

# ***Provisional Record***

108th Session, Geneva, June 2019

---



Date: Friday 12 July 2019

## **Plenary sitting**

### **High-level section: Visits by Heads of State and Government and other distinguished guests on the occasion of the Centenary of the International Labour Organization**

#### *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
High-level section .....	1
Statement by His Excellency Mr António Costa, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic .....	1
Statement by His Excellency Mr Marvin Rodríguez Cordero, Second Vice-President of the Republic of Costa Rica.....	5
Statement by Her Excellency Ms Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados.....	7



---

Wednesday, 19 June 2019, 3.50 p.m.

*Presidents: Ms Izata, Government Vice-President of the Conference, and Ms Mugo, Employer Vice-President of the Conference*

## **High-level section**

### **The President**

I call to order the 16th plenary sitting of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference.

In order to mark the Centenary of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Conference will be addressed by Heads of State and Government and other distinguished guests, who will gather to reaffirm their commitment to the principle of social justice upon which the ILO was founded 100 years ago and to share with the Conference their own experiences and their vision for the future of work. As part of this high-level section, we have the honour and privilege today to receive the visits of three of these guests. Without further ado, I give the floor to the first of them, His Excellency Mr António Costa, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic.

### **Statement by His Excellency Mr António Costa, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic**

#### **Mr Costa**

Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic  
(*Original Portuguese*)

It is a pleasure for me to be invited to speak in Portuguese, my mother tongue.

First of all, I would like to extend a special welcome to the Portuguese social partners here present and express my appreciation for the work we do together. It is a pleasure to see you here today. I would also like to greet all the participants in this very special session of the International Labour Conference to commemorate the Centenary of the Organization.

Throughout the last 100 years, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has had a very strong influence at the international level in the development of legislation and the adoption of social policies to promote job creation, safeguard rights at work, extend social protection, develop social dialogue and promote gender equality. This influence has been recognized universally, as was reflected when, 50 years ago, in 1969, the Organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The fundamentals and principles of the ILO Constitution are of profound political importance, and they define the ideological context. The ILO's tripartite structure, bringing together governments and representatives of workers and employers, has no parallel in any other international organization.

In recent decades, and throughout the world, the demands brought to the fore by globalization, associated with rapid technological progress, have led to profound changes in

---

the structures of production and of organizations, and have brought in their wake complex challenges for the world of work.

Over the last few months we have been involved in the ILO's debate on the future of work. A number of different visions were presented. Some predict that millions of jobs will disappear; others argue that new jobs will be created alongside the disappearance of old jobs, and will thus make it possible for workers to gain new skills. But we must be aware of the fact that, in any case, there is not a one-to-one correlation between the jobs that will be lost and those that will be created, nor will it necessarily be the same workers who lose their jobs who will easily find work in the jobs of the future.

What is clear is that it is vital that we are fully aware of the challenge we are faced with, because work is something that is always going to be at the centre of our collective lives, and its future will depend upon the will of humans and the collective choices that we make. And if we are going to make choices, we have to have a clear view of what the situation is and what the options before us are.

More than ever, social dialogue and tripartism, which are at the core of the ILO Decent Work Agenda, will play a crucial role in translating economic development into social progress, achieving broad consensus on national and international policies and promoting labour regulation which is efficient and adapted to each country, sector and enterprise. Rather than resisting, we should find ways to harness this change and to mould it into our collective vision of the future of work, and also the work of the future.

While it is true that nowadays economies are facing global challenges which are extremely complex, it is also true that innovation and skills will be the main tools that we can use to overcome those challenges, thereby enhancing opportunities to create higher-skilled jobs that are more stable and more engaging, as in fact happened in the past at each major shift in the economic paradigm. The technological and digital revolution is redesigning labour markets: the nature of work itself, the forms of working, the place of work and the way in which working time is organized. This requires a change in the types of skills that workers need to have, and the ability to innovate. These challenges are not just local and national, and therefore there is a need for governance at the international level.

In this connection, I wish to make reference to the report, *Work for a brighter future*, launched by the Global Commission on the Future of Work for the 100th anniversary of the ILO. This report is both innovative and responsible at the same time. It is innovative because it not only identifies risks, but also seeks to find the answers to the challenges of the future. It is also responsible, because it sets out an ambitious agenda of commitments for the tripartite constituents. By emphasizing the concept of decent work, the ILO has established a human-centred agenda.

As the report states, this is the time to improve the quality of work and to increase investment in people, by promoting education and training, and by guaranteeing a universal entitlement to lifelong learning. That is perhaps the biggest change which the technological transformation is going to require. This also is the time to expand choice, close the gender gap, combat poverty and reduce inequalities, by ensuring more inclusive social protection from birth through to old age.

And, as the report also mentions, it is critical that we preserve the enduring relationship between the labour market and social protection. It is imperative that we reinforce and reinvent the link between rights and duties in the employment relationship and in social protection. This is also the time to reflect on the need to extend the control each of us has over our own time to strike a fair and sustainable work–life balance and balance between those who have work and those who do not.

---

This is a discussion which is not just for today, or even for the coming months or years. This is a long-term objective for civilization, but a fundamental objective.

Currently, there is much pressure to extend the effective working day in some sectors. Technology has a tendency to permeate, and indeed invade, our rest times; thanks to technology we are somehow taking our work home with us. To resist such pressures, we must apply age-old wisdom, and that is that technology should serve society and help people to work better, but also, and more importantly, help people to live better.

Furthermore, in what the ILO has suggested in this report as “reinvigorating the social contract”, it is essential that we also reform the institutions which govern the labour market. Only with the committed action of governments and the organizations representing workers and employers will it be possible, given all the risks, to ensure full employment and decent work, with rights and fair wages, and to add value to the economy as a whole. This is a global challenge before us, which we must address in each of our countries and in each of our regions, and also at the international level.

This is why we very much welcome the fact a year ago in Gothenburg, the European Union laid down the fundamental principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and that in the Strategic Agenda, which we will be discussing over the next five years, there is a proposal that we solidify the Gothenburg principles and incorporate them into a genuine plan of action which will guide our transition through these difficult demographic, technological and climate-related challenges.

We must take advantage of this historic moment of the Centenary of the International Labour Organization to transform the *Work for a brighter future* report into a real tool for action which should motivate us and connect us all, as I hope will happen with the Declaration that is due to be voted on and adopted on Friday.

Today in Portugal questions concerning the labour market are very much on the political agenda and part of the public debate. We have a solid commitment to the ILO, which dates back more than 40 years. During the most difficult years of the economic and financial crisis that struck our country, the ILO’s help was pivotal. It brought into the debate data and studies which improved our understanding of the reality of the Portuguese labour market. For example, the idea that Portugal had an excessively rigid labour market, and that in order to increase productivity we needed to increase the flexibility of our labour laws, is one of the notions that we were able to dispute, using these comparative labour studies from the ILO.

During the crisis, the policies of austerity and an insistence on a model of competitiveness based on labour deregulation and low salaries had a very negative impact on our economy and on employment. At that point in time, unemployment reached unprecedented levels, soaring to 17.5 per cent at its worst. At the same time, the country suffered a wave of emigration which had not been seen since the 1960s, with a loss of our most valuable assets: our people, their talents and their skills. For our country, it was mostly young people who were leaving – the most well-educated members of our society – in stark contrast to the emigration of the past, in the last century.

Therefore, the Government of Portugal decided from the outset to abandon this incoherent idea of “expansionary austerity” to which the country was subjected during the crisis. Rather, we invested in a pro-growth, pro-employment strategy, combining modernization and innovation of our economic structures, with more value given to work, increasing income, restoring rights and creating jobs. We therefore undertook a commitment and successfully managed to improve income levels and to implement a phased increase to the minimum wage, which has risen by 20 per cent over the last four years. This is also why we launched a programme to combat precarity, reviewed active employment policies and

---

revived social dialogue by extending it to include discussion of a strategy for the decade which aims to overcome the structural shortcomings of the Portuguese economy.

Any strategy based on sustainable growth cannot lead to a devaluation of work, but must support the ability to create added value. This requires a great deal of effort in rethinking our structural deficits in terms of education and training, and skills acquisition for the entire population. In fact, it was only a model of “competitive development” that enabled us to get the Portuguese economy and employment levels moving again in a sustainable fashion, creating conditions to generate wealth effectively, increase well-being and strengthen the position of our country in the world. And that is why we also committed to technological innovation, and strengthening the link between education and training and the manufacturing sectors. Because we all know that the work of the future will require more skills, not fewer, and more innovation, not less.

The results of these choices are visible today. Over the last three years, Portugal’s gross domestic product increased by 7 per cent above the European Union average, which allowed us to achieve real convergence with the other economies of the European Union – something which had not happened since we adopted the euro at the start of the century. Unemployment has fallen 5.6 percentage points since 2015 and is now at 6.5 per cent, the lowest level in 16 years. Long-term unemployment and youth unemployment have fallen further than total unemployment. At the same time, job security has improved, given that permanent contracts represent 81 per cent of net job creation. We have thus succeeded in increasing families’ incomes and reducing the risk of poverty.

I must also stress that these new policies were developed and based on a strategy of consultation with the social partners. There is no economic growth possible without investment, and there is no investment without trust and confidence. So the success of these policies was possible only because they were based on a mutual trust that was established and through a robust policy which increased incomes and created a better investment environment. And that is why, in recent years, the growth of our economy has largely been based on growth in private investment on the one hand, either through increased foreign direct investment from investors choosing Portugal as a good place to invest or through increased investment from domestic enterprises, and on the other, through improved international competitiveness in all sectors, which has led to increased exports and increased market shares.

I think that it should be clear, then, that the competitiveness of our economy has not been achieved through collective impoverishment, but rather has come about through investment in upgrading the economic fabric, improved living conditions for workers, upskilling and ensuring that work is decent, as prerequisites for sustainable growth, business investment and increased international competitiveness. This is the path that we intend to continue on: to incorporate changes in the way that we organize our manufacturing processes, and to enable our companies to be more competitive through investment in technological infrastructures, in new management approaches, in science and in upskilling of our human resources. At the same time, we must never lose sight of the need to defend decent work, social dialogue, collective bargaining or the framework of rights and duties that are part and parcel of the welfare state. In essence, we want to ensure that work in the future will always come with rights. These principles are fundamental to an innovative and creative economy that generates wealth and creates jobs, but also a fairer, more supportive and more inclusive society which makes work and well-being more democratic and leaves no one behind.

In this agenda of the future, we are counting on the invaluable contribution of the ILO, as one of the most important actors in global governance, joining forces with its partners at the international, regional and national levels to defend the dignity of work, to build upon the important legacy that has been established over the last hundred years.

---

The future of the world is not a race to the bottom. On the contrary, we must increasingly share, as broadly and sustainably as possible, more inclusive social models that contribute more to decent work and greater prosperity that is shared by all. In this future, we can continue to build on our achievements over the next 100 years. You can count on us when facing up to the challenges that lie ahead.

**Statement by His Excellency  
Mr Marvin Rodríguez Cordero,  
Second Vice-President of the  
Republic of Costa Rica**

**Mr Rodríguez Cordero**  
Second Vice-President of the  
Republic of Costa Rica  
(*Original Spanish*)

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Costa Rica and President Carlos Alvarado Quesada, I wish to express our wholehearted support for the celebration of the Centenary of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which since its very beginnings has strategically reminded us that there can be no universal peace without social justice.

Since its establishment, the ILO has been characterized by two concerns which remain just as relevant today: first, how to improve the living conditions and welfare of the working population and, second, how to establish mechanisms to resolve conflicts and define joint goals for the development of our nations and of global society as a whole.

The culture of social dialogue and tripartism that has been developed within the ILO is one of the most important inventions for harmonious industrial relations and democratic development of nations. The ILO's contributions to improving working conditions on a global scale are manifold. For that reason, we defend its multilateralism and seek to support and strengthen its work.

By adhering to the fundamental principles on the basis of which the ILO functions, our country has benefited significantly. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that a significant proportion of the instruments and policies on which the architecture of welfare and social protection in Costa Rica is based are founded on a participatory process and negotiations, and on the consensus-based tripartite contributions of workers, employers and the State. This social compact underpins the social State based on the rule of law and the institutional framework of democracy in Costa Rica, and has made it possible for the country to attain higher levels of human development.

However, in today's world, we are faced with new, highly complex challenges which call on us to work collaboratively, both within our countries and at the multilateral level.

We are witnessing how innovation and technological change, robotization and artificial intelligence, among other things, are developing at a dizzying pace. They are generating both opportunities and challenges and are transforming production and social equilibriums, as well as the world of work and industrial relations.

To deal with the new paradigms of the future of work, we must design and develop comprehensive policies centred on human beings and their dignity that exercise the fundamental labour rights and human rights in general.

---

We must promote the creation of employment and decent work opportunities, which are prerequisites for making progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of eliminating poverty and reducing inequalities. The 2030 Agenda requires that we develop improved strategies and solutions.

Striking a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development – economic growth with social inclusion and environmental sustainability – is the major challenge for humanity, and there is no simple way of harmonizing these objectives.

It is crucial that the long history of the ILO should guide us in finding ways to address these challenges, involving all sectors of society and business in the development of public policies and strategies to build a dialogue of convergence that understands the different needs and perspectives.

It was precisely in the awareness that social dialogue is crucial for bringing about the changes that are called for in the labour market that the tripartite Higher Council on Labour of Costa Rica unanimously agreed to implement, within the framework of ILO technical assistance, the Decent Work Country Programme for 2019–23, which comprises four priority areas of action: social protection, employment, compliance with international labour standards, and social dialogue.

Over the next four years, we will seek to improve working conditions and enhance the employability of vulnerable groups. Work is currently ongoing on strengthening the National Employment System by integrating all of the country's employment services into one sole platform so as to increase the efficiency of job placement services and the search for quality employment.

In the current circumstances, it is essential that knowledge and education are managed as a public asset in order to build the capacity of human capital. Consequently, the Administration of President Carlos Alvarado Quesada has proposed extending preschool coverage to 89 per cent, increasing the number of schools, making the teaching of English universal and promoting a digital environment for education through the Bicentennial Education Network. Furthermore, as a result of a public–private partnership, the country is implementing the National Framework for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, which will enable the studies and credentials of people who opt for a technical career path to be recognized. That will facilitate enterprises' recruitment processes and simplify recent graduates' transition to the world of work.

I would also like to highlight that, with a view to giving effect to international labour standards, the Government is focusing on implementing the recently ratified Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). The application of this instrument is crucial to the labour market integration of the men and women of Costa Rica.

With a view to contributing to an improved work–life balance, deriving maximum benefit from technological tools and reducing the environmental footprint, we are moving towards new regulatory frameworks to seek alternative forms of work such as teleworking in the public and private sectors.

Recognizing the significant contributions made by the social economy as an extension of the State in providing goods and services in areas which public institutions are unable to reach, our Government is currently leading the development of the first National Policy on the Social and Solidarity Economy, with a view to improving the institutional services provided to associations, strengthening the processes for creating decent work and making an impact on local development related to these economic units.



---

In this connection, the Government recognizes the long history of cooperatives in Costa Rica and the contribution made by trade unions and other forms of associations to come up with comprehensive national solutions.

Lastly, I would like to say that we welcome the new international labour standard concerning violence and harassment in the world of work, proposed by the ILO for adoption at this session of the Conference. We must categorically reject any behaviour, conduct or practice constituting violence or harassment in the work environment. In the case of Costa Rica, the entry into force of the Labour Procedure Reform Act in July 2017 represented a step forward in establishing a regulatory framework prohibiting any form of discrimination and providing for corresponding remedies for victims.

I would like to conclude by saying that the only way to deal with the challenges of the future of work is by building a social compact that takes into account the needs and aspirations of all social and economic sectors, regions and sectors of production, particularly of the most vulnerable populations, for whom the promise of social justice, harmonious industrial relations and decent work are still just a hope, not a reality. Making it possible for all women and men to enjoy decent living conditions must be at the top of our agenda.

*(Ms Mugo takes the Chair.)*

**Statement by Her Excellency  
Ms Mia Amor Mottley,  
Prime Minister of Barbados**

**Ms Amor Mottley**  
Prime Minister of Barbados

I am honoured to be here, and to have flown over the course of the last 18 hours to get here. I do so conscious that the body that I am about to address has done more than any other institution in the course of the last century to change the lives of ordinary people across this globe. I am equally conscious that the last 100 years has seen greater change for ordinary people than at any other time in the history of mankind. If we accept those two statements, then we begin to understand the critical nature of the work that this Organization continues to do on behalf of those without voice and those without presence.

Indeed, just 15 years after the establishment of this Organization, our region, the Caribbean region, saw the beginning of unrest that saw workers take their place to have their voices heard and their presence felt. Protests started in February 1934 in what is now Belize, and the torch of rebellion travelled quickly to Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, Guyana, Saint Lucia, and then to my own country on the 26 July 1937, a day we recognize as a day of national significance. We saw the workers rise up to express their horror at the conditions under which they laboured. With only their passion and faith in justice for all, the workers drew strength from solidarity with their brothers and sisters across the region and from the heroes of their past, ranging from Bussa in our own country to Toussaint Louverture in Haiti.

This spontaneous workers' rebellion across the islands of the region, without the benefit of technology and telecommunications, led to the formation of my own political party, which I lead today, the Barbados Labour Party, which is the oldest political party in the English-speaking Caribbean. Indeed, three years later it led to the establishment of the Barbados Workers' Union, an institution with which this Organization is well familiar for the tremendous contribution that it has made, and continues to make, for those who have come here.

---

I am conscious that I stand here in an institution that has known what it is to see the best of Barbados, to have shared with us through the works of the Right Excellent Sir Frank Walcott, national hero of Barbados, who served on the International Labour Organization (ILO) Governing Body from 1969 to 1991, when he retired. And through the works of Sir Leroy Trotman, to whom we pay tribute later this evening, who served equally with distinction and dedication from 1991 to 2011, and who was the Worker Vice-Chairperson for almost a decade, from 2002 to 2011. And, of course, currently serving we have Ms Toni Moore, who has been a member of the Governing Body since 2017.

So, then, I come here not as a matter of choice, but as a matter of obligation, for my country has within its DNA an intimate and fundamental respect for the rights of workers and for the expression of them wherever and however we may, such that their life may improve at all times.

It gives me immense pride when, as one of my first acts as Prime Minister one year ago upon being elected, I invited for a meeting the then social partnership, and in particular the leader of the Barbados Workers' Union, Ms Toni Moore. She is, by the way, the first woman ever to be General Secretary in an institution whose stability has seen, over 78 years, only four general secretaries, an indication of the extent to which it has been a rock within our own country for the protection of workers' rights. I met with her and other union leaders and members of the private sector in our own social partnership, which Sir Leroy Trotman did much to form at the time of our last economic challenge in the early 1990s – 1992 – in order to ensure that our country adopted a shared perspective on governance, and a shared model, recognizing that government alone, capital alone, or labour alone cannot move forward on a sustainable basis the things that we must do to improve the lives of our country and the development opportunities of our nation.

Our social partnership, I am happy to report, now meets regularly again, having gone through a period of lethargy. That social partnership was the first entity with which I chose to meet because I understand fully that, if we are to move forward in difficult times or prosperous times, a commitment to sharing the burden fairly – as we must share the bounties fairly – must mark every aspect of our development model. Indeed, on my very first morning in office we met, and we set a national mission that was common to us all – the saving of the value of our dollar – recognizing that our failure to do so would impact on every sector and every class of person within our nation state.

That struggle for social justice, which is at the core of all that we do, for the rights of workers to associate, organize and withdraw their labour, and for recognition that labour has dignity and is not a commodity; that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere; that fairness and equality must be the bedrock upon which we rise; that there must be an elimination of child labour and workplace violence; and that there ought to be a tripartite approach to discourse and the solving of problems. These are the things that mirror much of what this Organization has stood for and promoted over the course of the last century. We were not here at the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944. I dare say most of us were not even born. But that history is our history, and these causes are our causes, deeply imbibed and proudly recalled.

Our future can only be secured by remembering our past. Never before has humanity faced a test of the magnitude of climate change as we face today. The Chairperson reflected on my comments to the United Nations General Assembly last September, where I spoke directly to those there and to those who could hear my voice, that the world has made a pact that it is not prepared to see those who are most vulnerable among the global community of nations. It is unfortunate because it reminds us of a world that was not prepared to see the most vulnerable of human beings 100 years ago, namely the workers. That we, 100 years later, in spite of the development of this institution, in spite of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in spite of all who have died and all that we have fought for, should continue

---

to believe that it is okay to view a group of nations as dispensable or, worse still, not to view them at all, against the very threat that is perhaps the gravest threat since mankind has inhabited this earth, is perhaps the greatest unfortunate aspect of our global affairs today.

We speak from event to event. We speak from institution to institution. And even though they say politics is the art of repetition, it appears that neither politics nor morality is having any meaningful impact on those whose actions and voices can make that significant difference to the climate difficulties that we face today. I go further. Those who are most likely to suffer from climate change will be the most vulnerable. The notion of climate refugees is not something that is alien to us. Within our own region, we have seen more than two thirds of the population of Montserrat leave because of a volcano; in our own region, two years ago, we have seen the whole island of Barbuda evacuated because of a hurricane; in our own region, we have seen the country of Dominica lose 226 per cent of its GDP and a significant dislocation of its population because of two hurricanes two years ago.

But it is not only climate change that bothers us, and it is not only the recognition that the world is only prepared to protect the most powerful who have been the ones who have caused the greatest contribution to the rate of degradation of our climate. But it is also the global insecurity. It is also the continued willingness to believe that it is okay to move capital but it is not okay for people to move, and hence mass migration of labour is unacceptable to a world, whether for xenophobic, racial or other reasons. It is okay for a world to accept that these combined issues, along with the rapid pace at which technological change is taking place, can all have implications for people, without States or institutions intervening to counterbalance the implications that they are having for ordinary workers.

Therefore, when this institution sought to look at the whole question of the future of work, it did so, I believe, against the background that we do not live in a world that in any way will resemble the world of 30, 40 years ago, far less a century ago. To that extent, therefore, it is absolutely critical for us to plan effectively to ensure that there are no unintended consequences for our populations, in particular ordinary workers, as we go through this fast-pace, multipolar, changing world. The pace at which it is changing means that the only certain thing is the principles to which we hold dearly. The environment will change. The geography, because of climate, will change. The power of those who have power will change. But the principles that cause us first and foremost to respect the dignity of work, to respect the decency of work, to respect the principle that burdens must be shared fairly but equally bounties must also be shared fairly, those are the only constants that we can assure ourselves of 10, 20, 30, 50 or 100 years from now.

It is against this background that my government and the region to which we belong has held dearly to the principles that those things that have allowed us to evolve as modern nation states, from the 1930s when our workers rose up, are as relevant today as they were in the 1930s. They called for equality; they called for fairness; they called for equal opportunity. Have we completed the task? No. Are there still issues that face us? Yes. I have come here today to confront some of those issues, cognizant that we do so at the very time that the world is prepared to jettison multilateralism and to jettison the voices of those of us who want to finish the journey and to complete the task. We are not over.

We have not completed the protection of women, who continue in many instances across this world to face conditions of unequal pay for equal work, and who, regrettably, have been the subject more often than not of violence and discrimination in the workplace. It is against that background that I am proud that my Minister of Labour has been appointed as Rapporteur on that technical committee – and I look forward to the work at the end of the week – because these are the “soft things” that no longer occupy the news headlines, but regrettably confront too many women and too many people in their daily working lives as they seek to protect their families and themselves.

---

Similarly, we have not placed sufficient emphasis on commitment. My own government is conscious that a previous government almost a decade ago in this very room made a commitment to sign up to the Conventions on the protection of the rights of domestic workers but yet, having made that commitment, did nothing. We have come to commit once again, because we recognize that, in our own case, tens of thousands of our own citizens were raised, were nurtured, were born to domestic workers, and, irrespective of their circumstances at birth, have risen to make significant contributions not only to our own country, but indeed to regional and international affairs. That their parents, and their mothers in particular, should be the subject of harassment or victimization, simply as they seek to do decent work to help others, is uncalled for and will not be accepted by my own government.

Then, of course, there is the issue of minimum wages, which your own report speaks to as a guarantee as to the minimum standard of living to which our citizens ought to be entitled. We live in a world where inequity has increased. Other than it parading itself in academic theses or opinion, or in editorial pieces in newspapers, we have seen little effort to be able to close the gap in inequity with respect to the economic path of too many of our countries across the world.

Countries speak glibly about GDP growth entitling or disentitling you from concessional aid in today's world. But it is not GDP growth that determines equity, it is fair and equitable growth in our societies that determines whether our path is on a sustainable basis or not. To that extent, we believe that we have a solemn duty to be able to upgrade the skills and to create the opportunities for access to both tools and capital for our workers at all times for them to be able to transition – whether transitioning from student to worker, from worker to parent, or from worker to retirement. In very many cases, it is in the transitioning of workers to different states that we see an absence of protection afforded to them.

My country was one of the first developing countries to offer unemployment benefit as part of the suite of national social security obligations back in the early 1980s. We did so at a time when many other developed countries did not offer unemployment benefit. To this, this year, I will now add the issue of paternity benefits because we recognize that, even as we move to remove discrimination against women, we have a solemn duty to ensure that our young fathers in particular have the opportunity to bond with their children because at the core of sustainable development are strong families, and strong families make strong communities. Strong communities make strong countries.

Equally, we recognize that we can no longer coast on a culture of contentment, and that for workers, and for capital, and for government, there must be the mirror exercise. That examination of self. Are we truly delivering what we have committed to deliver to be faithful to our mandate and to our constituency?

Our country has recognized that we have a responsibility to define excellence in every form. If we can define excellence in each job – from that of a car washer to that of a doctor, from that of a waiter to that of a lawyer, from that of a chemist to that of a domestic worker – if we can determine who can certify to excellence, and who can teach to excellence, but above all else, if we can then determine who can monitor the habit of excellence, because excellence is merely a habit, then we will improve that which we offer to each other and ensure that the level of productivity, and by extension our competitiveness as a nation and as a region, will significantly improve.

We have become accustomed, regrettably, to standing on a culture of contentment in too many parts of this world, without recognizing that continuous examination and retraining is absolutely essential to progress. In our own way, we call it the “Retooling and Empowering, Retraining and Enfranchising (RE-RE) Programme”. For those who think enfranchising is about making people owners without the protection of social rights, I say to

---

you that this is not the case because we recognize that at every stage we have a duty to protect the transition and ultimate destination of all who we seek to enfranchise. But we are conscious that no amount of training, no amount of development, no amount of retooling can make that ultimate difference in today's world without creating a platform for ownership for all. We say so conscious that technology threatens the existence of many of our workers only if those workers are not in charge of the ownership of the technology. The technology becomes an inimical tool against those who cannot control the direction or the shape of the technology. But if we own the technology as workers, and if we can shape the direction in which technology can be used both ethically and economically, then it is unlikely to cause the dislocation or to bother those who are worried about it as we confront automation, artificial intelligence and all of the other things that will fundamentally alter the structure of work over the course of this century.

We believe, for example – and a simple example – if a robot can do everything that I can do, that is fantastic, so long as I own the robot. But if I do not own the robot, then I am in trouble. It is against that background that a discussion as to ownership has to start to take place, and it is not a discussion that has been taking place, other than among a few who, regrettably, have not yet commanded the space of the national media to be able to make the case. We cannot stop the pace of technology, but we need to ensure that workers have a right in the ownership and shaping of what technology can do and will do in our societies.

We call, therefore, upon the Director-General, upon this Organization, its member States and its social partners, to work with us on the new models of business and ownership; on the models that will put at all times the dignity of our citizens at the centre of our development model. There are many proximate causes of our challenges and many technical solutions. But if we are distracted by the noise, or by the trees from the forest, then we will suffer the consequences of being a pawn on a chessboard. I want to suggest to this Organization that we have to make our voices heard where it matters most, and that is in the development trajectory of nations, and that is with respect to the repositioning of workers at the centre of the development model.

Our principles will not change. Our geography will. Our power relations will. Our capital will. But if we hold faithful to our principles, and if we ensure and hold on faithfully to our principles, that we put people at the centre of every share of power, be it capital, be it technology, be it in the framing of ownership, then I do believe that we will be able to evolve through this very turbulent period of world history, with the protection of workers' rights and the dignity of our people intact. Why? Because ownership matters. Why? Because the root of all must be fairness and equity. Why? Because our people matter. Why? Because our development thrust must always be about providing opportunity, allowing as many of our people to prosper and develop, to banish inequity that has so characterized so many of our countries in recent years, and to stand up for what matters, rather than being afraid to be a voice in the wilderness. If we in the Caribbean were afraid of being a voice in the wilderness, we would not speak about climate change. We would not speak about mass migration. We would not speak about the global inequities of a distorted global trading system that requires of us a participation at the same level and in the same manner as large countries, even though we have no power to distort global trade in goods or services. Size, position and geography cannot matter in fighting for righteousness and the protection of workers.

I suspect that those who gathered 100 years ago to form this Organization felt the same way and recognized that what mattered was the commitment to principle and the protection of average human beings, who were voiceless and faceless for too many people, but who understood that that commitment to cause, without fear of consequences, would one day lead to the kind of improvements that we have seen among the working classes of the entire world. We are not yet finished. The Talmudic texts tell us that we are not expected to complete the task, but neither are we at liberty to resile from it.

---

I stand here today, carrying the baton for another generation of Barbadian leaders to commit to principles that, more than any other institution, helped define what our country is about and what our mission stands for. I thank you for the honour accorded to me, my Government and my people, in being able to share a few perspectives on this Centenary. In our part of the world, and I suspect you know this, a century is nothing to be trifled with, even if we may not be seeing as many of them at the moment in the Cricket World Cup as we would like to see. But we know that once there is breath, there is will, and we will therefore join with you on that mission to continue to benefit those people who have not yet boarded the train.

### **The President**

On behalf of my fellow Officers and all Conference delegates, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you for having honoured us with your presence today and having shared your thoughts and your vision.

I hereby adjourn this high-level section, organized as part of the 16th plenary sitting of the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference.

*(The sitting adjourned at 5.25 p.m.)*