

Plenary sitting

Opening of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference

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Monday, 10 June 2019, 11.15 a.m.

Presidents: Ms Alfaro Espinosa, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and Mr Elmiger

Opening of the session

Ms Alfaro Espinosa

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)

It is my great honour as Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office to declare open this 108th Session of the International Labour Conference, at which we will celebrate the Centenary of our Organization's establishment. May I take this opportunity to extend to you all a warm welcome both to Geneva and to this Centenary Session of our Conference.

I am confident that this year's session – during which a large number of Heads of State and Government will honour us with their presence – and the outcomes that we hope will emerge from our work at the end of the next two weeks will live up to the expectations of the millions of citizens in the world who have placed their trust in us in the hope of achieving a better future of work for all.

Election of the President of the Conference

Ms Alfaro Espinosa

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)

Let us start with the election of the President of the Conference.

I give the floor to Mr Sadiqov, the Government representative of Azerbaijan and current Chairperson of the Government group, to put forward his group's nomination.

Mr Sadiqov

Government (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Government group

On behalf of the Government group, it is my honour to nominate His Excellency Mr Jean-Jacques Elmiger, Secretary of State of the Swiss Confederation, for the position of President of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference.

(The proposal is supported by the Employers' and the Workers' groups.)

Ms Alfaro Espinosa

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the
International Labour Office
(*Original Spanish*)

The nomination put forward by Mr Sadiqov has been duly proposed and seconded by the Employers' and the Workers' groups.

Are there any other proposals?

In the absence of other proposals, I have great pleasure in declaring His Excellency Mr Jean-Jacques Elmiger, Secretary of State of the Swiss Confederation, President of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference.

I offer Mr Elmiger my warmest congratulations and invite him to come up to the podium to take the President's Chair.

(Mr Elmiger, Secretary of State of the Swiss Confederation, is elected President of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference and takes the President's Chair.)

Presidential address

The President

(*Original French*)

You have placed your trust in me to preside over the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference, "our" Centenary Session. I thank you most sincerely, for this also brings honour to my country, Switzerland, a founding Member and the host country of the Organization.

Every year the International Labour Conference helps to further multilateralism as well as the reach of Switzerland and of Geneva as an international city. It is my wish that this tradition will continue beyond the ILO Centenary. I always say that the ILO is the home of social partnership and social dialogue, values that the Swiss also hold dear. The Conference is the global parliament of labour, affording member States and social partners a unique opportunity for responsible tripartite discussion of social concerns and matters affecting decent work across the world. This year, our Conference takes on a special format and is particularly significant. We are celebrating the Centenary of the ILO, and more especially 100 years of fighting for social justice in a more peaceful world.

Our predecessors broke new ground in 1919 in creating a tripartite international institution. They also showed unfailing political courage in developing international standards to implement fundamental principles and rights at work, which has had a lasting and positive influence on legislation relating to social well-being in every country of the world. Building on the solid foundations of its labour standards and development cooperation, the ILO is helping to put in place the international framework needed to establish equitable economic and social relations. Having been the first organization in the United Nations system immediately after the Second World War, the ILO fully deserved the Nobel Peace Prize awarded in recognition of its work in 1969. We must honour the ILO's founders and mission in charting its course through the future of work.

The capacity to create, or rather recreate, confidence in an environmentally responsible economic and social model is a matter which concerns all of us here. That model will enable innovative and responsible enterprises to create jobs with decent working conditions, allowing all stakeholders their fair share of the benefits from economic growth.

The agenda for this Conference session is very heavy. It will include discussion in plenary, by all the tripartite constituents, of the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, as well as many high-level visits. The Conference will also see the adoption of an ILO Centenary document in the form of a Declaration, the adoption of international labour standards for ending violence and harassment in the world of work, the adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21, the supervision of international labour standards, which is still the backbone of our institution and, finally, thematic debates and activities on the future of work.

The spirit of the ILO Centenary must imbue our work and our political commitment to the success of this Conference, which is pivotal not only for the ILO but for the international community, every government, every employer and every worker. The tripartism demanded by the ILO and accepted by its member States has survived many crises and economic or political developments. This model has been able to adapt to economic and social change. Faced with the challenges of a world of work in continual transition we shall be resolute, and willing to build consensus in order to advance the values of the ILO, all the while bearing in mind the words expressed so forcefully in the Declaration of Philadelphia: “labour is not a commodity”.

I shall do my best to guide our work in that spirit, and will spare no effort to ensure that this Conference is a success for everyone here.

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference

The President *(Original French)*

Our first task is to elect the Vice-Presidents of the Conference. I give the floor to Ms Dimitrova, the Clerk of the Conference, who will read out the names of the candidates proposed by the groups.

Ms Dimitrova The Clerk of the Conference

The nominations for the three positions of Vice-President of the Conference are as follows: for the Government group, Ms Izata (Angola); for the Employers’ group, Ms Mugo (Kenya); and for the Workers’ group, Mr Dimitrov (Bulgaria).

The President *(Original French)*

If there are no objections, may I take it that these proposals are approved?

(The proposals are approved.)

Nomination of the Officers of the groups

The President (Original French)

Let us move to the nominations of the Officers of the groups, who are, of course, autonomous in their choices. I draw your attention to the names of those concerned, as indicated below:

Government group

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Chairperson | Mr Sadiqov (Azerbaijan) |
| Vice-Chairperson | Mr Kadiri (Nigeria) |

Employers' group

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Chairperson | Mr Mdwaba (South Africa) |
| Vice-Chairpersons | Mr Echavarría Saldarriaga (Colombia) Ms Hornung-Draus (Germany) Mr Matsui (Japan) Mr Megateli (Algeria) Mr Robinson (United States) |
| Secretary | Mr Suárez Santos (International Organisation of Employers) |

Workers' group

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Chairperson | Ms Passchier (Netherlands) |
| Vice-Chairpersons | Ms Carvalho Francisco (Angola) Ms Liew Kiah Eng (Singapore) Mr Martínez (Argentina) Mr Thibault (France) |
| Secretary | Ms González (International Trade Union Confederation) |

Constitution and composition of the Conference committees

The President (Original French)

We will now move on to the constitution and composition of the standing and technical committees that will consider the different items on the agenda of the Conference.

As those of you who regularly attend the Conference will know, four standing committees are established every year: the Selection Committee; the Finance Committee of Government Representatives; the Committee on the Application of Standards; and the Credentials Committee.

In accordance with the proposal made by the Governing Body at its 335th Session (March 2019), the Selection Committee will be convened only if the need arises. The Conference must nevertheless appoint the members of this Committee. The Finance

Committee of Government Representatives is composed, as its name suggests, of all Government delegates to the Conference. There is no need to register for this Committee.

The Conference may also wish to establish two committees to examine the technical items on its agenda: the Committee of the Whole, to consider the draft ILO Centenary Declaration, and the Standard-Setting Committee: Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.

The composition of the Committees is communicated to participants on the Conference website as *Provisional Record No. 2*.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference approves these proposals?

(The proposals are approved.)

Suspension of certain provisions of the Standing Orders of the Conference and other proposed decisions regarding formalities

The President
(Original French)

We will now move to the next agenda item, which concerns proposed decisions to be taken at the opening sitting with regard to the suspension of certain provisions of the Standing Orders of the Conference and other proposed decisions regarding formalities.

The purpose of their suspension is to implement at this session the various changes in the format of the Conference proposed by the Governing Body in order to improve its functioning and, in particular, to accommodate its shortened length. Some of the suspensions relate to the work in plenary and others to the work in the committees.

With regard to other formalities, the Governing Body has recommended that the Conference should approve, at its opening sitting, all of the formalities necessary to set the Conference in motion, including some of the formalities dealt with in the past by the Selection Committee. These formalities include setting the closing date for the registration of speakers in plenary, approving the tentative plan of work for the Conference, adopting a number of suggestions to facilitate the work of the Conference and its committees, and authorizing the invitation of international non-governmental organizations to participate in committees.

These proposals are set forth in *Provisional Record No. 1*, which has been published on the Conference website.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference wishes to suspend the various provisions of its Standing Orders for the purposes set out in *Provisional Record No. 1*?

If there are no objections, may I also take it that the Conference endorses the procedural formalities set out in the second part of *Provisional Record No. 1*?

(The proposals are approved.)

Opening statement by the Director-General

The President *(Original French)*

We have now completed the necessary administrative and procedural tasks and can turn to questions of substance.

It is therefore my honour to call on the Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr Ryder, to present his vision of the work to be accomplished at this session of the Conference.

Mr Ryder Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference

“Despite all the misery of a world that is still divided and in turmoil, despite all the difficulty of peoples to meet and to know one another we believe that, through the ILO, social justice will be established in the world”.

The words of the ILO’s first Director-General, Albert Thomas, in 1926.

As I congratulate the President on his election – in recognition of Switzerland’s role as the ILO’s host and his personal contribution to our Organization – and as I welcome all participants to this Centenary Session, I think we might all reflect for a moment on these words. Because today there is still much division in the world, too much turmoil, and dialogue and understanding in and between countries seems frequently to elude us.

But the confidence in the ILO’s capacity remains. I have seen it. I have seen it expressed in member States throughout this Centenary year. It is shown by the more than 40 Heads of State and Government who will honour our Conference in the coming days and the presence of representatives of Governments, Workers and Employers here in this great world parliament of labour is its most concrete confirmation.

You are here because you share the vision and confidence of Albert Thomas and the conviction that it is within our grasp to generate the conditions for decent work for all, in which enterprises prosper, people succeed and societies progress.

This confidence matters. It is even vital. But alone it will not be enough. It needs to bring with it the political will to work together to produce results, and it requires us to bring creativity and innovation to everything that we do to advance our common cause.

The defining challenge of this Conference comes from the fact that the ILO’s Centenary coincides with the most profound and transformative process of change in the world of work that the ILO has seen throughout its history.

There is nothing in these changes which questions the relevance of the ILO’s mandate or detracts from its importance. Indeed, if anything, the reverse is true, because the uncertainties and insecurities of our time instead underline just how fundamental the achievement of social justice is to stability and to peace, and how vital access to decent work is to the advancement of human well-being.

We are not called here to review, revise or even add to the objectives which the ILO was established to pursue, this great social contract for peace and social justice. But we certainly do need to subject to rigorous examination exactly how we intend to realize those objectives. It is, to say the least, improbable, as the world of work is transformed by the

combined impact of technological innovation, demographic shifts, climate change and globalization, that our Organization would be best served by unreflecting business as usual. What worked well yesterday may not work tomorrow. Things we saw no need to do in the past we will need to address in the future – and that includes integrating environmental sustainability into all areas of the ILO’s activities.

In fact, this is a lesson of our history. To what does the ILO owe its longevity, its 100 years of uninterrupted activity which is unique in the international system? I think we owe it to three things.

First, we owe it to our mandate for social justice – because the human reflex for fairness and the respect of rights is universal and permanent. Second, we owe it to our tripartite composition – because it is surely no accident that when other purely intergovernmental organizations fell, the tripartite ILO alone survived. Lastly, we owe it to our constant capacity to adapt – to turn towards the challenges of change, rather than away from them.

It is true that much of the business of this session of the International Labour Conference resembles, in form at least, what we have done at our Conferences for decades. It would therefore be tempting to see that business as “routine”. But in fact it is more than that. By adopting new international labour standards to stop violence and harassment at work, this Conference will, of course, strike a blow against abuse which should offend the basic standards of decency of each and every one of us. We have to do this. But when we have done it, we will also have taken one further step in the ILO’s historic normative role of establishing international labour legislation. This was at the heart of the founding vision of our Organization and it must certainly stay there. Were it otherwise, the ILO would be diminished out of all recognition.

Setting the labour rules of the global economy is meaningful only if their application is effectively monitored. The ILO can be justifiably proud of the supervisory system it has built over the years into one of the most remarkable of the multilateral system. Certainly, holding member States to account for their obligations under ratified Conventions is not the easiest part of the ILO’s mandate; but there are few, if any, which are more important and we should all take care not to damage it.

Indeed, from the historical perspective of our Centenary we can see that this Conference will be cementing new bricks into the extraordinary edifice of achievement of the ILO’s normative work and carrying forward the cause of the rule of international law.

The decisions taken by our member States five years ago mean that this Centenary Session is dedicated above all to our future, and to the future of work. I think that there was wisdom in these decisions. Because the ILO’s own activities in this period, the 110 national tripartite dialogues on the future of work, the deliberations of the ILO’s Global Commission on the Future of Work, its inputs to the broader United Nations system, but, most strikingly, the hopes and concerns of citizens in all of our countries and their impact on national public life, demonstrate just how strongly people of all regions recognize in this debate on the future of work the challenges, opportunities, and choices which will be of extraordinary importance in determining the future direction of individuals, families, communities and societies.

This is no obscure, introverted, or self-indulgent exercise to mark 100 years of a venerable organization. This is about tackling the issues that most matter to people, at a moment when they see urgent need for answers and for action and our collective capacity to provide them is in question. At a time when people seem to feel the need to take back control of their lives, it is based on the proposition that whatever the power of the forces at work changing working lives so profoundly, in ways which are more quickly felt than understood, the fact is that the future of work is not pre-determined. It will not be decided for us, not by robots, not by artificial intelligence. These matter of course – and much else matters as well.

But the fact is that the future of work will be the result of our decisions, our choices, our capacity to follow up on them, our willingness to cooperate together to make the future of work the one that we want, and that is one which assures the continuity of the 100 year-old vision of the founders of the International Labour Organization and the aspirations of the citizens of the future through the constant advancement of decent work, of social justice and of peace.

The ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work has urged us all to take responsibility for this task. We will be honoured to hear from the co-chairs of that Commission, President Ramaphosa and Prime Minister Löfven, later today. As they and the Commission have summarized the challenge, it is for us to revitalize that social contract which was born with the ILO.

This Conference, uniquely, brings together those who can do what no others can. You are the right people – the representatives of Governments, Employers and Workers; you are in the right place – the ILO; and you are here at the right time – now! The declaration that you are called upon to negotiate and to adopt can be – but it depends on you – a crucial statement of intent, a strategic road map for the ILO, precisely because the future of work is the future of the ILO; it can be a mobilizing call to each of our member States; and it can be the platform for cooperation with our sister organizations of the international system.

In this regard, with the multilateral system under pressure and responding through deep reform in the United Nations in which the ILO is so actively engaged, we must surely be able to demonstrate that we are ready to lead in promoting greater coherence, coordination and common purpose between all those whose mandate impacts upon the world of work. That is called for by our common responsibilities to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is called for too by the simple fact that international organizations working, for example, in the fields of labour, of finance and of trade, have entirely compatible, complementary and interactive mandates.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres will join our Conference on its closing day. Could there be any better way of showing him the power and contribution that tripartism and social dialogue can bring to the reformed United Nations than an ambitious declaration on the future of work?

When all is said, it is clear in fact that the current session of the International Labour Conference is different from others.

Different because its decision must tell the world that we have the confidence, the common purpose, the will and the means to construct a future of work with social justice for all. I believe that is what we will do. We will do so because labour is not a commodity. We will do so because labour conditions with injustice, hardship and privation do imperil the peace and harmony of the world. We will do so because each human being does have the right to pursue their material well-being and spiritual development in freedom and dignity. We will do so because freedom of association and expression are essential to sustained progress. We will do all this together because poverty anywhere is a danger to prosperity everywhere. We will do it because the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of work obstructs other nations which wish to do so.

We will do so, we must do so, because this is the International Labour Organization, because we know what our past has been and we assume together responsibility for what our future must be.

The President
(Original French)

Thank you very much, Director-General, for presenting to us the key points of and challenges for our Conference. I am sure that the three groups gathered here will be guided by your message to this Centenary Session.

**Presentation of the report of the Chairperson
of the Governing Body**

The President
(Original French)

We will now proceed with the presentation of the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body for 2018–19. The report is presented as [Report I\(B\)](#). It is now my pleasure and my honour to call on the Chairperson of the Governing Body, Ms Alfaro Espinosa.

Ms Alfaro Espinosa
Chairperson of the Governing Body of the
International Labour Office
(Original Spanish)

Firstly, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the President, the Vice-Presidents and the Officers of the Conference on their election.

I would like to begin by reiterating my deepest appreciation to the Governing Body, as well as to the Government group, the Employers' group and the Workers' group of the whole International Labour Organization for putting their faith in me to hold this post. It has been a great honour for me, for my predecessor Mr Claudio de la Puente and for my government, the Government of the Republic of Peru, to have the privilege to hold the position of Chairperson of the Governing Body for the past 12 months, at such a significant time for the Organization.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, the Officers of the Governing Body, Ms Passchier and Mr Mdwaba, for the warm welcome that they extended to me when I arrived and I am grateful for the way that they have represented the interests of their respective groups while fulfilling their collective responsibilities as Officers of the Governing Body for the work of the ILO as a whole. In addition, I would also like to express my special appreciation to the Director-General, Mr Ryder, and his team, for their support and friendship. Lastly, but no less importantly, I would like to give special thanks to the incredibly valuable team at the Permanent Mission of Peru in Geneva, without whom my work would not have been possible.

The report that I present to you today, entitled *Report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body to the International Labour Conference for the year 2018–19*, Report I(B), addresses the activities of the Governing Body from June last year until today.

I do not intend to go into detail about all the Governing Body discussions over the past year. However, let me briefly mention some of our most significant achievements.

With regard to the governance role of the Governing Body, I believe that one of our most fruitful tasks has been the preparation for this session of the Conference. The Governing Body spared no effort to ensure that this session would be worthy of the event that we are commemorating this year, the Centenary of the founding of our Organization.

The establishment of the agenda for future sessions of the Conference was also satisfactory, since we were able to adopt decisions that will enable the Office to make the necessary preparations for those meetings, while also retaining the necessary room to include the outcomes of this session of the Conference in the future work of the Organization.

The second aspect of the Governing Body's work that I would like to draw your attention to pertains to the ILO standards supervisory system. I must highlight the significant progress that has been made with regard to the Standards Initiative, in particular its review since 2015 and the adoption of a work plan for the strengthening of the supervisory system. I would also like to note in a positive light that we still have several pending tasks relating to that fundamental ILO matter, which will require us to continue working in a tripartite manner to find agreement and consensus and achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Also relating to standards, last autumn, the Governing Body declared closed a complaint filed in 2012 under article 26 of the ILO Constitution concerning the application of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87).

Another of the noteworthy issues tackled by the Governing Body this year has been United Nations reform and the need for the ILO to be proactive in that process. The Governing Body thoroughly examined the reform process and, in particular, its potential consequences for the ILO. In that regard, we focused on how to preserve the fundamental aspects of our Organization such as tripartism and the specificity of our normative framework, among other things.

I cannot conclude my statement without making reference to the Programme and Budget proposals for 2020–21, which the Governing Body approved in March and is submitting to this session of the Conference. The adoption of the budget is always an important moment in the life of an organization. The budget that the Governing Body is submitting to the Conference has left room to accommodate the implementation of the outcomes of this session of the Conference in the work of the Organization during the next biennium.

I would like to conclude the presentation of my report on the activities of the Governing Body for the consideration of the Conference with a few brief reflections. Modern multilateralism is constantly evolving. In that context, the tripartism characteristic of this Organization has enormous potential to facilitate agreements that might be more difficult to achieve if they had to be negotiated solely among governments. That is the strength and the added value of our unique tripartite structure. Governments, employers and workers together must continue strengthening that potential.

The commemoration of the first Centenary of the International Labour Organization invites us to reflect upon the fundamental role that the ILO has had since its inception. That fundamental role is essentially dedicated to the protection of labour rights and the tireless work of building a world in which social justice prevails. In that regard, at this session of the Conference we have the important challenge, on the one hand, to adopt a declaration, the Centenary Declaration, which will address the future of work and of our Organization, and on the other hand, to draw up a normative instrument to end violence and harassment in the world of work.

The ILO deals with cross-cutting issues linked to the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals, so we must ensure that we continue to be the leading organization on those issues within the United Nations system, without losing sight of the focus of our attention, which is the human being and the need to create the conditions necessary for dignified and decent work.

In that regard, in addition to the outcome of this Conference, the future requires us to continue strengthening our society and our Organization so that we can face challenges such as self-employment, new forms of employment in the digital age, labour informality, competition and productivity, youth employment, the wage gap and gender equality, among other important issues that our Organization must tackle and continue to develop without fail in its second century.

It is my hope that we will get through this Centenary Session of the Conference together over the next two weeks.

The President
(Original French)

Thank you, Ms Alfaro Espinosa, for your presentation of the work carried out over the past year. As your report shows, the Governing Body has had a particularly busy year, and I would like to thank all the members of the Governing Body for their efforts to reach tripartite consensus on a significant number of issues.

I should like to congratulate you, and your predecessor, on behalf of the Conference, on your efficient guidance of the discussions of the Governing Body over the past 12 months. My congratulations are also extended to your Employer and Worker colleagues, and to all the members of the Governing Body.

**Opening statements by the Chairpersons
of the Employers' and Workers' groups
of the Conference**

The President
(Original French)

We will now hear the opening statements of the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups, who will present their groups' views in respect of the work of our Conference.

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

Good morning, *bonjour, buenos días, molweni, sanibonani, dumelang, asubuhi nzuri*. I am saying "good morning" in all these different languages as it has just occurred to me that there is not a single African language among the languages used in the 100 years of the ILO, and we may need to look into this as we move into the future. Happy birthday to all of us; may we have a festive time and get time to dance, which is important for some of us!

Allow me to begin by congratulating the President and Vice-Presidents of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference on their election. They are presiding over a historic session of this Conference. As you all know, I have enormous respect for each of them, and for the work we have done together over the years. Let us continue to make history during the next two weeks.

It is an exceptional honour and a pleasure to speak on behalf of the Employers' group today for this truly landmark event: the opening ceremony of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference, which is taking place in the year of the ILO's Centenary. For me, as a rural South African boy, it is a dual celebration, given the Nelson Mandela

centenary celebration at home that dovetails with this one; I think that there is more in the stars than meets the eye. I do not believe in coincidences, but in universal connections.

When we launched the Centenary celebrations at the ILO building here in Geneva on 22 January this year, I mentioned that for 100 years we have been living a wild dream. In 1941, the United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt described ILO tripartite governance as a wild dream. Well, this dream has quite literally transformed the lives of billions of people for the better and changed the course of history. This wild dream has sometimes seemed out of reach, but it is always leading us to a better place.

Our wild dream began in the shadows of the First World War. Then, the Commission on International Labour Legislation of the Paris Peace Conference proposed the establishment of a permanent organization and a series of urgent measures to improve labour conditions in the world. These provisions became the Constitution of the ILO and were adopted by the Peace Conference on 11 April 1919. In October 1919, in Washington, DC, the First Session of the International Labour Conference took place.

A few milestones along the way included a Nobel Peace Prize in 1969. At the time, the Chairman of the Nobel Committee said this about the ILO: “There are few organizations that have succeeded to the extent the ILO has, in translating into action the fundamental moral idea on which it is based.”

Our extraordinary capacity for dialogue has served us well as wars erupted, and as walls were (and are) erected to divide us. Our strength, my friends, is our ability to speak together, respect one another and find common ground. We should jealously protect and nurture this powerful force with all our collective strength for future generations.

We have much to be proud of as we look back on our 100-year history. We have risen to great challenges, overcome many obstacles and seized opportunities. The path has not always been clear and conflict has, and always will, inevitably arise. But we persevere and, as M. Scott Peck wrote in *The Road Less Traveled*: “Once you admit that life is difficult, the fact is no longer of great consequence. Once you accept responsibility, you can make better choices.”

Employers fundamentally believe in a fair playing field for the world of work. No one should be left behind, and we must go beyond rhetoric and make things happen. And, importantly for us, labour is not a commodity; it is humanity.

We share the ILO’s belief that a skilled workforce is the backbone of success, not only of business but of society as a whole. We are committed to promoting social dialogue to guarantee sustainable economic growth and concomitant stability and to ensure lasting peace. We firmly maintain that freedom of association is a prerequisite for social peace, for workers and employers alike.

My presence here today symbolizes the active engagement of the Employers with the ILO since its establishment in 1919. On this Centenary, and on behalf of the Employers’ group and the International Organisation of Employers – now representing over 50 million companies through our members globally and celebrating its own centenary in 2020 – I unequivocally reaffirm our profound and long-standing commitment and gratitude to the ILO and to the objective to ensure social justice based on access to equal opportunities, productive employment and decent work for all.

We, the Employers, recognize the ILO’s significant contribution to the continued existence of employers’ organizations worldwide. Without these efforts, I doubt that I, indeed most of us, would be here today. More significantly, the ILO’s work to protect employers’ organizations has saved not only institutions, but also lives.

We believe that balanced ILO Conventions, Recommendations and supervisory systems matter for business. We value the ILO's policy guidance to shape national and international debates in a balanced manner that benefits both workers and employers. And we wholeheartedly want to continue to be a strong voice in those debates, bringing the voice of employers to the ILO table.

All, though, is not well in our tripartite house. There is an unacceptable mischievousness in references to us, the Employers, as being "the brakes" on the ILO's work because we dare to differ and because we insist on being consulted, and for urging all to ensure that the "three-legged pot" I always refer to symbolically does not have unequal legs, as otherwise the all-important food in the pot will spill. While this is meant to be a negative connotation, we actually think it is a very positive one: where would we be, in terms of safety, without brakes? Brakes are an essential element in the fast-paced world in which we live.

There are numerous times when our voice is not heard. There are way too many times when we have to fight – fights we should not be having, generating negative energy we can do without. The same applies when the Office finds that consulting all three groups of constituents is too burdensome. The sidelining of constituents' views harms the entire Organization. It undermines the ILO's founding principles, mandate and work, and calls into question the added value of the Organization. We are sabotaging social dialogue and tripartism from within and then we accuse the outside world of doing the same. Decisions relating to the setting up and structuring of our work – even decisions relating to inviting speakers – are made by the Office at the highest level without consulting us. This is completely unacceptable. And then we have to clean up the chaos caused by the Office, chaos that we had nothing to do with! A few days ago, a discussion had to be cancelled because a member State was not consulted.

Matters such as the Global Deal, which has been parachuted in from the outside and imposed on us, and the lobbying for it using ILO resources, provide another example of what is increasingly becoming unacceptable. Some member States and regional groups are increasingly being treated as more equal than others, because they have better resources or the ability to fund programmes; and yet we say we shall leave no one behind. This is unhelpful. We cannot speak from both sides of the mouth. Let us have respect for social dialogue and let us mean it with consistent action. Otherwise, this Centenary celebration will be the last one the ILO shall have.

As a South African who was oppressed and who spent almost half of my life with no rights and unequal treatment in the old South Africa, I struggle with unfairness and unequal treatment. The ILO has historically had a phenomenal impact in the democratization of my country and on freedom of association. This is something I want to see continue over the next 100 years. It must not stop because of inadvertence.

The strength of the ILO is its unique tripartite governance structure. You have other institutions that separately serve business interests, while others represent workers, but nowhere else in the world do the silos between the principal actors in the world of work break down and work together towards a better future.

Today, I call on each one of us to take concrete steps to reinforce and renew our commitment to the ILO's tripartite governance. We need to ensure that this governance is more balanced and transparent. It means that the Office must work towards ensuring that the interests of the three groups of constituents are addressed and promoted on an equal footing. This is where rhetoric must meet action. This is the house of employers and business as much as it is the house of workers and governments. It is our house! It also means that as we, the constituents, celebrate our successes, we also must call out failures whenever they arise. It is not lost to us that 3 July represents a critical day for us as an Organization – for

all of us – in terms of our staff and, whatever happens, we need to appreciate and look after our staff, our people and be exemplary to the world on how people must be respected and listened to as well within the Organization. The Employers love what this Organization represents, let us all make it keep its shine!

In conclusion, I would like to say that the agenda of this Centenary Session is extremely ambitious. I share the Employers' views in that we support the discussion on violence and harassment and are in favour of a Convention. However, we need to have robust dialogue. The Committee of the Whole is responsible for drafting the Centenary outcome document. I would like to urge caution and call for the right manner in proceeding with working methods that are traditional for a discussion of this nature – trying out strange and untested working methods at our Centenary Session could be very, very risky. We unanimously believe that, as we move forward, we must all work together.

I celebrate the fact that, after a period of difficulties, we have been successful in making the Committee on the Application of Standards a body which works well and which provides the highest tripartite guidance to implement ILO standards. We support this, and note that this year, in respect of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which is a highly pertinent topic for the future of work, its recommendations and conclusions carry strong weight, even if they sometimes diverge from those of other bodies, such as the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. And even if we do not always manage to achieve tripartite consensus in respect of all points, we feel that this is the way to move forwards.

In the words of my compatriot, one of the founders of our South African democracy and global icon, Nelson Mandela, speaking at the Conference in 2007: “We rely on the ILO to continue its struggle to make decent work [and I add: productive employment] a global reality.”

We have an extraordinary opportunity now to reaffirm the values and principles of the ILO and to set the institution on a just and inclusive path into the next century by having the courage to speak up and tweak some parts to make it better and more effective for our people. One of the ambassadors, whose name I shall not mention, said to me recently, “The old lady [the ILO] has gathered a lot of dust over the years and it is time to dust her off to prepare her for her next 100 years”. I look forward to our discussions over the next two weeks, as it will be us, the ILO's constituents – Governments, Employers and Workers – who will set the Organization on its path for the next 100 years. As we work over the next two weeks, we will disagree and negotiate well into the night. But once we reach a common understanding and a shared goal, we will make history.

I look forward to this landmark session of the International Labour Conference.

Ms Passchier

Worker (Netherlands), Chairperson
of the Workers' Group

It is an honour to address this assembly today, on behalf of the working men and women of the world – the millions without a voice or protection at work, who for a century now have been looking up to the ILO as their beacon of hope for a better and fairer future.

Let me start by congratulating the President and the three Vice-Presidents on their election, and also all of our delegates, and wishing them well in all their work during this session of the Conference.

One hundred years ago, at the end of the first devastating world conflict, the ILO was created, recognizing that universal and lasting peace can only be established if it is based

upon social justice. A unique tripartite governance structure was established. And the setting and supervision of international labour standards was placed at the core of the ILO mandate, to prevent a race to the bottom at the expense of workers' rights, to create upward convergence and to ensure a level playing field for business.

In 1944, the Conference, emerging from a second world war, adopted the Philadelphia Declaration, and as was mentioned earlier, fundamental principles of the Organization were reaffirmed, among them: labour is not a commodity; freedom of expression and association are essential to sustained progress; and poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere.

These fundamentals are just as relevant today. Yes, we have seen social and economic progress, but major decent work deficits remain. Unfettered globalization in the digital era is increasing inequality, insecurity and violation of workers' rights. Growing numbers of working people are seeing the stability of their jobs, incomes and pensions placed in danger, but at the same time are witnessing soaring profits for big business. Many regions in the world are being torn apart by conflict, leading to involuntary migratory flows. In many places, democratic space is shrinking.

The sense of insecurity caused by all this, coupled with sentiments of unfairness and a lack of a positive outlook for the future, is a recipe for major unrest and recourse to nationalism, protectionism, racism and xenophobia. Demands to close borders and build walls are a misguided and destructive reaction, which fails to address the desperation of so many who see no option but to seek haven and a decent life elsewhere.

The best recipe, as the ILO has shown over its hundred years of existence, is social justice that provides protection to all and a fair sharing of the planet's opportunities and resources. However, these resources are currently in existential danger, with climate change causing poverty and instability, and threatening the survival of the planet. We know that there are no jobs on a dead planet. But there is too little recognition of the urgent need to take action *now*. We must heed the young people who are taking to the streets to save *their* planet and future. We therefore need a fundamental change of direction that challenges a business model that puts profit above people and planet.

The challenges facing the world of work are huge, and inaction is simply not an option. As the Global Commission on the Future of Work put it, "without decisive action we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social and economic repercussions". Therefore, our group expects the ILO constituents at this session of the Conference to commit to a bold and ambitious Centenary Declaration with clear follow-up action.

The mandate of this Organization, set in 1919 and 1944 and reaffirmed in 2008 by the Social Justice Declaration, is still fully up to date: social justice, decent work, and the protection of workers and their families against old and new risks in the world of work, as part of a fair model of globalization. The fundamental rights guaranteed by the ILO are universal and must be applied universally. That is central to renewing the social contract.

Technology brings huge promises and opportunities. Yet, we must learn from the past and the initial sufferings caused by the industrial revolution. It took more than a century, with a key role for the ILO's policies and regulations, to lay the basis for decent work, which is still not a reality everywhere in the world. Technological change does not automatically produce well-being and fair outcomes for all workers. Regulation is necessary to manage and master it, in order to reap its benefits.

We must ensure that the ILO's notion of a "worker" remains inclusive, covering old and new forms of work with adequate protection. And this must include the right to organize,

so fundamental to this house, including for self-employed workers and workers in the informal economy, to ensure that they can collectively stand up to call for the improvement of their living and working conditions.

In order to create the future of work that *we* want, we need a human-in-command approach with a strong guiding and regulating role for the ILO. We strongly support the Global Commission's call for a fundamental, human-centred, change of direction in economic and social policies, and its call to reinvigorate the social contract. This means reaffirming tripartism, social dialogue and collective bargaining as key drivers for negotiating the terms of a just social and environmental transition. We must also deal with the "unfinished business" of the Philadelphia Declaration, to ensure the ILO's leadership role on decent work and social justice in the multilateral system.

Let me now touch on the other important items on the Conference agenda.

The Committee on the Application of Standards has an essential constitutional task which makes the ILO so unique in the UN system. In too many countries, the realization of decent work and social justice remains jeopardized by violations of labour rights, particularly the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The debates in that Committee are therefore crucial. Ratification must imply a commitment by member States to give effect to the Conventions to which they have voluntarily become signatories, and to their obligations under the ILO Constitution.

At the first session of the International Labour Conference in 1919, out of around 500 registered participants, 22 were women. If the world of work has seen one enormous change, it has been the mass entry of women into our labour markets and into active and leadership roles in our societies. However, we have not yet been able to deal with all its challenges. One is on the agenda of this year's session: violence and harassment in the world of work.

Hundreds of millions of women yearly across the world are known to have experienced some form of violence and harassment. While women are overwhelmingly and disproportionately affected, men are not immune. And discrimination against certain groups exacerbates the incidence and impact of violence and harassment.

Our group is pleased to note that there is growing broad tripartite support for the adoption of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. Members of that Committee have a unique opportunity to show the relevance of the ILO standard-setting function, one hundred years after the creation of the ILO, which will contribute to safer and more productive workplaces for women and men.

Let me also thank the Director-General for the Appendix to his Report, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. The occupation, now already 50 years old, continues to make the living and working conditions of Palestinians extremely difficult, without real prospects for improvement. Renewed and sincere efforts to achieve a just peace are required, to end the occupation and deliver peace and prosperity for all. In the meantime, we fully support any action the ILO and its tripartite constituents can take to support the various stakeholders in addressing the most serious social and labour challenges.

To conclude, at this Centenary Session of the Conference, the debate is on the future of work that *we* want. This is about us becoming the drivers for a change that should be human-driven, gender-balanced and planet-oriented. This is about recognizing work as bringing value, dignity and influence to those selling their labour, and bringing social justice and stability to their economies and societies.

The ILO must seize this opportunity and show the key role it can play, in the next century too, in the necessary global governance structures to accompany this change. It can only play this role when its tripartite constituents allow it to do so.

This requires forward-looking businesses whose vision transcends short-term interests to focus on the importance of long-term sustainability. And it requires governments to be courageous, going beyond national and regional perspectives, to support a strong role for the ILO in tackling the challenges that arise. And, yes, it requires organized labour to support the shaping of a better future.

A world in turmoil requires leadership. This is what the ILO can and must offer, as it did in 1919, with social justice as its guiding principle and primary goal, to ensure lasting peace and stability. The world of work outside is watching us with high expectations. We had better deliver!

I wish all of us a fruitful Centenary Session of the Conference.

The President
(Original French)

I now have the honour to welcome His Excellency Mr Alain Berset, Federal Councillor, who will address this august assembly on behalf of the ILO's host country, the Swiss Confederation. We will also have the honour to welcome Her Excellency Ms María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

**Statement by His Excellency Mr Alain Berset,
Federal Councillor of the Swiss Confederation**

Mr Berset
Federal Councillor of the Swiss Confederation
(Original French)

It is a great privilege for Switzerland to host the Centenary Session of the International Labour Conference. The establishment in Geneva of the ILO and the League of Nations 100 years ago was one of the cornerstones of the development of multilateralism and the influence of international Geneva. As a founding Member of the ILO, Switzerland shares the fundamental values of the Organization: social justice, social partnership, respect for human rights, the pursuit of peace in general and world peace. For the past 100 years, the ILO has unceasingly promoted fundamental principles and rights at work, working indefatigably for social justice in the world.

We must remember what the world was like when the ILO was created: it was the end of the First World War. The founders of the ILO were guided by security, humanitarian, political and economic considerations. It was necessary, under difficult circumstances, to be able to offer similar working conditions and decent treatment to workers from countries competing in markets.

The founders of the ILO pioneered the creation of the only tripartite organization in the multilateral system, bringing together representatives of governments, employers and workers in its executive bodies. This tripartism, the Organization's great strength, lies at the source of social partnership. Even today it gives – I would like to say more than ever – an essential legitimacy to the work of the ILO, as well as to the Conventions and

Recommendations that it adopts. When a Recommendation or Convention is adopted, it is binding on all three parties represented at the discussion table.

If we now think about the ILO Constitution, it is and remains the most ambitious international social contract in history. One hundred years after its creation, the mission of the International Labour Organization remains unchanged. Its mission is to protect the rights of all workers around the world and guarantee them sufficient social protection and to improve the access of women and men to decent and productive work, freely chosen and carried out in conditions of safety and respect for human dignity.

The standards established by the ILO have a positive impact on the world of work. In the current context of globalization, the digitalization of the economy and the questioning of free trade, where we sometimes see that inequalities are increasing, these standards are more necessary than ever for social cohesion, solidarity and trust in democracy.

We know that new technologies are revolutionizing trade. They are generating new forms of employment and offering new opportunities. But we also know that digitalization does not make everyone a winner. New, more flexible forms of work offer new opportunities, but they also entail the risk that work will become precarious. The same essential question faces us today as in 1919, namely: how can we ensure, in the future, decent working conditions and adequate social protection for all?

Productive employment and decent work are key to achieving sustainable development, fair globalization and poverty reduction. This requires the ability to create quality jobs, to improve the situation of millions of people who work part-time or who do not earn enough to rise above the poverty line. While decent work implies adequate remuneration, it also includes safety at work, adequate social protection and opportunities for personal development.

Equal opportunities and treatment for all, men and women, including young people and people with disabilities, are essential. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the work of the International Coalition for Equal Pay (EPIC). We are pleased that the ILO, in collaboration with UN Women and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has launched this initiative. I must say that for Switzerland, it was obvious to join it from the start, because it is essential to guarantee fair and decent salaries for women and to encourage fair competition between companies at the national and global levels. I would like to take the opportunity that I have this morning to invite all countries to join this coalition, EPIC. It is only with the combined expertise of all – the experience of our countries, employers and workers – that we will be able to attain this goal of equality.

On the occasion of its Centenary, the ILO has launched a welcome reflection on the future of work. Switzerland welcomes the launch of this initiative by the Director-General. This reflection led to the publication of the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, which should inspire the work of this Conference.

At this point I would like to highlight some aspects that are essential for the future of work. Firstly, social partnership. You know – and we also know this because we experience it in Switzerland on a daily basis – that dialogue is needed. There must be trust between partners. We need to find pragmatic solutions, together. This strong social partnership based on mutual trust is crucial to ensuring, in a dynamic economic environment, a balance between the expectations of workers and those of enterprises. Social partnership and peace at work are guarantees of stability. They make it possible, and this is an indispensable element, to establish the right framework conditions under which all sides can participate in economic success. We must aim for sustainable and environmentally friendly economic growth. To do this, we must create a competitive environment for enterprises, while offering employment opportunities and decent working conditions to as many people as possible. We

must also establish the basis for the economic and personal well-being of all members of society. This is why the ILO's tripartite model, applied by many countries including Switzerland, must be followed. Secondly, lifelong learning. The future of work is in training for young people. We must invest in basic education and vocational training. The future of work is the initial training upon entering the labour market and, also, the ability to continue training throughout one's working life. For this we must be able to offer opportunities, a qualified job of course but also development in terms of lifelong learning. Thirdly, social protection. The future of work also means solid and universal social protection from birth to old age; this is one of the sustainable development objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

Effective national social security systems are powerful tools for ensuring income security, preventing and reducing poverty and inequality and promoting social inclusion. Such systems form part of the essential framework conditions for companies to create jobs and develop.

I would like to add that even today, substantial inequalities with regard to working conditions persist. In the digital age and in globalized economies, we need common standards more than ever to ensure fair competition between countries. That is one of the reasons why the International Labour Organization is so important. It is the responsibility of all of us in the framework of the ILO to develop, adopt and apply these common standards.

This is an opportunity for me to remind you that the future of the world of work and the issue of social justice require strong international cooperation. There is no alternative to strong international cooperation. There are reform processes that we must encourage and criticisms that we must be able to make, but there is no alternative to strong multilateralism and international cooperation, which we must believe in and work for. It is within this framework that we will be able, together, to meet the challenges posed by the current changes. It is remarkable to note that the ILO remains, 100 years after its foundation, a central actor and a privileged framework in which multilateralism can and must be promoted.

The Preamble to the ILO Constitution states that "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice". This message has lost neither its relevance nor its topicality. It reminds us once again of the importance of dialogue, trust and pragmatism. With these words, I would like once again to bid you all welcome to Switzerland on the occasion of the Centenary Session and thank you for your attention.

**Statement by Her Excellency
Ms María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés,
President of the 73rd session of the
General Assembly of the United Nations**

Ms Espinosa Garcés
President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly
of the United Nations
(*Original Spanish*)

The International Labour Organization was described by its first Director-General, Albert Thomas, as a monument to peace and social justice. The vision and determination of its founders in building this indispensable institution merit our respect, for they raised it from the ruins of the First World War in response to the desperation and frustration of millions of workers. For this reason we pay tribute, at this Centenary celebration, to the labour and trade union movement. Its historical struggles and contributions have been crucial in asserting the rights and guarantees of workers, men and women.

Over these 100 years, the ILO has changed from being a distant dream to a tangible reality, a unique model of tripartite partnership that has facilitated social dialogue between governments, employers and workers, hosted by the marvel that is the international city of Geneva.

But it has also handed down to us a vast body of work, including hundreds of Conventions, policies and mechanisms which have inspired labour laws and institutions that promote safe conditions, decent treatment, freedom of association and non-discrimination, among many other rights.

The three fundamental principles of the ILO expressed in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia are more valid than ever: labour is not a commodity; freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress; and poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere. These principles of the Declaration of Philadelphia are important.

If I may, I shall address three themes.

Firstly, I should like to underline the fundamental importance of continuing to ensure decent work for all, leaving no one behind. This is indispensable for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Decent work is essential for eradicating poverty and reducing inequality within and between countries, and for securing the well-being of our peoples. However, the challenge is enormous: 2 billion people base their livelihood on the informal economy, 780 million work but still live in poverty, and over 190 million remain unemployed. To reverse these figures and generate the 600 million new jobs needed by 2030 in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), political willingness is crucial. We need firm action in order to maximize the potential of the economic transformations and demographic transitions taking place. Technological progress, the fight against climate change and the fourth industrial revolution are only some of the factors shaping the jobs of the future.

Clearly, the challenges to the future of work relate not only to the number of jobs we must create but also to job quality and the ability of work to bring well-being, satisfaction and social cohesion and to unlock people's creative potential.

Aware of the importance of taking swift action to achieve SDG 8, "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all", on assuming the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly I made decent work one of my priorities. Thus, on 10 April this year, together with the ILO I organized the High-level Meeting on the Future of Work, where we also commemorated the 100th anniversary of this Organization. At that event, one of the messages that resonated strongly was that we have the capacity to determine and construct the future of work that we want. I have also emphasized the potential of technology for creating productive work and that it is not always a threat; the importance of lifelong training and learning; the need for greater inclusion and non-discrimination; and the role of social protection over a lifetime.

Next, I should like to mention the importance of achieving gender equality in the world of work, one of the most pressing challenges that lie ahead. Women continue to suffer discrimination, violence and exclusion in all walks of life, and the world of work is no exception. In fact, many of the disparities are to be found precisely there, in the world of work. On average, women still earn 20 per cent less than men for the same work. This situation is unjust and unsustainable. I cannot imagine a future, at least a just and sustainable future, in which women are not an active part of the economy and work.

Lastly, I refer to the value of multilateralism and to the future of work. The ILO was the pioneer that sowed the seed of the multilateral system. That is why this Centenary is so important. Cooperation and dialogue are the bedrock of its existence. The ILO has strengthened and enhanced multilateralism, which, in turn, will be decisive in shaping the

future of work. Our presence here at this historic session, together with all the world's Heads of State and Government, is testament to that.

The road to decent work calls for broad-based dialogue among all stakeholders: governments, private sector, unions, workers and civil society. There is no other way to deal effectively with the urgent challenges that we face, such as the eradication of child labour or modern slavery.

I wish to emphasize that over recent months the UN General Assembly has had an intensive work agenda. I have pushed for decent work and the future of work to be included as cross-cutting issues in all our activities in accordance with the mandate of the Member States.

For example, at the High-level Event on Culture and Sustainable Development held recently, we focused on creative economies as a source of inclusive economic growth, job creation and innovation.

At the High-level Meeting on the Protection of the Global Climate for Present and Future Generations we discussed the enormous benefits of bold climate action that can generate economic returns and create more jobs than those that would be lost. There too, we are aware of the opportunities offered by the models for conversion to organic production and transition to low-carbon economies.

I commend all those initiatives that recognize the historic role of the ILO and tackle the huge challenges of the future. Only a few days ago in Paris, the G7 countries held a Social Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting. As I said in my message for that occasion, it is vital to strengthen the multilateral system and dialogue among the international organizations in the cause of justice, social protection and the reduction of inequalities.

Lasting and universal peace is linked to a large extent with decent treatment for workers, as in 1919. Today, the ILO embarks on a new phase, a new century, its vision and contribution more than ever necessary for promoting social justice, particularly in this time of major global changes.

I am confident that the new challenges of the twenty-first century will find us even more committed to the ILO and to its irreplaceable role in support of the well-being and dignity of everyone.

The President
(Original French)

That brings us to the end of the opening sitting of the Centenary Session of the International Labour Conference.

(The Conference adjourned at 1.10 p.m.)