

**Speech by the Director-General of the ILO, Guy Ryder
to the Jobs for Peace and Resilience Webinar “How employment and decent work
can contribute to Peace and Social Cohesion in the time of the COVID-19 crisis”
(28 September 2020)**

Greetings to everybody participating in this extraordinarily important Webinar.

We are pleased to be organising this webinar with the UN Peace Building Support Office and of course with the Swiss Confederation, and pleased to be with you in this event together with some great panellists, who have already been introduced and who will bring testimony from the country level which is key to our conversation.

I think all of us know intuitively that there is an intrinsic link between peace and resilience on the one side and economic and social conditions and employment on the other. All our personal experience and all history tells us that that link exists.

And at the moment that we are struggling with the ravages of COVID-19, not just the health emergency that has created, but its economic and social fallout. At the ILO we calculate that the pandemic has already cost the equivalent of 495 million full-time jobs around the world. We know that in these circumstances not only are we on the edge of a serious humanitarian situation in many parts of the world, but we have the danger of the situation triggering and tipping over the situation that we already see of fragility and conflict into something worse.

These are dangerous times, let's make no bones about it. But this link between peace and social justice in fact is the origin of the mandate of the ILO. This organization was created after the First World War on the understanding, and you will find it at the beginning of our Constitution, that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice. And we decided to come to Geneva to set up our office because Switzerland was already a peace hub then. If those words were true a hundred years ago, they are true today.

And we don't only have to acknowledge these realities and these dangers, we have to work out together how best to respond to them. Now it is easy, I think, to set intellectually all of these linkages of economic and social conditions on one hand and situations of fragility and instability on the other. The question is what we do to tackle them. There is of course the idea that conflict arises out of the absence of decent work opportunities, and that is well proven, but we also have to act on the notion that the creation of decent work opportunities is a very good route out of conflict and fragility as well. So there is a preventive and there is a reactive action that we have to take.

The ILO has equipped itself most recently with a normative framework for action in ILO Recommendation 205 on Employment and decent work for peace and resilience, which is an update on a previous recommendation that was adopted, not coincidentally, towards the end of the Second World War. The question is how do we make all these principles and reflections operational, and that is where the panellists are going to bring out some important lessons for us.

From the ILO perspective, what lessons have we learned as we deepen our work in these areas?

The first thing, which is absolutely essential, is the need for partnerships, like the partnership that we have with PBSO, with the Swiss Confederation and many other actors in the world of work.

Dealing with things such as these require all these actors to combine their efforts, which does not always come very easily or naturally. It's not easy for those dealing with these situations in a direct way to work with those whose speciality is about employment or gender or social conditions. We have to bring those efforts together in the framework that the ILO has put together with our friends in the PBSO, UNDP and the World Bank.

There is another way of looking at the intersection of humanitarian and development work. Very often you find ways to address humanitarian emergencies that begin the long road to sustainable development. So we have learned a lot along the way; it's been a hundred years of working at that. We've got very positive experiences to show, most recently in the flagship programme of the ILO on jobs for peace and resilience in countries such as the Central African Republic, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania and Somalia, and others that you will hear about later - Colombia is another example that comes to mind.

So we have learned a lot along the way together when we are facing conditions such as we are facing today. These are dangerous times with COVID-19; we can't allow ourselves the luxury of narrowly focusing on organizational silos or mandates. It is not a health emergency, it is not a humanitarian emergency, and it is not an economic and social emergency - but it is all of those things together. And if you aggregate those emergencies, I think you have to realize that we are facing a parallel situation of instability in the world.

Those were a few thoughts to set the conversation going, but let me reiterate what I have alluded to earlier on - the ILO has a hundred years of experience and we have a mandate and responsibility.

Let me add to that by saying that we have a renewed sense of responsibility from what we've learned and from the circumstances that we have faced today. We must double our efforts, together with those who share the commitment to promote peace and resilience in these times of COVID-19.

I leave it there and I look forward to the debate.