

High Level Opening and Welcoming Remarks

Remarks by Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto, ILO Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific

Your Excellency, Mr Minister Ambassador Davies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

We have several reasons to be excited today.

First, you are in Thailand, the Land of Smiles. A very warm welcome to all of you who have come from the neighboring countries and Geneva.

Second, we will be spending about 14 hours together to discuss the matter which is closest to your heart – ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking.

Third, we are starting something new not just for this region, but for the world – something we hope to become the greatest force you have ever seen to push our ambition forward. How powerful that force could be is partly determined today by you.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you may know, Sustainable Development Goal 8, better known as SDG 8, places social justice and decent work for all at the heart of Agenda 2030, which sets an ambitious trajectory towards sustainable and inclusive growth and development.

SDG 8 has several targets. Target 8.7 is particularly challenging. It calls on us to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers. In addition, by 2025 we must end child labour in all its forms.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is why we are here today and tomorrow. This is the second regional Consultation to be organized before the SDG Alliance 8.7 gets its high-level global launch, in September this year, preceding to the United Nations General Assembly Session. I thank most sincerely each one of you gathered here for the leadership and courage to take this bold step.

We need your leadership inspiring a greater level of commitment to SDG 8.7. Despite the past effort, we still live in a world full of distressful news. Recent examples of headlines include:

“New report shows dangers of modern slavery in construction industry” “Vietnamese kids smuggled from Jungle to UK to be cannabis farm slaves”, “Forced labour common among Hong Kong's domestic helpers” and the list goes on.

These numerous compelling stories are reflection of some hard facts.

Nearly 50%, 78 million child labourers out of a global total of 168 million are in this region.

Globally some 21 million people are in forced labour – among them children forcibly recruited into armed conflict, organized begging, commercial sexual exploitation, or the production and trafficking of narcotics. In this region alone, the ILO estimates that 11 million people are victims of forced labour.

These figures and stories behind them are shocking, but as you know these problems are not new, but should not continue.

By way of adopting the SDGs, the global community have declared that a world without these headlines, a world with no child labour, no forced labour, no modern slavery or no human trafficking is possible.

Achieving such an ambitious goal requires an unprecedented level of mobilization of partnership, which harnesses energy, resources and strategic and political acumen to a maximum degree. Ending child labour and modern slavery will require integrated thinking, coordinated actions, effective policy making and efficient use of resources in a manner we have never seen before. Hence the call for SDG Alliance 8.7. SDG Alliance 8.7 is intended to realize extraordinary and ground-breaking ways of bringing multiple actors together for concerted and focused actions to help countries to achieve the goal and targets set forth in SDG 8 and other related SDGs. Successful achievement of SDG 8.7 will require the active involvement of all parts of society –

Governments, workers' and employers' organizations, the private sector, civil society and community organizations, faith-based groups, academia and those working in the arts and media.

There are some very encouraging signs, especially for Asia. For example, when it comes to eradicating child labour, the most significant decline has occurred here, in this region. A major reason for this decline is the concerted efforts to move away from an approach based on policy silos, towards longer-term, integrated policies that tackle the foundations of child labour. These policies include quality and accessible education, social protection, decent work, youth employment and strengthened enforcement.

We are taking the existing partnership to a new level – transforming it into a more conscious alliance of action and initiatives. While this is a call for a new form of working together, we will definitely build on what we already have and go from strength to strength. Nearly all the countries here today have already dedicated national resources to combat child labour. Many have also allocated resources to counter human trafficking, including increasing prevention and enforcement work, rehabilitating victims, or gathering credible national data to monitor progress. And some of you have already shown you are prepared to innovate to get results, by embracing non-traditional partnerships, including with those you may not always agree with. Others have adopted cross-border co-operation mechanisms where these did not exist before.

I would like to emphasize the elements of open mindedness. It is just the sort of innovative, results-focused approach we will need to achieve SDG Target 8.7.

Ladies and gentlemen, are we ready for this journey towards a world with no child labour, no forced labour, no modern slavery or no human trafficking? Here in this conference room, we have the most prominent leaders in this sub-region who are tackling these issues. I know, leaders like you get more inspired and motivated when challenges are unsurmountable.

For sure, the journey would be a complex one, perhaps without a clear map as we will enter into an uncharted arena of these complex issues. I would say, if not you, who else would be the courageous front-runner with required expertise and commitment.

Can you imagine and visualize a world without child labour, forced labour, modern slavery or human trafficking? I would say, if not you, who else would paint it and inspire others who may not be able to so easily?

Now you know why we have invited you – each one of you is an essential player who will shape and lead the newly called Alliance.

One point that is clear about SDG Target 8.7 is its timeframe. We have now less than a decade to achieve the complete elimination of child labour - by the year 2025. And only a few years thereafter to eradicate modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour.

These two days and beyond, we shall contemplate deeply and concretely about how the Global 2030 Agenda can be translated into effective action and measurable results locally. I would like each one of you to ask yourselves and each other – “what more is needed to achieve this ambitious target in my own country, in my own locality, in my business, in my school, and in my home?” How can we become more influential and make a great impact? Let us not leave any stone unturned. Let us not provoke any new ideas unscrutinized. Let us surprise ourselves with something we have never thought of.

Finally, I’d like to say how honoured the ILO is to have been able to convene this important, and high level consultation. A diverse set of actors that want to make a difference globally, regionally, nationally and locally are here to gain and to give inspiration. Your commitment, collaborative spirit, time and energy is acknowledged and highly appreciated. I am convinced that it can only be through likeminded, multi-stakeholder actions – an Alliance - that we will reach SDG Target 8.7.

I’d like to thank each one of you for agreeing to take part, to help to chart a future without child labour, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. I am looking forward to seeing the recommendations you will produce. I wish you a very fruitful meeting.

Thank you.

Remarks by H.E. Glyn T. Davies, U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand

Thank you, Assistant Director-General Nishimoto. Mr. Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to open this workshop today along with Labor Minister General Sirichai Distakul and ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Tomoko Nishimoto.

Tomorrow, the world's leaders will begin to gather in New York for the 71st UN General Assembly. One year ago, the UN's 193 Member States came together to establish and commit to new Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.

At this year's UNGA, the Member States will seek to demonstrate to that adoption of the SDGs was not just an event, but the start of an entirely new, country-led, approach to resolving our most pressing issues.

The United States continues to lead in achieving SDG Target 8.7, the battle to eliminate of the worst forms of child labor; eradicate forced labor; and end modern slavery and human trafficking by 2025. We will continue to work with every one of the Member States represented in this hall today, as well as the ILO, UN, and other international and regional organizations, in conjunction with our partners in the NGO community, media, and academia.

There is global recognition that the solution to all these challenges ultimately lies in decent work for families and respect for fundamental human rights. It is a collective challenge.

The ILO estimates 20.9 million people are victims of forced labor in virtually every country in the world, fueling 150 billion dollars in illicit profits to traffickers each year. These chilling statistics mean that we need more engagement, not less. With millions – including young children -- exploited for the enrichment of others, the status quo is unacceptable.

The ILO's efforts to establish the new SDG Alliance 8.7 – and shape our collective efforts through workshops such as this one – are excellent examples of the principles of inclusivity and partnership which my government supports.

Looking around the room, I am pleased to see broad participation of governments, UN agencies, regional organizations and civil society partners, and youth -- including some of our Model UN students!

Through today's work, you will make critical contributions toward the Global SDG Alliance at the UNGA, and the 4th Conference on Child Labor next year.

The strong commitment and follow through of countries across Asia and the Pacific is essential to the achievement of the global target.

I would like to acknowledge in particular the efforts of the Royal Government of Thailand and the leadership of Prime Minister General PRA-YUT CHAN-O-CHAA and Deputy Prime Minister General PRA-WIT to counter trafficking in persons and improve labor protections, as well as Thailand's leadership on the global stage through its leadership of the Group of 77 bloc at the United Nations and its willingness to host important conversations such this one.

I congratulate all the participants of this workshop on the concrete contributions your discussions – on topics ranging from education, to supply chains, to monitoring and measuring progress – will have in advancing our global efforts to resolve this complex and critical issue.

Remarks by H.E. General Sirichai Distakul, Minister of Labour, representing H.E. General Prawit Wongsuwan, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand

Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto, ILO Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, H.E. Glyn T. Davies, U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific on their hard work in well organizing this “sub-regional consultation workshop on achieving SDG target 8.7”, ending forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labor.

We have imposed the set of ambitious and interconnected sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030 as our flagship of success. And we already witnessed that human right violation and all forms of decent work deficits are impeding us to move forward. However, thanks to the ILO and other social partners, today, we see the potential to make our world free of forced labor, slavery, human trafficking and child labor through concerted efforts, partnership and collaboration.

We could not ignore the fact that in Asia and the Pacific region, millions of our people are still facing decent work deficits which worsen their quality of life and human dignity. I would like to point out that solving the problems is not an easy task. But together with friends and partners, it is possible. Unacceptable forms of employment and human trafficking degrade human being and society at large. Children, they are our most precious resource. They are our future, our hope ... hope that has the power to transform the world. As well as unacceptable forms of employment and human trafficking, the existence of child labor preventing them from quality education and human capital development is a genuine threat not only for achieving the SDGs’ targets, but also for us to be a responsible generation.

Thailand has placed the issues of human trafficking as a national agenda. And I am proud to say that recently, Thailand has a significant progress and quite satisfied outcomes on combating forced labor, human trafficking and child labor. Today, I would like to share our experience of the 3 strategies that we have employed. They are efficient, effective and most importantly applicable for this region.

First, “Sector by sector”, due to limitation of resources, it is not practical for developing and transition countries to implement universal measures. Consequently, starting with the most serious sector is more effective and cost-efficient strategy.

Second, “Partnership and Shared Responsibility”, since the problems are complex and specific to the region, country and sector, there is no a single solution for them to be solved. So, partnership that allows knowledge, information and resources sharing between stakeholders is imperative. Following this, Thailand and CLMV countries have agreements to take collective responsibility together to get rid of irregular migration, which is the root of forced labor, human trafficking and child labor.

Third, “Standard Promotion”, this is for the sake of sustainability. There must exist the common standard in which everyone can be followed and abided with. In Thailand, we have promoted businesses to implement Thai labor Standard and Good labor Practices in their enterprises. And we always ensure that our regulations and measures are fully enforced and complied with international standard especially the ILO’s conventions.

Today's event is marked as a great start of solid efforts. Thank you everyone particularly the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for seeing the importance of labor's quality of life, and making this relevant event happened. I wish the workshop a success with fruitful discussions and progressive results.

Last but not least, I would like to reaffirm that Thailand is ready for every constructive alliance, and we will continue to work closely with our partners to make this region liveable for all.

Thank you.