



SEVENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Other questions**

**Report of the ILO Symposium on Business Responses to the Demographic Challenge**  
(Geneva, 28–29 April 2009)

1. The International Symposium on Business Responses to the Demographic Challenge was held in Geneva on 28–29 April 2009. It was attended by 24 Employer representatives, nominated by employers' organizations selected through consultations with the Employers' group of the Governing Body.
2. The agenda of the meeting, as approved by the Governing Body at its 303rd Session (November 2008),<sup>1</sup> was the following:
  - The impact of an ageing population on business, including regional and sectoral trends
  - Business strategies to seize the opportunities and respond to the challenges of an ageing workforce
  - The roles of employers' organizations and the ILO
3. The symposium was opened by Mr Jean-François Retournard, Director of the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities, and Mr Brent Wilton, Deputy Secretary-General of the International Organisation of Employers. They drew attention to the importance of the issue and the need to take action before the challenge became a crisis.
4. Speakers included leading thinkers and practitioners from the business community, trade unions and advocacy groups, researchers who were studying age management and major companies that had taken interesting initiatives to address changing workforce demographics.
5. Participants recognized that the national context for every country was very important, and that there was no single response that would work for all countries or enterprises. Public policy issues, including social security, fiscal incentives and age discrimination laws, as

<sup>1</sup> GB.303/21.

well as workplace policies and practices were discussed with a view to identifying the range of options available to business.

6. It was important for employers to engage with their workers in discussions on workplace and retirement issues arising from the demographic trends that affected them. Today's older workers are quite different from yesterday's, with respect to both the desire and ability to continue working. The rules and systems in place should not impede their access to work. It was also important to change attitudes based on misconceptions relating to older workers in order to overcome age discrimination at the workplace.
7. While most of the discussion related to the ageing of the workforce, participants noted that issues of migration and development also needed to be addressed when identifying appropriate strategies for the future.
8. The knowledge gathered at the Symposium by speakers and participants will contribute to ongoing work on the subject, raising awareness of the issues, promoting business engagement and suggest areas where more research could usefully inform the discussion. The Office will take it into account in its future work on the subject.
9. The report of the Symposium, as well as related documents, can be found at the ILO web site <sup>2</sup> and can be made available to members of the Committee on request.

Geneva, 28 September 2009.

*Submitted for information.*

<sup>2</sup> [www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actemp/whatwedo/events/2009/symposium.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actemp/whatwedo/events/2009/symposium.htm).