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Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General: Discussion

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Thursday, 31 May 2018, 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr Murad

Principles governing the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General

The President

It is my great pleasure to declare open the second sitting of the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference.

This morning, we shall begin the plenary discussion on the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General. These reports were presented in plenary on Monday of this week.

Before starting the discussion, I should like to make a call on all those who will speak on these reports to do so with both the openness and the dignity that are appropriate to the highest international body in the realm of social and labour-related matters.

Freedom of expression is a vital feature of the International Labour Organization. To exercise this freedom in a spirit of mutual respect, it is essential that all delegates use parliamentary language, respect the accepted procedure, refer only to the items under discussion and avoid raising any questions foreign to these matters. This discipline is necessary if we want our work to be effective and successful.

Please note that the duration of speeches is limited by the Standing Orders of the Conference to five minutes only, corresponding to approximately three typewritten double-spaced pages. This time limit will be strictly applied. It is therefore strongly recommended that delegates reduce courtesies to a minimum.

The lectern is equipped with a timing device which allows speakers to see how much time they have left. With a view to transparency, and because respect for time-keeping is a collective responsibility, the timing display is also projected onto the two screens facing the plenary hall, so that delegates in the room are able to see the speaking times as well.

This will also enable delegates speaking further down the list to see how fast progress is being made and to prepare themselves for making their presentations.

I should point out that this strict time limit does not apply to the statements by the Employer and Worker spokespersons as they open the general debate with their group statements.

Every delegate will have the right of reply if he or she feels there is a need to respond in the event that his or her government, or the organization they represent, has been challenged. In such cases, delegates must inform the President of the sitting, before that sitting finishes, that they wish to exercise their right of reply. Please make such requests by coming up to the podium and informing the Clerk. The Clerk will transmit the request to the President, who will agree with the delegation concerned on a time at which the reply will be made.

The reply should refer only to the point under debate. It should not exceed two minutes, and it should be delivered in correct parliamentary language. Please keep in mind that it is not practice in our Organization to allow replies to replies.

If there is no objection, may I take it that these arrangements are agreeable to the Conference?

(It is so decided.)

Without further ado, we shall now open the discussion on the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.

Statements by the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Conference

Mr Mdwaba

Employer (South Africa), Chairperson of the Employers' group

I would like to thank the Director-General for preparing and submitting his Report, *The Women at Work initiative: The push for equality*. It is very comprehensive and is provoking great discussion among us all on the topic of gender equality. Overall, the Report paints a rather negative picture of women in the world of work and emphasizes the prevalence of unfairness at work and within social structures. We cannot deny the important challenges faced worldwide with regard to gender discrimination in society and in the workplace.

As I stated in my opening address, there is no doubt that a lot still needs to be done to deal with double standards for men and women in the workplace, as well as hypocritical attitudes towards women by society as a whole. But due recognition of the considerable progress that has been achieved over the past decades as a result of national and international efforts, in particular in those countries that have approached this challenge as a societal one, is called for. Therefore we must guard against painting a generic negative picture of the situation.

While we always provide examples and corroboration of our positions as a group, there are those who feel that we do not make them crystal clear so here goes. According to the annual *Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)* for the period 2016–17, “[a]round the world, empowered women are achieving visible progress”. This report cites various achievements which have resulted from 72 laws that have been adapted or amended to strengthen women’s rights in 61 countries. The World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2017* tracks the evolution of the Global Gender Gap Index since 2006 by geographic region. It highlights local progress towards gender parity over the past decade in regions such as Western Europe, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although more work needs to be done, all of the world’s regions have recorded a narrower gender gap than the one observed 11 years ago. The World Bank has found that between 1990 and 2017, the percentage of women participating in the workforce increased in a considerable number of developing countries, such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Botswana, Chile, Djibouti, Gabon, the Gambia, Haiti, Iraq, Mali, Namibia, Pakistan and Senegal, as well as in the least developed countries, the sub-Saharan African countries and the low-income countries. In the developed countries, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Report on the*

Implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations, women's labour force participation rates have moved closer to men's rates over the past few decades.

With regard to ILO interventions on gender equality, a considerable amount of constituent funding under the regular budget or specific development cooperation projects has been allocated to the promotion of gender inclusion over the past few decades. Rather than a general reference to a guide to best practices, we had hoped to see detailed information on success stories to inspire those who are not fully aware of the challenges faced by women and encourage them to make positive changes. Consultation with our Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) would have helped to ensure that these examples were included for balance, particularly in light of ACT/EMP's 2015 *Global Report on Women in business and management: Gaining momentum*, which highlights a number of company examples of good practice and ways in which employers' organizations are taking the initiative in their own governance structures. This Report will be updated for the ILO centenary next year as a demonstration of the importance that we attach to this matter.

Let me highlight a few important points. Employers globally are fully committed to women's continued progress as a critical talent pool. We fully agree with the Director-General on the need for a new push for equality. We must also emphasize payment parity as part of this push and include our youth in the process of ensuring that work in the future is characterized by changed attitudes that concomitantly contribute to a better world in this regard.

At yesterday's update on the work of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, I mentioned that this is a point that my daughter likes to stress with me all the time, so I have to put it in and make sure that she knows that we do bear these things in mind and we do listen. Those of you who also attended the briefing on the Global Commission are aware that we will be looking forward to the Commission's report for ideas on how we can craft a better future in this respect because that, too, should help us decide how to move forward.

The ILO must provide a much more ambitious contribution to gender inclusion. It is not just the right thing to do; it is also a powerful step towards improving productivity. A large number of women are now better positioned on the labour market thanks to businesses' efforts to invest in fair recruitment, compensation and promotion policies, adopt flexible working-time schemes and establish other internal human resources policies on matters such as care facilities.

Businesses are changing their approach to recruitment, promotion and workplace culture. These efforts also aim to improve women's access to top managerial positions. At the same time, employers' organizations are progressively prioritizing gender equality, offering services on women's entrepreneurship, working with public institutions and stakeholders to narrow the gender gap in education and training, and developing evidence-based approaches to and research on women in business and management.

The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and ACT/EMP are working intensively in this area and, as a result, best practices are being shared and advocated among employers' organizations. I would also like to highlight that this is a shared responsibility: public institutions; the private sector, through employers' organizations; workers' organizations; communities; and other stakeholders all have a role to play. A collective effort to address a global challenge is needed. There are many ways to address this challenge, but one thing we are sure of is that a mere legal approach which just adds burdens and shifts responsibilities to companies has proved to be counterproductive.

Alongside legislation, public authorities need to design effective incentives and a policy mix that supports this effort. This is linked to the point made in the Report with regard to employers who shoulder maternity protection costs. Laws on this issue have made hiring a

woman more costly than hiring a man. Again, we must find novel ways of doing things in order to effect change. It is imperative that we learn from what has not worked in the past and ensure a better future for our people.

At this juncture, I would not favour the use of the expression “non-standard forms of employment” as opposed to “standard employment”. This is no longer useful, because, among other things, it fails to acknowledge the key role of diverse forms of employment in promoting equal opportunity. It fails to acknowledge new methodologies associated with the world of work into which we have moved. Without, of course, pre-empting the future Report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, this issue has been raised repeatedly by constituents and we must change in order to recognize it and not be stuck with the useless labels of the past.

In relation to the future of work, we would like to propose that the ILO conduct additional research and, of course, pay attention to the rich discussions that we are having in the Global Commission on the Future of Work on ways to assess how the digital economy is empowering women’s purchasing and decision-making power, enabling women and men to afford care services and, eventually, allowing women to transition to more formal workplaces.

In terms of ILO programme implementation for 2016–17, given the length of my intervention at the Governing Body’s March session, which was quite comprehensive, I would just like to highlight the main points for the next biennium report.

We would like to see an improved analytical framework using appropriate measurement tools so that trends, changes and impact will have a stronger narrative. We would also like to see an improved financial analysis and clarity on how approved budgets are implemented. We are, of course, encouraged by the fact that our colleagues in the Office have taken in what we said and confirmed this in the discussions at the most recent meeting of the Finance Committee. We heard, only a few days ago, that they are making changes in order to reflect our concerns.

We appreciate the Appendix to the Report of the Director-General, entitled *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, as well as the ILO delegation’s mission to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Israel and the occupied Syrian Golan. We take note of the negative economic situation of Palestinian workers; unemployment is rising with an overall rate of 27.4 per cent and female unemployment at a staggering 47.4 per cent. In view of the decline in international aid in recent years, we call on the international community to increase financial support with much more ambition and determination. We encourage both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to engage in effective dialogue through a concerted effort to achieve substantive improvement in the business environment that will be conducive to solid job growth. The Employers’ group would like to insist on the lifting of restrictions on economic activity in order to effectively enable businesses to operate and contribute to economic growth in the region.

As the Employers’ group has stated in the past year, the ILO should embark on large-scale technical assistance within the framework of the flagship programme on fragile States and disaster response. We should intensify our efforts to support the labour law reform processes through tripartite partnerships and consultations and provide technical support and advice on the skills development of Palestinian workers. The Employers’ group encourages the ILO to build the capacities of all constituents.

Ms Passchier

Worker (Netherlands), Chairperson
of the Workers' group

Today, we are discussing the Director-General's Report on the Women at Work initiative, whose title very appropriately refers to "the push for equality". Progress is at a snail's pace, and in many places we even see a backlash. So, we certainly need to do more and better if we do not want to have a similar discussion at the second centenary of this house.

There have been many advances for women in the world of work over the past century. The most visible change has been the feminization of the workforce in remunerated employment. Women's participation in the labour market has increased exponentially since the Second World War and now stands at around 50 per cent. Globally, many countries have implemented measures aimed at reducing or eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace.

The ILO has a long track record of addressing equality and non-discrimination and the rights and needs of women workers. However, women continue to lag behind in the world of work. This is not due to overall poorer qualifications or skills, as women are increasingly performing better than men. However, in many ways women's participation in the labour market is still seen as supplementary. Supplementary, that is, to their roles as spouses, mothers and carers.

Somehow, these roles, even for women who do not perform them in practice, determine our chances of a steady job and income, a career and a position of leadership, and ultimately a proper pension. This translates into occupational segregation and gender wage gaps that continue to persist in all regions, but also into violence against women and girls, both at home and in the workplace.

In recent times, matters have become worse, especially in the regions most affected by the economic crisis. Labour-market participation rates for women are now stagnating or declining. Certain policies introduced in recent years, particularly in Europe following the collapse of the world's financial markets, have challenged the robustness of gender equality policies.

Since 2009, we have seen an alarming rise in income inequalities. Women continue to predominate in informal work, and precarious, low-skilled and low-paid jobs with poor labour and social protection are on the rise again. Poverty continues to wear a female face and young women and migrant women are particularly affected.

We have seen an acceleration in the State's withdrawal from the provision of vital public services, and also from its role as an employer, including the care services on which women so heavily depend in order to access decent work. The promotion of equal sharing of family responsibilities, adequate maternity protection and equal pay appear to have taken a back seat in both public policies and macroeconomic policies.

Attacks on fundamental trade union rights have been part and parcel of the backward trend. In recent times, trade unions have managed to secure gender equality provisions in collective agreements and, by organizing themselves into unions and taking collective action, vulnerable groups of workers have tried to improve their situation. In many trade unions around the world, this has translated into increased female membership.

However, the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, including the right to strike, which are more and more being claimed and utilized by women workers and in female-dominated industries such as the garment sector and tourism, are

coming under increasing pressure. Violence and harassment against women in the world of work remains a pressing challenge and a significant barrier to the realization of women's rights.

On this occasion, looking forward to the centenary of the ILO, we strongly support the message in the Director-General's Report that it is high time to go beyond "business as usual".

Indeed, we may have reached the limits of what we can do from a mere equality perspective. Until now this has too often resulted in declaring women equal to men and expecting them to compete in the world of work on male terms, without addressing the contradictions arising from this approach.

We must look into a more transformative approach that allows both women and men to develop all their talents and capacities and to take on multiple roles in life, as workers, parents and carers, and which demands that companies, public institutions and workplaces be more responsive to change and diversity.

It is not women that need to be "fixed", but the social and economic systems and institutions that shape our lives and the world of work.

This is not to say, as the report rightfully stresses, that the experiences and tools of the past should be jettisoned. Rather, they need to be complemented by new and innovative approaches. To achieve this, the Director-General suggests five building blocks, and let me briefly touch on each of them.

But before doing so, let me emphasize that all these building blocks are interrelated, such that only by addressing them all at the same time in a proactive and integrated manner will we bring about the necessary progress.

The first one is: *A high road to a new care economy*. At the heart of much of the inequality faced by women lie constraints revolving around care responsibilities and women's reproductive roles. Assumptions about women's roles and place in society profoundly affect how women participate in the workforce, including the type of work they do, the positions they hold, the quality of their jobs, their career opportunities and their wages.

The need to juggle caring responsibilities with income-generating activities, combined with the lack of appropriate frameworks or facilities to support and reconcile work and care, often leads women into low quality part-time work or casual or informal work arrangements.

Without tackling this dominant care paradigm or, as the report puts it "the time-money-agency conundrum", we will not make the necessary progress towards a more just and gender-equitable world of work.

The Workers' group agrees with the report's conclusion that a new care economy, grounded in decent work, can contribute significantly in the push for equality. While much of the focus of the future of work is placed on the impact of rapidly evolving technologies, the care economy will be one of the fastest growing sectors of the future. Adequate investment in the care economy can boost women's labour force participation rates and help close gender gaps, by improving pay and conditions in the care sector and enabling working women and men to better reconcile work and family responsibilities. The challenge is to ensure that the jobs created are decent.

If we take this priority seriously, we must promote investment in care services and in the working conditions of care workers, create the necessary fiscal and budgetary space, and

make quality care services an integral component of comprehensive national social security systems.

The second building block is: *Strengthening women's control over their time*. The very first standards of the ILO were about working time. Reducing working time was seen as a key factor, not only in promoting the health and safety of workers, but also in ensuring that they live a decent life outside work.

In the early days of working-time regulation there was little recognition of the household and care obligations that workers, especially females, also had to manage. In more recent times, the increased labour market participation of women has led to a number of challenges which until now have only been addressed in a piecemeal manner. In many countries, new so-called flexible working arrangements have emerged, some in collective agreements but many more outside any protective framework, which are said to provide greater flexibility and autonomy to workers. Especially where this flexibility is combined with precarious and non-standard employment relationships, without the worker having any influence on the scheduling of hours, the result is irregular and unpredictable working hours that are detrimental to the worker's physical and mental health and work-life balance. The emerging evidence is that the same is true for work in the platform or gig economy, where new technologies make every hour of the day and night a potential working hour, while the workers are falling outside any protective framework.

The reflections we are called on to make at this year's Conference on the General Survey concerning working-time instruments – *Ensuring decent working time for the future* may provide important pieces of the jigsaw and lead to guidelines for the ILO to act upon. It is clear that workers need working hours that can be adapted to their needs: predictability of schedules, guaranteed minimum hours of work and limitations on excessive working hours, as well as a real say, through social dialogue and collective bargaining, in choosing how their working time is arranged. These are all necessary to the push for equality that would give working women autonomy and control over their time, work and life.

As a first step, the ILO and its constituents should recognize that there are already quite a number of useful instruments available that could be promoted and more fully utilized, such as the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175).

The third building block is: *Valuing women's work fairly*. The Workers' group welcomes the important work of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, which adopted, in 2013, a ground-breaking resolution defining unpaid care work as work and making women's contribution to the economy, in all its dimensions, more visible. This is an important step towards addressing the persistent undervaluation of women's work.

The Workers' group is also encouraged by the formation of the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), led by the ILO, the OECD and UN Women, with the aim to accelerate progress towards closing the gender pay gap by 2030, in fulfilment of target 8.5 and Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda.

The Director-General's Report provides for two responses: the first is to further develop the statisticians' methods to accurately evaluate women's contribution to the economy and society; the second is to focus on more transparency with regard to pay differences between women and men and consider methods to require companies to take action to bring about concrete improvements.

Although these are useful steps, the Workers' group, taking into account that much has been attempted already on this important topic, would like to see more comprehensive and effective actions that make stronger links between and with the other building blocks, such

as ensuring better pay for care work and addressing the over-representation of women in precarious and non-standard forms of employment that have a detrimental effect on their income.

The fourth, and not least important building block is: *Raising the voice and representation of women*. The Director-General's Report rightfully draws attention to the importance of "agency", meaning the possibility for women to raise their voice and be heard. We cannot stress enough the importance of the two most fundamental labour rights, namely the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and of the need to ensure that these enabling rights are fully accessible by and respected on behalf of women.

We in the trade unions are fully aware of the need to modernize and adapt our policies and structures to represent both women and men more equally in the world of work and to stand up for women's rights and interests and put pressure on the abovementioned agenda for structural change. Let me tell you that increasingly we are succeeding in doing so. When recently in South-East Asia, I was struck by the number of young, strong and inspired women trade unionists leading their sisters and their unions towards improved living and working conditions in their workplaces and countries.

We thus fully support the call by the Director-General to reinforce the ILO's efforts to have women's views, perspectives and interests taken up across the whole range of its activities, including in development cooperation. This should be coupled with a call on the ILO constituents to step up their efforts to include women in their delegations and in the work of the ILO. In addition, we would like to see more action and activity on all sides to enhance prospects for women to take up positions of leadership.

This brings me to the final building block, and I can be brief here because we are discussing it currently in this Conference: *Ending violence and harassment*. In the future of work that we want, there is no space for violence and harassment against women, or indeed anybody else, nor for unfair treatment or unequal opportunities due to gender. We are looking forward to successful outcomes from the debate that is currently taking place in the Standards Setting Committee on violence and harassment at work.

In conclusion, there can be no future of work without women at work, and the future of work must be one in which women and men are different but equal. As we prepare to celebrate 100 years of the Organization and its laudable record of being at the vanguard of the push for gender equality, we must ensure that we do not take another 100 years to achieve this reality.

A final word on the Appendix to the Report by the Director-General on which I have already spoken in my opening statement to the Conference, namely that concerning the dire situation of Palestinian workers, men and women in the occupied territories. We believe that the ILO has a very important role to play in this context.

(The Conference continued its discussion of the Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.)