
Introduction by the Director-General

326th Session of the Governing Body (Geneva, 14 March 2016)

Thank you very much, Madam President. Good afternoon to you and good afternoon to Government, Worker and Employer representatives, members of the Governing Body. Let me, in my turn, welcome you all once again to Geneva and to this 326th Session of the Governing Body. You have a very full agenda before you again and the prospect of two weeks of hard work ahead. I want to tell you at the outset that the provisional list of participants to this Governing Body session comprises 647 accredited representatives, including 19 ministers and 47 observer countries. So at least we have a lot of people sharing the burden ahead.

All of us in the Office have done our best to prepare for this session, to enable you to work productively and, of course, we remain at your entire disposal throughout the session. I can perhaps contribute to this collective effort of support through these now customary introductory remarks, providing some context for the points on your agenda and highlighting what I think are some of the more salient issues that arise from them.

Let me begin with some comments about developments since we last met in November. First, I must express solidarity and sincere condolences to the Governments and to the people of Turkey and of Côte d'Ivoire, for the terrible attacks of which they were victim yesterday. It is worrying that this background of continued conflict and widespread violence in too many parts of the world continues to inflict terrible suffering on millions of people and to provoke rising and dangerous levels of political and social tension. And we are, against this background, witnessing renewed and acute concerns about the state of, and the prospects for, the global economy.

Since our last session, forecasts of future growth have been adjusted sharply down again. It seems to be prevailing opinion that our economic circumstances are in a more fragile condition than at any point since the global crisis broke in 2008, and which has already cost the world no less than 27 million jobs. I believe that we need to focus on this alarming situation because whatever the reasons, whatever the complexities, the fact is that its impact on the world of work is raising new and important obstacles to the achievement of the ILO's objectives. This is very much our business and it is why our agenda items and challenges for global policy on inclusive growth and more and better jobs are central to our work here in the next two weeks, and address issues which are more than ever urgent and serious.

The other development since November which I also want to highlight at the outset – and this time it is a positive one – is that the international system has successfully completed, in 2015, its year of global action, with the climate change agreement concluded in December in Paris. Following on the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in September, and with next May's humanitarian summit in Istanbul in prospect, I believe that we must draw encouragement from the demonstrated capacity of the multilateral system to address and to reach agreement on some of the most decisive global challenges of our time. We must also resolve that we, the ILO, must be fully committed and effective in the implementation of the commitments that are made. And it is our firm intention to do just that.

Since we last met, the ILO has been deeply involved in developing the indicators which we need to make the Sustainable Development Goals measurable and, thus, to make us all

accountable for their realization. And my own Report to the Conference in June will return to the ILO's overall role in the implementation of a 2030 Agenda which, thanks to all of your efforts, so well embodies the Decent Work Agenda.

In this spirit, let me say as well that I was really quite proud to go to ECOSOC in New York in January, to launch the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which – through ILO leadership – today enjoys the active support of all 29 United Nations entities of the UN CEB. It is one example of the real and practical commitment of the ILO to work for cohesion across the UN system, in pursuit of goals that we all have responsibility for.

And, at this session, let me add that you will examine UNAIDS achievements in 2015, during which time it was the ILO that chaired its Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations.

Madam Chair, recalling that the ILO also chaired the UN Global Migration Group in 2014, brings me to the two items this Governing Body will be discussing on fair and effective migration policies and on the labour market impacts on refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. We need to distinguish between the two. And, indeed, we will examine them separately, with the item on refugees and displaced people in the format of the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization.

We all know that migration for employment is a constitutional responsibility of the ILO and, as of this biennium, a policy outcome priority as well. In addition, I believe you will recall that we had a first debate on refugees and displaced persons in November. I think – and many of you have said the same thing to me – that that debate was a necessary but inconclusive exchange, which needed to be followed up but not simply repeated. It is my hope that this time, at this session, we can try to do two things. The first is to give clear definition, clear definition, to what the ILO role should be in the face of a refugee crisis, which is, let us recall, not new, and not restricted to any single region or situation, but rather longstanding and global. I heard the view expressed in this room in November that refugees and displaced persons were not part of the ILO's mandate and not our responsibility. Let me say that I do not believe that this argument is sustainable.

My visit to Jordan in January showed that access of refugees to labour markets and its impact on host communities are key issues there as they are elsewhere. I was grateful to the organizers of last month's Syria donors' conference in London for making jobs one of the three thematic issues discussed there and for the opportunity to argue the decent work dimension of the response to the global refugee crisis. Within our mandate, and with our expertise, we have to be part of that response.

That leads me to the second thing I believe we need to do, which is to frame our contribution in full understanding of, and in coherence with, the overall multilateral effort. And to help us do that we are going to structure our debate – and it will be a week today – around an invited panel of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration, Sir Peter Sutherland; Director-General of the International Organization of Migration, Ambassador William Lacy Swing; and the Director of the Division of International Protection of UNHCR, Miss Carol Batchelor. There are many reasons why this is a key discussion for this Governing Body, but I think that the most compelling is that the international community is falling short of its humanitarian obligations to millions of women, men and children, who desperately need our help. That shames us as individuals and it stands as an offence to the ILO's values of social justice.

Madam Chair, members of the Governing Body, the Governing Body will receive two reports at this session which I think are important milestones in the implementation of our Centenary Standards Initiative. Professor Van der Heijden, Chairman of the Committee on Freedom of Association and Judge Koroma, Chair of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations have submitted the report requested of

them by this Governing Body on the functioning and interrelationship of the different parts of the standards supervisory system. And in your name I thank them for it and the recommendations it contains.

And we have also the first report of the Working Group of the Standards Review Mechanism (SRM) and I am very encouraged that they did their work in a very constructive atmosphere, with concrete results to show and I must say they completed their work a day and a half early. It will be said of course that this is only the beginning of a long journey that is true. It will be said that there are more difficult issues that lie ahead of them and that is true as well. But a good start has been made and that is important and moreover my understanding is that the Committee on Freedom of Association which met last week undertook its works successfully and that included an examination of its own working methods and I believe that this also augurs well for our future efforts.

And with the Centenary Enterprises Initiative in mind, let me also draw your attention to a cluster of three items on our agenda which all relate, albeit in slightly different ways to the ILO's engagement with the private sector in general and enterprises in particular. There is a progress report on the Enterprises Initiative itself, on our Public-Private partnerships, and then on the review of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

I think it is only fair to say that this Enterprises Initiative has been one of the most difficult to progress and has raised political concerns of which I am very much aware and has also tested the Office's own organizational capacities. And I very much hope therefore that the advice and the guidance which you provide at this session will help us progress more quickly and of course to the satisfaction of you all.

And in similar vein, your views on the independent evaluation of the ILO's Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2010-15 and on the current plan for this year and next, which is also on the agenda, are going to be very helpful for our work on the Women at Work Initiative.

Madam Chair, members of the Governing Body, once more the Governing Body has five country-specific items on its agenda and if past experience is a guide, they will absorb a good part of your energy and time in the days ahead. Since the last session, in two of these cases Fiji and Qatar, a tripartite mission and a tripartite visit respectively have been to the countries concerned and I want to thank their members for the hard work that they did. Because of that work, the Governing Body has real opportunity to move these cases forward substantively and constructively.

With regard to those and the other country-specific items, I want only to repeat what I have said to you previously, that it is essential that the ILO proceed through an objective and impartial assessment of the facts with the aim of promoting full application of the ratified Conventions involved. And that while politicization of these issues and of the Governing Body is of course to be avoided, that includes unjustified allegations of politicization to discredit real efforts to defend the rights of workers and employers as the case may be.

I have to confess that I cannot recall any article 26 complaint that was not at one point or another decried as politically motivated and yet once completed they have generally been recognized as having brought major positive change entirely in consonance with the mandate of our organization and let me say that the stage we have now reached with Myanmar is one such example.

Let me turn in conclusion to the items on your agenda which relate to the management and administration of the Office. This being the very first Governing Body of the new biennium, we are all spared on this occasion any major programme or budgeting debate, they will come and in a big way next November. But we do have the implementation report for the just completed biennium. And this is not less important because in a sense it completes

the cycle of the Office's duty of accountability to you and your responsibility for governance. So we take very seriously both the task of presenting a report which is truly informative and useful to you in discharging that responsibility and also the need to learn from your comments to ensure that we continue to improve.

And later this afternoon you will also be examining an update on the headquarters building renovation projects where the bottom line is that we are so far on time and in budget. And I would expect that to make you happy but I am not so sure about what your thinking will be on the options that we have presented, and I underline at your request, for the financing of the areas of work which are currently outside the agreed scope of the project because of insufficient funding. These concern above all the refurbishment of the meeting rooms that we use which will have to be undertaken at some point and can be done more economically if in connection with the current project.

Madam President, members of the Governing Body, in the period since your last session, just as in the period up to your next one and beyond that, the life of the ILO has been and will continue to be characterized by our collective commitment and efforts to change and to improve the way that we work. The Working Party on the functioning of the Governing Body and Conference will again contribute to that and I would note that in November next it will turn its attention to regional meetings and that is something perhaps we can keep in mind when we examine the report of the 13th African Regional Meeting, held in Adidas Ababa at the end of last year. A very good meeting I think but one which raised some questions about applicable rules.

The Office is now focussing particularly on its own business and administrative processes with a view to stripping out unnecessary complexities and costs so that our rightly rigorous standards of financial probity are assured along with the highest levels of efficiency in programme delivery. The reports of the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee and of the Chief Internal Auditor, which are before you will certainly be valuable reference points for all of these endeavours. We continue to address the important challenges with what is I trust a level headed and honest appreciation of what we have achieved and what has not gone as well as we would want in the process of change and reform.

The update that you have on the Human Resources Strategy is, I think, an example of that approach and like everything else that we do to serve our tripartite constituents, my colleagues and I will pursue its implementation with determination and with energy. And in this context and before closing, I think it proper that I alert the Governing Body to our investigations into alleged fraud committed by a small group of retirees against the Staff Health Insurance Fund. I have kept the External Auditors and the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee informed of this issue and so some of you may already be aware of it. This incident was detected through our internal control mechanisms and is currently the subject of criminal investigation. Four arrests have been made and judicial process is following its course.

Madam President, members of the Governing Body, with these remarks I want to wish you all success in the hard work ahead and to assure you once again of the full support of myself and my colleagues in your work. Thank you very much.