



Governing Body

309th Session, Geneva, November 2010

GB.309/9

FOR DECISION

NINTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference

Oral report by the Chairperson

1. The Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference met on 12 November 2010. Ambassador Farani Azevêdo (Government, Brazil) was Chairperson, while Mr Daniel Funes de Rioja and Sir Roy Trotman were Employer and Worker spokespersons, respectively.
2. The Working Party had before it a consolidated paper¹ on improving the functioning of the Governing Body, based on concepts and proposals that had been under discussion by the tripartite consultative group and prepared in response to the request of the group at its last meeting, held on 18 October 2010. The paper was submitted on the understanding that all documents and ideas submitted since the start of the process remained on the table and that no part of the debate had yet been concluded. This principle was reiterated by the Chairperson and agreed by all participants. The Chairperson also reminded members that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed. She stressed the need to combine timely decisions with mature discussions, which ensured all tripartite constituents would be comfortable with the outcome. The consolidated paper was well received by the Working Party, which felt that the paper constituted a useful attempt to bring together the views that had been put forward. There was consensus that it provided a good basis for the Working Party to continue its work. It was further reiterated that any reform had to remain within the ILO Constitution. There was consensus within the Working Party that the structure of the Governing Body should be closely aligned to the strategic objectives of the Organization and to the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.
3. The Chairperson proposed that the Working Party should open with brief general statements on the reform process and then proceed to take the report in sections, making specific and detailed comments on each chapter. The Working Party concentrated its attention on chapters B (Main directions of a potential reform), C (An improved agenda-setting mechanism) and D (A new structure for the Governing Body), but time constraints limited progress and sections E (Enhanced transparency and Office support to the tripartite

¹ GB.309/WP/GBC/1.

constituents) and F (Better document presentation and time management) were not taken up, while section D required further consideration.

4. The Worker spokesperson stressed that the aim of the reform was to improve the governance function of the Governing Body, and that this should include an improved method of following up on previous decisions. The group continued to favour the approach in which a Governing Body plenary was supported by a committee structure. The four strategic objectives should be covered in a balanced manner. Some reorganization of the committees might be necessary and the group was flexible in this area, but it was essential to avoid an unstable, unpredictable structure. Care should be taken not to allow issues that were critical to the Workers to disappear, nor should the rights of the group be diminished. In attempting to raise the level of strategic and policy debate, possibly through a system of panels or invitations to high-level guest speakers, the basic purpose of the Governing Body, which was to give guidance and oversight to the ILO, should not become secondary. The group opposed any suggestion that uniform time limits should be set for debates: it was important that the Governing Body continued to discuss complex issues in depth.
5. The Employer Vice-Chairperson said his group noted the concerns expressed by the Workers and was open to dialogue on these points. The present Governing Body was approaching the end of its mandate, and the experience it had acquired over the three years should enable it to deal effectively with the reform. There were gaps in the structure of the Governing Body as it stood, and these had to be filled. The group favoured an approach in which the Governing Body met in one continuous plenary session, divided into thematic segments, aligned to the four strategic objectives. This approach would avoid dealing with the same issues in several different structures. He underlined the need for clear aims and stressed that the reform process should proceed without haste. Working through consensus was vital.
6. Speakers from the Government benches expressed broad consensus for an improved mechanism to allow the Governing Body to monitor follow-up on its previous decisions. This might take the form of a report of the Director-General. A further suggestion was that such information might be presented in tabular form. A distinction should be drawn between substantive and procedural decisions. Many Government representatives favoured an approach maintaining a structure of a Governing Body plenary supported by committees. Representatives expressed different points of view as to the precise redistribution of terms of reference of these committees. For example, it was felt that care should be exercised to prevent the mandate of the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee from becoming too diffuse. Some regional groups supported an independent Committee on Technical Cooperation. Whatever structure was decided on, care should be taken to ensure that lower profile issues were not lost. General appreciation was expressed with regard to the changes introduced in document presentation for the 309th Session of the Governing Body, which included a synopsis page and an executive summary. Many speakers recalled that the Working Party's mandate included improvements to the functioning of the International Labour Conference. Speakers from the Government benches underlined that during the March 2010 meeting all groups had supported a structure to provide increased support to their group within the Office and that further discussions were needed regarding its form. In order to inform these discussions, the Office was asked to produce a paper containing information about the mandate and scope of ACTRAV and ACT/EMP.
7. It was understood that the Committee on Freedom of Association would continue to be an individual entity. The Workers supported maintaining three two-day meetings annually, while the Employers supported two three-day sessions a year, but could be flexible on this issue.

8. There was consensus in the Working Party that an improved system for setting Governing Body agendas should be put in place, in the manner set out in the paper, including by reinforcing informal consultations and dialogue with tripartite constituents. Such a system should allow priority agenda items to be established and avoid duplication.
9. There was consensus in the Working Party that a road map for the period from November 2010 to March 2011 should be drawn up setting out a timetable for informal consultative meetings and an additional inter-sessional meeting of the Working Party, possibly to be held in February 2011, with a view to advancing consultations leading up to the 310th Session of the Governing Body and, if possible, presenting a clearer set of proposals at that session. This could enable potential reforms to be in place by the 312th Session of the Governing Body, with its new composition as elected in June 2011. The road map should concentrate on the points to be clarified, or which required further in-depth discussion.
10. *The Governing Body may wish to request the Office to draw up a road map setting out a timetable for informal thematic consultations, which would allow in-depth discussion, as well as an additional inter-sessional meeting of the Working Party, to allow concrete reform proposals to be submitted to the 310th Session (March 2011) of the Governing Body.*

Geneva, 16 November 2010