is a source of great pride that Juan Somavia has led the International Labour Office for the last 13 years. In that role, he has promoted the concept of decent work, put the issue of employment at the heart of the work being done by multilateral organizations, and fought tirelessly to emphasize the importance of dialogue and tripartism as vital elements for a fairer world.

As Chile's Minister of Labour, I would like to express my warmest thanks for the tribute paid to a prominent and distinguished Chilean on the world stage. Juan, to you, to Adriana and to all your family go our very best wishes and our admiration. There can be no doubt that, wherever your life takes you from now on, you will continue to pursue your ethical and political commitment to a fairer world based on greater solidarity.

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

As President of the International Labour Conference, I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words.

Mr Somavia, dear Juan, you took over as Director-General of the International Labour Organization at a historic time. The Cold War had come to an end, and the Berlin Wall had fallen; but at the same time, a sweeping process of globalization of economies and markets was beginning. This was an overwhelming, often unfair, unbridled process, which sought on occasion to deregulate labour and strip it of protection for the sake of comparative advantage.

It was in this context that you began your term of office, with the concept of decent work as your watchword from the outset, later to become your intellectual hallmark and political legacy.

Previous speakers have highlighted your achievements over the 13 years of your tenure as Director-General of the International Labour Office. I will only mention a few: the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization of 2008; the Global Jobs Pact of 2009; the ILO's participation in the G20; the various regional meetings that the Organization has held, and the Decent Work Agenda for the Hemisphere – a full-scale strategy embodying a set of policies combining economic, legislative, institutional and labour market measures aimed at advancing the promotion of decent work throughout the countries of America. Added to this is the adoption of Conventions on fundamental issues such as child labour, domestic workers and maritime labour.

In my view, however, your most important achievement was to change people's perception of this Organization, strengthening its unique role in the world of work and creating expectations among circles which had often been indifferent to labour issues.

Perhaps your most important legacy is to have ensured that labour and protection of workers are now at the heart of government policy, both nationally and internationally. That explains why the United Nations has included the goal of full employment and decent work for all as a key component of national development policies and strategies as part of its programmes to support countries under the Millennium Development Goals.

Your hallmark has been your easy contact with people and your gift for communication, as well as your vision for the future of this House and its constituents. You have been tireless in your efforts to ensure that the ILO plays the fundamental role which it was assigned nearly a century ago when, in a pledge to heal the wounds of war, this Organization was born under these simple and fundamental words: "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice".

As a Latin American, I am proud of your legacy, and I am sincerely delighted, as President of the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference, to be able to say farewell to you from this podium. I will never forget, Juan, that you spent part of your childhood in Santo Domingo. Those were happy years, although I also remember an unfortunate incident in which you were bitten by a dog as you played in the streets of Santo Domingo. But that has not prevented you from loving that city and the people of our country.

Thank you very much, Juan, for that support and for your legacy to the world of work.

Original Spanish: Mr SOMAVIA (Director-General of the International Labour Office)

Mr President, Vice-Presidents, Ministers, those who spoke before me, particularly the Minister of Labour from Chile, I thank you for your presence here.

Let me begin by thanking you in as many languages as I can: *gracias, merci, xie xie, shokran jazeelan, vielen vielen dank, spasibo bolshoe, obrigado, arigato gozaimasu*, thank you. These are the languages used during the International Labour Conference here in Geneva.

(The speaker continues in English.)

How can I express the feelings? There are moments in life that stay in your heart forever, and this most certainly one of them. The feeling is gratitude, gratitude with open arms. I am overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude, and I feel blessed by your words and your sentiments. I have to say that, throughout the Conference, you have expressed, in a thousand ways, in private and public, incredible levels of affection. You have showered me with generosity and warmth. Yes, you have chosen to let me know what you feel, in the corridors, in receptions, in group meetings, in the most informal of ways. You have transmitted warm friendship, respect and most importantly, a fantastic amount of positive energy. It is a gift in the most profound sense, and it is a gift of energy, a shot in the arm, a feeling of being accompanied by friends, by close friends, as I move into my next stage of life. Thank you, thank you enormously for that, because you are telling me I can go, feeling the connection you are giving me in this Conference. I cannot imagine a better way to conclude this Conference. I have to thank all of you very much, collectively and individually.

Of course, there have been problems. How could it be otherwise? But in the end, I saw, I sensed, I felt, that you wanted a Director-General who could project the ILO with tripartism behind him. I also have to say that, in performing my functions, you gave me the space to propose, to suggest, to invent, sometimes to go beyond, much beyond the boxes in which we have to think, or the way that prevailing policies tell us to think.

You took the decisions, the governance system took the decisions, but you let me fly and, sometimes we flew together, and sometimes I flew because you inspired me, because there were ideas you had that you wanted us to develop. Particularly, for example, the reaction that we had to the global crisis, which came specifically from the Employers' group, very much interested in making that happen. I could quote the Workers' group on globalization, and so many others, it was an interaction, an inevitable interaction between myself and you. I never felt constrained, I never felt, "be careful, do not say this". Of course, you have to manage things in the tripartite system, but the essence of the ideas that I wanted to transmit to you, I was able to do so.

So, thinking about all of this, I also want to thank you for having elected me. You elected me with a very large majority, about 80 per cent of the votes at the time, and you have re-elected me twice. Thank you so much, I cannot just thank you for the words you have said today, I have to thank you for the reason I am here. Thank you very much for that.

Another thing that I have to thank you for is that you also respected my origins. You know that I have been a proud representative of the South, heading the Organization. I am very proud of my origins. I am very Chilean, I am strongly Latin American, I am clearly “developing country”, but I am also a global citizen, capable of interpreting the needs of ILO’s multicultural tripartism. Again, thank you for that, because I think that I brought that view, I brought that experience, I brought the feelings that you have when you do come from the developing world.

Another central element in my life here with you is that you draw on the legacy of those that came before. This is something that sort of develops over time. You begin to feel it, it begins to grow on you, you realize, “Yes, yes, I am the ninth Director-General. There was an eighth, and a seventh”, and then you go back to Albert Thomas, and you have this feeling of continuity, this baton that is passed to you, and that you have to run the race, and you have to run the race inside the lanes, so you are not disqualified. Those lanes are very simple. Those are the values of the ILO, those are the values of the Constitution. There is a moment at which you have that feeling very, very strongly, that none of what you are doing came out of thin air. That everything that you are doing is based on what Albert Thomas did. Can you imagine promoting labour Conventions, when in order to get to Chile, which he did, he had to take about 30 something days, by ship? Sometimes we feel the difficulty of what we are doing today, imagine the difficulty of selling this new notion of this funny institution which was tripartite, in the 1920s. So, yes, you do feel this connection really strongly.

I would like to quote to you a rather long quote. I am quoting myself here, but there is a method in the madness, let me put it that way. Let me talk to you about something that I feel is fundamental to who I am: “I believe that institutions, like people, have values. The ILO is an institution founded on the values of social justice and the promotion of dignity at work. I identify deeply with this goal. I believe that life without values has no meaning. Ideals are the very backbone of our spirit. Conviction is the energy that moves society forward, that moves us forward as human beings. Even with our different cultures and spiritual traditions, we are all inspired by higher values. I believe profoundly in the need to approach problems through the eyes of the people. I believe that the world needs greater sensitivity towards others, towards those who are different, towards those who have been excluded.

At the same time, we must be realistic in the way that we proceed. Idealism alone, without proper organization, without a framework for action, is just a dead letter, whereas idealism combined with a capacity to act, to generate consensus, to yield agreements, is an idealism that can have a positive impact on reality. That is why we must maintain a sense of reality, and act within what is actually possible. If I had to give you an image, I would say that we must join the hand of what is possible with the hand of what is hoped for, the hand of what is feasible, with the hand of what is necessary.

We need to be capable of bringing together these two facets. But, of course, whenever a new idea is proposed someone is going to say it cannot be done. And yet we know that what is impossible today will be possible tomorrow. We know that things are

happening in the world today that 30 years ago appeared unattainable – and yet they have happened.

Let me conclude therefore by saying that this task – that of making expectations coincide with what is possible – points us in the right direction of doing everything possible to reduce the gap between the time when something is considered impossible and the time it is shown to be possible. There will always be difficulties, questioning and doubts. But the essence, the strength, the justification of this cohesive, creative tripartism will be its ability to reduce the waiting time between hope and reality.

Dear friends, this is from my inaugural speech to the ILC in 1999. This is what I said, the day, 13 years ago, when I was standing here for my first speech. The reason that I brought it back, was to say this has been the essence of what we have done together. We have tried, precisely through the values of the ILO, to bring expectations closer to feasibility, hope closer to reality, to show that at least we can do it in terms of the decision-making that we do here.

Consequently, together with recalling the values and a method of work, I also quoted that because, I have to tell you, I loved the journey. I loved the journey with you, because it was fun, because we did prove that certain things were possible, because the decent work saga was exhilarating and continues ahead, but most of all, because we did it together. Everything you mentioned today, everything, we did it together. It was a shared vision. It was a shared mission and it was a shared conviction to make the ILO more relevant in the world of today. And we were a team.

I remember in the Workers’ group, Bill Brett, Sir Roy Trotman, Luc Cortebeeck now, in the Employers’ group, Rolf Thüsing, Daniel Funes de Rioja. In every regional group, I have to thank every one of you who spoke for your regional groups, with each one of you, I have had a special relationship, and that is a very particular thing for a Director-General. I could feel the heartbeat of every one of you, which were not the same, they are not the same realities, but you permitted me to connect and I also have the will and the necessity to connect. So let me thank all of you. I have visited, as you know, all of the groups informally during this Conference, but this is a very important formal moment. That relationship with the groups was absolutely essential in my shaping the thinking of the proposals that I would be putting forward to you.

Inside the ILO, there was a special chemistry between the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference, which performed the governance function, and the Office which performs the servicing function. And that chemistry happened. It happened in many ways and it happens in very different places. When I speak about teams, I have to speak about the ILO teams, the ILO is full of teams that relate to you, at home, in terms of issues, in terms of different subjects, in terms of the Decent Work Country Programmes – everything that we do at the country and the regional level, that relates to you as a Conference. One of the most important moments in the life of the ILO is the International Labour Conference, you cannot imagine everything that happens behind the scenes, so that your work is done in the most impeccable of circumstances as far as the process goes, as far as the backing the Office can give you, there is an enormous amount of work behind the scenes. I want to thank all of those

teams, in the regions and at headquarters, servicing this Conference.

Let me also say that I would not have been able to do the sort of things I have done without the close advisors that I had in Cabinet. I have to symbolize that in María Angélica Ducci (Daniel beat me to it there!). She has helped me marshal the capacities of the House with enormous efficiency, grace and sense of humour. And if I can say it in Spanish:

(The speaker continues in Spanish.)

She has been my right hand all these years. Her tireless energy, her intelligence and her joie de vivre made my term in office much lighter work. Very many thanks, María Angélica.

(The speaker continues in English.)

Let me also say, I feel that I have not only aged these 13 years, I also feel that I have grown. And I think that we have grown together. I think that we can feel it, in the way we speak about the ILO today, the way we sense the ILO, the way we can speak and present it in different places in the world. In the process, my interaction with you made me better. I want to thank you for that, because it implies getting out of yourself the best that you have, trying to serve as best you can, making the teams work, making us think together, having that passion become something practical and concrete, as I was saying at the beginning. I feel very blessed by what this relationship has been and the sort of things that it has left me, and the sort of things that you have made me feel.

Let me also say, when we are talking about teams, what I said on the first day of this Conference, how much I admire and respect Guy Ryder. He will be a great Director-General, of that, I have no doubt. He knows the House, he knows the ways of tripartism, he is a consensus builder. But also, he is a man of vision and values, and I have seen him up close. I have no doubt you will support and empower him to lead the ILO to its future destinies.

But also, I have to say, you have achieved another first with the election of Guy Ryder, because he is the first person that comes with a background from the Workers' group, and I think that this first can only enrich the Organization. As I was the first who came from a developing country, the first one to come from a workers' organization will enrich this Organization. I want to thank you for that election and also to celebrate Guy, who is here with us.

Let me also say, as I am moving to my next station, that in looking at the way I have done things, the way we have done things, some conclusions come to my mind. Let me just share them with you, ways of looking at issues and problems. The first one will not surprise you. Act with convictions and values – things that you believe in. Be ambitious when you conceive and careful when you implement. Listen to others, but not to cynics. There is no substitute for teamwork. To be multilingual and multicultural is good. Be proud of your identity, but also respect differences. Acknowledge people's work, regardless of rank or importance. Think of yourself and think of others at the same time. Persevere – do not give up, but also know when to stop. Be self-assured and humble at the same time. Be resilient, because fortunes change, and it is not always a successful road ahead. It is all right to be uncertain. Do things seriously, but do not take your-

self seriously. Your personal life is more important than your professional life. Connect with your inner self. Know yourself. Be careful if you are not the image that you project. And finally, it is all right if you are not always the leader. Now, let me say, I have not necessarily always followed this guidance – I am a perfectly imperfect human being. So I want to say to Adriana Santa Cruz, my wife, who has maybe suffered from the fact that I have not been perfectly coherent with what I just said:

(The speaker continues in Spanish.)

She gives me companionship, inspiration, advice, direction, she always tells me what she is thinking, she makes me think and we think together; much of what I am is, without a doubt, thanks to her.

(The speaker continues in English.)

Let me finish by saying, I have decided to advance my departure, but you can understand that, in a way, the ILO does not continue to be in my heart of hearts. Let me quote the letter that I wrote to the Governing Body when I announced that I was advancing my departure, saying that I would exercise all my responsibilities as Director-General until the day I leave and then when the time comes, I would organize an appropriate handover to my successor, and as I informed you long ago, we are already doing that very, very well with Guy. I said, "From then on, I will continue to be active on national issues and international affairs but at a more paced rhythm. And always and forever, I shall be at the service of the International Labour Organization and its values, which I so deeply respect. I have come to love our Organization in so many ways I would never have imagined when you elected me for the first time. Lifelong friendships and relationships have been born. Thank you for the confidence, the honour and the privilege."

And as I come to the end of this conversation with you, let me share with you two quotes which very much interpret what I feel now. One is from Rumi, the Persian Poet, who says: "When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy". I think that this is what I felt throughout all these years – I felt that river, a felt a river moving through me, and I felt a joy and I said that I enjoyed the journey, I very much felt it. And then another one, which is anonymous, that says, "You never leave someone behind, you take part of them with you and leave part of yourself behind", and I think that that is also going to be very true. And if I am quoting, let me switch to Spanish because I will also quote Pablo Neruda in this context. In one of his writings, he says,

(The speaker continues in Spanish.)

"I have been a lucky man. To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life." And I want to tell you that I shall be taking that fire with me in my heart, it will be at the centre of my memories of the ILO. Inevitably, slowly, I am now beginning to think about my new reality, my new circumstances, the reason we are leaving. As I have told many of you, this is to go home – a very deep desire to go home, so Chile, South America, Latin America, is very much on my mind. I would particularly like to thank Minister Matthei for being here. She handed me a letter from the

President of Chile, a beautiful letter about the work I have done here. I would like to thank my fellow Chileans who are up there, Chilean politicians, and all my Latin American friends, the Minister from Peru, thank you for your beautiful speech. Of course, what is starting to happen to me now is that I am slowly going to get my native language back, and I'll start speaking more in Spanish and less in English, which will also be a good balance in the future.

You have filled my heart at this Conference. You have said things, transmitted feelings, spoken to me in a way that I find deeply moving and will be part of what I said at the beginning. There are moments that stay with you throughout your life, that stay in

your heart forever and this moment is without doubt one of those, as has been this entire Conference. During the entire Conference you have been so affectionate towards me, thank you so much for that.

Thank to you all so much.

Original Spanish: The PRESIDENT

Thank you very much, Mr Somavia. On behalf of the Officers, I would like to offer you this modest gift in recognition of your tireless fight for social justice, human dignity and fundamental principles and rights at work.

I would like to thank all the speakers who have addressed this special sitting.

(The Conference adjourned at 5.45 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Page

Special sitting

Tribute to the Director-General of the International Labour Office.....	1
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