



**Special sitting**

Wednesday, 1 June 2011, 12.20 p.m.

*President: Mr Nkili*

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY TARJA HALONEN,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND**

*Original French: The PRESIDENT*

The International Labour Conference has the great honour of receiving today Her Excellency Ms Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland.

Ms Halonen is a friend of the ILO. We owe an awful lot to her. In particular, she co-chaired the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. Allow me to give the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr Juan Somavia, who will welcome and introduce her.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Your Excellency, people in the ILO feel really close to you and what you have contributed to this House. We welcome you as an honoured guest and a dear friend, and we are delighted that you could be present at the opening of this historic 100th Session of the International Labour Conference.

We share the conviction that a better world must be built on respect for human rights and democracy, and this has been the beacon you have carried as General Secretary of the National Union of Finnish Students, in your work as a trade union lawyer, your political career as a parliamentary aide, and later a Member of Parliament and as a government minister with portfolios ranging from social affairs and justice to foreign affairs – an incredible array of knowledge. Your unwavering commitment to justice and your dignified leadership, combined with your strong commitment to practical action, have led you to scale further heights, to reach the position you hold today.

In the first European country to grant women the vote, you were a pioneer. As the first woman to be elected President of Finland, your example speaks volumes at this Conference, which will discuss the issue of discrimination during this very session.

President Halonen, your pursuit of social justice has led to a strong engagement with the ILO. In 2002, as the backlash against globalization mounted, you agreed to co-chair the ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, together with President Benjamin Mkapa of the United Republic of Tanzania. Your steady hand helped to steer the Commission towards balanced and unanimous conclusions, founded on the principle of a fair globalization, and the role of decent work in achieving that objective. The Commission's analysis resonated when the economic and financial

crisis broke around us, and you did not hesitate to attend the ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis in 2009 to lend your support to the call for recovery with jobs and social protection within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda.

Finally, on a personal note, by taking a stand for human rights and democracy, you have also been a very good friend to my home country, Chile, particularly during the period of dictatorship.

Your Excellency, our Conference is about to get down to the business of improving the world of work and deliberating on the qualitative policy shifts needed to secure a new era of social justice and decent work for all. The distinctive combination of idealism and common sense, reflection and action, experience and forward thinking that you bring to this House, will be invaluable at the start of our proceedings.

*Ms Tarja HALONEN (President of the Republic of Finland)*

The establishment in 1919 of the International Labour Organization stemmed from the political desire to create common, international rules for reducing unhealthy competition between countries and working conditions and terms. The tripartite system has proved its strength and viability. Before the 100th International Labour Conference, which starts today, the ILO adopted a total of 188 Conventions. The principles of the Organization are based on the Declaration of Philadelphia. In today's global economy, these principles are even more topical than over 60 years ago. The Declaration of Philadelphia also stated that the ILO should promote social security programmes, in order to provide a basic income to all who need such protection. At this year's session of the Conference, we will discuss how social security can be guaranteed to all, not only to those in gainful employment, but also to those millions of people who have been excluded from the labour markets, or are otherwise trapped in the grey areas of the global economy.

At the beginning of the new millennium you, Director-General Juan Somavia, appointed a World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. I had, as you mentioned, the pleasure and challenge of co-chairing the World Commission, together with the then President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. By the way, he is also now today in Geneva. In accordance with ILO principles, the members of the World Commission represented the various dimensions of society. By recognizing these different starting points, and by listening to each other, we were able to produce a

unanimous report, which was then published in 2004. You might remember that those were the days when it was not so easy to agree on anything concerning globalization. I am happy that our work led to results at the United Nations World Summit in 2005 and also in 2008 the International Labour Conference adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. This now defines the strategic objectives of the ILO. On this basis, it has been possible to address the impact of globalization, including the requirements of access to decent work. For example, the regional organizations outside the European Union or the African Union have also done so.

The ILO has been active to ensure that issues of working life are taken into account in the debate on the global economy and now also in the work of the G20 countries.

The recent events in North Africa and in the Middle East have, once again, opened our eyes, or at least have the possibility to open our eyes, to see that the conflicts are emerging due to not only the lack of democratic human rights and the rule of law, but also the absence of social justice. In the Report to this Conference, you, Director-General Somavia, emphasized that the Organization's values and policies are needed more than ever. In your words, ILO policies contribute to a world with fewer tensions, greater fairness and strengthened security. So, the implementation of the trinity of sustainable development, economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development, would be the most effective way of achieving security. At the global level, the United Nations has worked to enhance positive development, in spite of the increased numbers of conflicts that it is requested, or expected, to resolve. Sustainable development would be a much better solution; both in terms of reduced human suffering and the economy. The UN High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, which I currently co-chair with the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, aims at finding models for global cooperation. We hope that sustainable development will have a genuine impact on people's everyday lives as soon as possible.

The ILO has a global goal in promoting human rights and establishing safer social and working life norms. The core Conventions adopted by the Organization remain highly topical, but still a great deal remains to be done with regard to national implementation in many parts of the world. In particular, more work is necessary to eliminate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour. The right of workers to associate and bargain must be further promoted. These basic rights must be represented when we look for the means to advance the global economy.

Dear participants, at this year's Conference we will discuss a Report on equality at work. The Report shows that many countries have made progress in increasing gender equality, especially in the public, political and institutional sectors. Nevertheless, women, especially those belonging to minorities and immigrant women, are still far too often the first to face the negative impacts of various crises and conflicts.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention and the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. The equal status of remuneration of women at work, however, continues to demand our full attention. Yet achieving sustainable development would simply require that we fully utilize the potential and resources of all people, men and women equally, then all human capital would exist.

Gender equality is a human rights issue. The same is true for the elimination of work discrimination and the eradication of racism. It is good that these topics are among the agenda issues of this year's Conference.

Dear friends, we know that governments have their responsibility but they cannot alone implement ILO objectives. The tripartite system is the special nature and the strength of the Organization. As all three parties have committed themselves to the ILO decisions, it is easier for all parties to also support and promote the national implementation processes in their own countries.

The Report of the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, which was mentioned here earlier, contains several recommendations. One of them was that work towards a fairer globalization begins at home. My own country, Finland, and other Nordic countries, or, as I call them very often, "Nordic Sisters", have based our systems on the welfare society model and despite that approach these countries are among the most competitive countries in the world or perhaps, and here I will whisper to you, it is just because of it.

Governments, labour market organizations and other key partners should agree on national measures which guarantee that the benefits of globalization can be fully utilized and that the challenges caused by globalization are addressed. If we fail to act at home, we cannot easily expect to have better progress at the international level. Close cooperation between different international organizations is essential so that we can create a strong direction for development. I consider that an intense interaction between such organizations as the ILO, UNCTAD and the WTO, for instance, would provide a solid basis for the global solution. At the global level, we need better coherence among different objectives and access, and a common understanding on how to achieve our goals. Esteemed representatives of the Conference, I wish the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference and all the participants great success in your very valuable work in the coming days and weeks.

The International Labour Organization has a key role in the family of world organizations – people and the Decent Work Agenda are at the centre of your work. You have all my respect and trust.

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*Original French: The PRESIDENT*

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Madam President, we thank you most sincerely for your continued assistance and the powerful message you have just delivered to the Conference. I can assure you that it will be a source of inspiration during the course of our discussions.

*(The Conference adjourned at 12.35 p.m.)*



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