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Institutional Section

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Update on the Global Coalition for Social Justice

Purpose of the document

This document provides further information on the operational arrangements for the Global Coalition for Social Justice (see the draft decision in paragraph 31).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: All policy outcomes and enabling outcome A: Improved knowledge and influence for promoting decent work.

Policy implications: Yes

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: Yes.

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Related documents: [GB.346/PFA/1](#); [GB.346/INS/17/1](#); [GB.346/INS/PV](#).

▶ Introduction

1. At its 346th Session (October–November 2022), the Governing Body discussed the proposals for the Global Coalition for Social Justice (“the Coalition”) and provided guidance on its scope, focus areas and operational arrangements. The Governing Body generally welcomed the creation of the Coalition while recognizing that a number of issues needed additional clarification.
2. This document summarizes progress to date, following the guidance provided by the Governing Body, and reflecting the informal consultations held since then. It provides an overview of the key components of the Coalition, which is due to be launched during the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2023). The Office will continue to work closely with the tripartite constituents before and after that date to finalize the establishment of the Coalition, and will report on progress at the 349th Session of the Governing Body (October–November 2023).
3. The activities described in this document are aligned with the Director-General’s Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25, which have been submitted to the Governing Body at its current session.

▶ Background

4. Social justice makes societies and economies function more cohesively and productively, by reducing poverty and hunger, inequalities and social tensions. Given its central importance to inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, social justice should be seen as one of the cornerstones of the renewed multilateralism that is required to overcome current challenges – a rallying point as well as an organizing principle for a more efficient and coherent multilateral system that supports national efforts across a range of policy areas and interventions.
5. In the most fundamental sense, a society is “socially just” if all human beings “have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity”,¹ and if there is an essential degree of fairness in the distribution of economic outcomes, including in the context of difficult transitions such as those related to crises and longer-term economic transformations. Such a society has the capacity to provide related universal rights and institutional support, with the rule of law as a cornerstone.
6. As early as 1919, the ILO Constitution mandated the Organization with advancing social justice, by recognizing that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice”. Subsequently, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), as amended in 2022, and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008, as amended in 2022, established the four pillars of decent work that are critical in realizing this mandate. More recently, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future

¹ ILO Declaration of Philadelphia, 1944, para. II(a).

of Work, 2019, directed the ILO to deepen the pursuit of this mandate through a human-centred approach to the future of work, in the context of “transformative change in the world of work, driven by technological innovations, demographic shifts, environmental and climate change, and globalization, as well as at a time of persistent inequalities, which have profound impacts on the nature and future of work, and on the place and dignity of people in it”. In 2021, the Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis appealed to all constituents and stakeholders to accelerate the implementation of the Centenary Declaration in order to address the profound and highly uneven social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

7. The quest for social justice goes beyond the world of work. Both the Social Justice Declaration and the Centenary Declaration note that it cannot be an endeavour for the ILO alone and requires the involvement of the multilateral system as a whole. Failure to act on social justice in one domain undermines progress in others, and undermines the capacity of the ILO to promote decent work. This has been particularly evident during the recent COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent energy and food crises. Indeed, the ILO has long acknowledged that the pursuit of social justice in respect of adequate food and housing and effective access to quality medical care and education is essential for the realization of its own mandate. For these reasons, the Declaration of Philadelphia refers to the obligation of the ILO to advance programmes and actions to extend social security measures to provide comprehensive medical care, provide adequate nutrition and housing, and ensure equality of education and vocational opportunity. These are mutually interdependent, for example, effective access to health care and to quality education improves opportunities to access employment, while access to decent work enhances the likelihood that workers and their families will enjoy good health and adequate nutrition and will benefit fully from quality education.
8. Social justice has come under further strain from a combination of overlapping crises and the acceleration of long-term structural economic transformations. In particular, rates of extreme poverty and working poverty are on the rise, as are child labour, youth unemployment, informality and precariousness. The multiple crises are severely affecting enterprises and their workers, particularly small firms which are most vulnerable to shocks. Many countries now face an even more complex policy landscape marked by rising debt burdens and shrinking fiscal space. These decent work deficits are widening in many countries, fuelling inequalities, undermining social cohesion and the foundations of peace and stability, and hence putting social justice under further strain. There is ample evidence that these growing inequalities are threatening the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and undermining trust in democratic institutions, further reducing civic space and leading to recognition within the multilateral system of the need to take action.² Such considerations were discussed by the Governing Body at its 346th Session, prior to its adoption of the ILO strategy to reduce and prevent inequalities in the world of work.
9. In such circumstances, the efforts of governments, international organizations, social partners and other stakeholders need urgently to be intensified and better coordinated to protect people and support the achievement of social and economic progress, with particular attention to the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals, to have the maximum positive impact on human dignity and agency. The ILO has a major opportunity to advance its social justice mandate by forming a Coalition of stakeholders committed to increased and better-aligned action, and thereby ensuring that the efforts made at the international, regional and national levels to advance social justice everywhere are strengthened and not unravelled by a lack of

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*.

an integrated approach. The Coalition therefore has the potential to mobilize far greater support from the international community and the multilateral system as a whole for the ILO's human-centred mission.

10. In his report on the future of global cooperation and the multilateral system, *Our Common Agenda*,³ UN Secretary-General presented his vision of a more networked multilateralism, which requires greater solidarity and a renewed social contract to restore trust in governance and in the UN common system. It recognizes that, for this purpose, basic principles of equity and social justice need to be taken into account, as called for in UN General Assembly resolution 57/213. The Coalition will respond to that call by mobilizing political, technical and financial support, and will pave the way for a major contribution to the World Social Summit in 2025 proposed by the UN Secretary-General. The Coalition will support and highlight both individual and collective initiatives to address social justice deficits. The UN Secretary-General's Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions will be instrumental in this regard. This collaborative initiative across the UN system, which also engages multilateral development banks and other development partners, has the potential to multiply and accelerate action on some of the most acute social justice challenges that some countries are facing.

► Purpose and scope

11. The Coalition will act as a platform to elevate the political debate on social justice, strengthen understanding of the urgent need for social justice and the economic case for increased investment in it, bring together all entities of the multilateral system working on related areas, and catalyse additional resources and other support for related country strategies. Rooted in the ILO's values and international labour standards, the Coalition will aim to bring about tangible progress in people's lives, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable. As such, the Coalition presents an important opportunity to integrate tripartism and social dialogue more firmly into multilateral cooperation. By elevating the debate on the imperative of social justice, the Coalition will seek to increase coherence in the multilateral system and strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development. It will contribute to efforts to reduce and prevent inequalities and efforts to ensure that social justice is prioritized in national, regional and global policymaking and action, including in development cooperation, investments and trade agreements. The joint efforts under this initiative will aim to generate more social investments, act as a catalyst for the mobilization of funds for on-the-ground actions and strengthen domestic and international support, and will be anchored in people's needs and national priorities.
12. The Coalition will seek to facilitate the engagement and combined impact of its partners' actions through the following thematic and functional areas, which are aligned with the Decent Work Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the Coalition will have various workstreams, including on topics that are beyond the ILO's mandate (see paragraph 7 above), the following areas of the ILO mandate's will be essential components of the Coalition's work.

³ United Nations, *Our Common Agenda*, Report of the Secretary-General, 2021.

Thematic areas

- 13. Realizing labour rights as human rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic needs:** This thematic area encompasses, in particular, the setting, ratification, implementation and supervision of international labour standards, which form part of the United Nations norms and standards landscape, and the promotion of labour rights as human rights. It will also comprise actions that seek to strengthen the rule of law. In this connection, it will contribute to ensuring that people's basic needs are met, thus supporting human dignity and agency, in pursuance of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Coordinated support to Member States will be strengthened to ensure that rights at work, in particular the fundamental principles and rights at work, are realized and that the comments of the ILO supervisory bodies are followed up effectively. This will be done in a number of ways, including their promotion in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks along with the recommendations of UN treaty bodies and other relevant international and regional monitoring mechanisms.
- 14. Providing protection and building resilience:** Work in this area aims to bring about universal social protection through the development of social protection systems, including floors, with special attention being paid to universal health coverage. It also aims to advance protection at work for all, through adequate wages, improved working conditions and protection against work-related injury. It will thereby contribute to improving standards of living, help to strengthen the resilience of individuals and enterprises to crises and enable them to cope better with fast-paced transformation. It will strengthen the ILO's cooperation with partners, especially international financial institutions; UN funds, programmes and agencies; multilateral development banks; and regional and public development banks. Among the objectives will be to include decent work in socially sustainable anti-crisis frameworks and recovery programmes and to expand fiscal space for and increase investment in social protection.
- 15. Expanding productive and freely chosen employment:** Income from work represents the overwhelming majority of household income. Thus, the battle against poverty, vulnerability and marginalization depends greatly on the extension of decent work opportunities to all. One important focus of the Coalition will therefore be to promote and support gender-responsive and pro-employment human-centred institutions, policies and investments. This entails the promotion of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, decent work and productivity growth, specially focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises, lifelong learning and skills enhancement, formalization strategies and other active labour market policies.
- 16. Addressing inequality, discrimination and exclusion:** High levels of inequality and persistent systemic discrimination are major obstacles to social justice and social cohesion. The Coalition will seek to increase action and collaboration in support of its partners' efforts to reduce inequality in all its forms, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind. This will involve combating gender-related and other forms of discrimination and violence and harassment at work and beyond that unfairly affect opportunities for people to participate in and benefit from economic growth and development. The Coalition will also promote equality of treatment and opportunities for the advancement of a transformative agenda.
- 17. Strengthening just transitions and the social dimension of trade and investment:** This thematic area covers the mobilization of domestic resources, private investment and international solidarity for workers, communities and enterprises undergoing major transitions related to changes beyond their control – whether related to climate change and

other environmental changes, the digital transformation of industries, natural disasters or economic disruptions and shocks. It encompasses strengthening the social dimension of sustainable financing, and ensuring that public and private investment frameworks, development cooperation, financial policies and trade agreements take social justice parameters into account in their decision-making processes. For this purpose, and in collaboration with other multilateral organizations, work in this area aims to foster fair, rules-based international trade, ensure market access for all and, at the request of Member States, provide coherent advice in relation to labour provisions within trade agreements to support their effective implementation. It also includes building the capacity of tripartite constituents to develop and implement trade and investment policies, and promoting responsible business conduct.

18. **Reinforcing institutions of social dialogue:** To advance social justice, it is essential to have strong and representative employers' and workers' organizations that are engaged in social dialogue processes. They help to ensure that policies are effective and inclusive and they facilitate their implementation. They also provide the means to build trust and foster social cohesion. The role of these organizations in advancing social justice needs to be strengthened, including through an enabling legal and institutional framework and a broad commitment to dialogue on the renewal of the social contract. The Coalition will support countries in identifying social justice deficits through processes of national social dialogue and in designing strategies to address these deficits effectively and sustainably, including by promoting collective bargaining. It will also promote opportunities for social dialogue aimed at improving the alignment and coherence of domestic and international action.
19. The four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda enshrined in the Social Justice Declaration and the objectives towards which the ILO should direct its efforts in accordance with the Centenary Declaration provide the overarching framework for the thematic work of the ILO's contribution to the Coalition. The ILO will also seek to further strengthen such interinstitutional cooperation, coherence and impact through the priority action programmes included in the Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25.⁴ They aim to bring together existing activities and related efforts for more impactful results. By facilitating coordination and synergies among all relevant units and staff at headquarters and the field, and including relevant development cooperation projects, the programmes seek to foster integrated approaches and identify new opportunities. The Coalition will serve as an important conduit to enhance the impact and visibility of the priority action programmes and to leverage technical and financial assistance for their work.

Functional areas

20. The following means of intervention will enable the Coalition's partners to carry out joint initiatives, building on existing activities of the ILO and partners. Joining efforts will enhance responsiveness, complementarity and impact.
21. **Foster knowledge generation and the dissemination of facts, data and tools:** The Coalition will seek to develop and disseminate knowledge on social justice that can be used to shape global and national debates and actions and promote policy coherence. To identify key trends that hamper social progress and drive inequalities, the Coalition will bring together the

⁴ Namely: The transition from the informal to the formal economy; just transitions towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies; decent work in supply chains, investment and trade; and decent work in crisis and post-crisis situations.

expertise of the international stakeholders and, to the extent possible, take full advantage of innovative research (in areas such as big data, artificial intelligence and geographic information systems) to generate findings in under-researched areas. The Coalition will organize expert debates, promote the enhancement of global statistical databases and encourage joint research and data generation by governments. This work will be published in a recurrent report on the state of social justice in the world. As currently envisaged, this report would build on the data and analysis of ILO flagship reports but not replace them.

22. **Conduct political advocacy, awareness-raising and communications campaigns:** The Coalition will seek to elevate the debate on the critical importance of social justice in tackling current global challenges. It will aim to improve understanding of the urgent need for social justice and the economic case for social and environmental investments, putting people and the planet at the centre. Joint global campaigns and an advocacy and communication plan will be developed to promote social justice through tailored messages for each key audience, including, as a priority, public policymakers and regional and international policy forums.
23. **Enhance dialogue and mobilization at the country, regional and global levels:** The Coalition will promote these objectives by various means, including the involvement of ILO constituents and other partners in dialogues at the national or regional level on the challenges the world is facing, the changes it is undergoing and the implications for the achievement of social justice, using social dialogue as a means to create space for mobilization and cooperation. These national dialogues will set the stage for effective engagement by constituents and partners on appropriate policy responses and financing priorities, including in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. The conclusions of the national or regional dialogues will provide critical inputs for the Coalition's work.
24. **Facilitate action and partnerships:** The Coalition will seek to facilitate cooperation between providers of relevant knowledge and resources, on the one hand, and Member States and other actors that are seeking to narrow specific social justice deficits, on the other. It will seek to do so by facilitating communication among partners and engaging them in events that highlight the nature and outcomes of related activities of Coalition partners, especially during a Global Forum on Social Justice to showcase the work of the Coalition. In particular, the Coalition will seek to increase the level and coherence of support by partner international organizations for the implementation of country strategies, including those developed through national social justice dialogues.

► Participation in and governance of the Coalition

25. Participation in the Coalition will be open to governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international organizations who wish to do so, and other stakeholders (from, for example, enterprises, academia and non-governmental organizations) that are committed to increasing their efforts to address social justice deficits in the areas outlined above, both individually and in cooperation with other institutions and actors. ILO constituents, and representatives from the whole United Nations system, multilateral development banks and the World Trade Organization would automatically be eligible to participate in the Coalition; requests from other actors would be subject to an approval process, to be defined in a manner satisfactory to ILO constituents.
26. The Coalition will not be a new institutional entity and therefore will not have a separate or distinct existence from that of its partners. The ILO will provide secretariat support to the

Coalition and will report periodically to the Governing Body on the Coalition's progress and results.

27. The Coalition's activities will be coordinated by a relatively small group of Coalition partners. It will be chaired by the ILO – including an appropriate regional balance of tripartite constituents – and will include the most relevant international organizations. The group will be further tasked with defining the working methods of the Coalition, including its mechanisms for participation and accountability.
28. The Office will engage in outreach to potential partners over the coming months in order to explore their interest in joining the Coalition and identify their potential contributions to its mission. Such discussions will consider an initial number of priorities and collaborative initiatives, organized in workstreams where each partner will provide leadership and support in line with its respective mandate and expertise. These groups will then be able to determine their work plans and reporting arrangements. Special attention will be paid to coherence in the implementation of the various initiatives of the multilateral partners.
29. The Coalition will be launched during the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference. Moreover, the Report of the Director-General to that session of the Conference will focus on social justice, which will provide an opportunity to gather views, interest and support from a broader audience, including external partners.
30. In 2023, the costs associated with the development of the Coalition and related activities will be covered by existing resources. In the next biennium, the Coalition will be included under the implementation of the proposals in the Programme and Budget for 2024–25, in particular with outcome 8 (Integrated policy and institutional responses for social justice through decent work) and enablers A and B (Enhanced knowledge, innovation, cooperation and communication to advance social justice, and Improved leadership and governance, respectively). Development cooperation activities will be aligned and integrated into the resource mobilization strategy of the Office.

▶ Draft decision

31. The Governing Body:

- (a) **endorsed the Director-General's proposal to forge a Global Coalition for Social Justice, including its launch during the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2023);**
- (b) **requested the Director-General to take into account its guidance in the further development of the Global Coalition for Social Justice, and to report on progress at its 349th Session (October–November 2023).**