



**3<sup>rd</sup> Regional General Council Meeting of ITUC AP  
10 November 2009, Cebu City**

**Opening Message by Linda Wirth  
Director, ILO SRO-Manila**

Mr. Rajasekaran, President of ITUC AP  
Mr. Suzuki, General Secretary,  
Brothers and Sisters,

Mabuhay!!

It gives me great pleasure to address the 3rd Regional General Council Meeting of ITUC AP. Allow me to express my sincere thanks for your invitation to address the opening of this meeting. I bring you greetings from the Director General Juan Somavia and Ms. Yamamoto, Regional Director of Asia Pacific. We have always had a good and productive relationship with the ITUC AP over the years and I would like to take the opportunity to thank the leadership for their continued support and guidance.

Delegates, I share with you the importance of this Regional General Council meeting and I understand this is the most important gathering of the affiliates from the Asia and the Pacific Region. I was also told that such gathering takes place only once every year. (CHECK). At this Council meeting, I understand you will review the work of the ITUC AP which has been carried out and more importantly discuss and adopt policies and plans for the future. This will help charter a path for the future development of your organization. It is also an opportunity for you to reflect upon challenges facing men and women workers particularly today in the light of the financial crisis.

Allow me to take advantage of this platform and raise some issues that you may want to consider in your discussions this week.

Trade unions and workers globally are facing mounting challenges as a result of globalization. These are common issues for both of us -the ITUC AP and the ILO. Being more effect in assisting the unions to be stronger and more representative is one such key challenge for the ILO.

The ILO speaks for the real economy. Our voice stems from the life experience of our constituents, governments, employers and workers, throughout the developed and developing world.

The ILO – perhaps more than any other organization in the multilateral system – is based on the dynamics of social change, what actually happens in the economy and society. Our values are clear and our policies are shaped by its tripartite membership rooted in enterprises and workplaces.

The ILO believes that union organizing in the context of the present crisis is a key for making unions stronger and representative.

Organizing globally in the current economic crisis...- We meet at a time when so many things, so many certainties, are falling apart, causing hardship and frustration to billions throughout the world.

The ILO has forecast was by end 2009 world unemployment could increase by 50 million over 2007 reaching 230 million; and the numbers of working poor by 200 millions.

In the ILO we believe that we must focus on three key international understandings based on policy convergence and international cooperation with a sustainable development approach:

One, put in place urgently a social protection floor for the most vulnerable, adapted to the diversity of situations in different countries, covering health, education, housing, food and income transfers. Development cooperation should be available to the poorest countries. The IMF, the World Bank and all United Nations organizations must work together to support this objective.

Two, agreement on a global jobs pact to protect and promote job creation. It would span employment intensive infrastructure investment, active labour market policies and support for the millions of small and medium enterprises.

We must ensure a productive recovery through the promotion of sustainable enterprises. Now is the time for stimulating a greening of production and consumption – with public and private investments and incentives for new technology and clean energy packages.

Three, a global commitment to respect the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work stating that the crisis is a moment to reinforce workers' rights, not to weaken them.

This includes a decision to foster much more social dialogue and collective bargaining by which enterprises and workers can find together the best options to address problems in their own enterprises or sectors as well as regionally, or nationally.

The stabilizing power of dialogue in crisis conditions is irreplaceable.

In this are the pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda, rights, employment, protection and dialogue, taken together to broaden the opportunities for all women and men to obtain work in conditions of freedom, dignity, security and equity.

It was conceived in normal times to promote a better distribution of the benefits of growth and productivity. Today, this is also an agenda of response to the crisis as seen from the perspective of people.

Mr. Somavia mentioned in one of his statements "We need to replace a certain model of globalization; a model which overvalued the market; undervalued the role of government and regulation; and devalued the dignity of work, the welfare function of society, and the protection of the environment. In the process the development agenda never became a true priority."

So we need to come back to basics. The notion of a fair share for workers in the fruits of progress is economically and socially sound; fundamental rights at work are essential to empower trade unions to negotiate wage increases that are linked to rising productivity without undermining competitiveness.

The very existence of the ILO reflects the role of work in achieving social justice as a fundamental condition of universal and lasting peace.

Today an entirely different landscape has emerged.

Major milestones were the 1995 Summit on Social Development, the ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; the Decent Work Agenda that placed labour standards as a development objective;, and now the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

It states in particular that: “..the violation of fundamental principles and rights at work cannot be invoked or otherwise used as a legitimate comparative advantage and that labour standards should not be used for protectionist trade purposes.” Today, it is possible to make this tripartite agreement of the ILO a common policy of the whole international community.

In consequence, more countries are turning to the ILO to seek assistance on the application of ratified Conventions. And this demand will rise with the crisis.

As a result, it is necessary to strongly reinforce the capacity of the ILO to assist countries and its constituents with the application of labour standards. We must also strengthen the ILO’s capacity to follow-up with each country on the decisions of the ILO’s Freedom of Association Committee and those of the Committee on the Application of conventions of the International Labour Conference. Here in the Philippines we in the ILO are currently working closely with the tripartite constituents in a programme of work and technical cooperation to follow up on a recent high level mission on Convention 87.

Now is the time to think boldly. History advances in leaps and bounds, usually at the time of a major crisis.

ILO instruments such as the Conventions particularly those related to the right to freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain are important in this regard. Ratification of these Conventions is poor compared to other regions in the world. Thirteen countries in the region have ratified the Freedom of Association Convention (No.87) and 16 countries have ratified the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (No.98).

I urge you to consider the ratification issue in your discussions.

Employment and employment creation is of utmost importance in the Asia/Pacific region. Women and men cannot be employed if there are no jobs. The ILO believes that it is not only about more jobs but it is also about better jobs. It is about jobs that provide decent wages and those that are carried out in decent working conditions. In the Asia Pacific region there are many cases of workers working under poor conditions, children instead of going to school work in factories, women work long hours in difficult conditions.

The Asia Pacific region also has the highest number of working poor.

It is estimated that around 900 million workers receive less than US\$ one dollar a day. Thus creation of employment opportunities is vital.

The ILO believes that while jobs are important it is equally important that these are carried out under healthy and safe environment. Also it is important that workers are covered by proper social security.

In short, we should pursue Decent Work as a global agenda.

However this cannot be achieved unless women and men who are directly affected by it are involved in the promotion of the agenda. They can be involved if workers have the right to form unions and they have the right to collective bargaining.

Workers need to be involved at national, sectoral and enterprise levels in tripartite and bipartite structures. Thus organizing and strengthening the capacity of unions is a necessary precondition.

There is a unique opportunity to build something new. Not to turn our backs to the recent past; but to shape things in such a way as to produce different outcomes.

Let me say that the ILO can never meet these challenges alone. Partnership with workers, employers and governments, and other relevant stakeholders, is crucial. We have many opportunities to do this. For example, next February there will be an ILO Pacific Tripartite Conference.

I am confident that the affiliates of the ITUC AP will be active partners in this effort.

Be assured of the support and assistance of the ILO, in particular its Asia/Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok, as well as its sub-regional and national offices.

All the best wishes for a successful meeting!

Mabuhay!