

337th Session of the ILO Governing Body

Opening remarks by the Director-General

(Monday, 28 October 2019)

Welcome to this 337th Session of the ILO Governing Body, which meets as the ILO's Centenary year draws towards its close.

This circumstance provides a specific and important context for the discussions we will have over the next two weeks and I think it is useful for us to reflect upon it as we begin our work.

By common consent, we have made a considerable success of this unique Centenary. The decisions made by this Governing Body to focus above all on the future of work, and through a demanding and ambitious process of preparation starting with national tripartite dialogues, then with our Global Commission, and then through the negotiations at this year's Conference, to adopt a Declaration for the Future of Work, have been amply vindicated.

The result is that the ILO can move forward from its Centenary with confidence and momentum, and this is good news for us all.

Good news, because the ILO has gained enormously in visibility this year.

Good news, because the ILO has gained too from the extraordinary engagement of its constituents which I have seen directly in so many member States.

Good news, because we have received strong political support from the highest levels for our mandate and our activities. This was expressed by the messages delivered by no less than 34 Heads of State and Government to the Centenary Conference, and has been echoed in many other venues, and in our worker and employer constituencies.

But what is even more important, what matters most, is that the Centenary has offered the ILO the opportunity to assert its leadership, its mandate, its expertise and its values in what are some of the most pressing substantive policy issues of our time; those that concern the future of work, and therefore the future of our societies, of us all. And we have taken that opportunity.

In this regard, let me draw the Governing Body's attention to the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 September 2019 concerning the ILO Centenary Declaration. It says a lot in a short space, beginning with an expression of appreciation of the historic role of the ILO and its tripartite constituents, and going on to welcome the Declaration and encourage its implementation. In particular, it asks all UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies and financial institutions to consider the integration of the Declaration's policy contents as part of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in order to inform the work of UN Country Teams. It goes on to encourage member States in applying the principles of the Declaration at the national level.

There is more, but the point I want to highlight is that the Declaration has opened up remarkable new opportunities for the ILO internationally – and we are all aware of the significance of that in the light of our many discussions on UN reform here – and nationally.

The question, then, is whether we will be able to take these opportunities – and this above all else is what this Governing Body must keep in mind as it tackles the agenda before us. The real challenges of our Centenary do not end when this year ends. Rather they begin now and will be with us throughout the years ahead. There are high expectations of us, and by extension the capacities of tripartism and of multilateralism are under scrutiny. Such are the responsibilities which come with the opportunities generated by the success of our Centenary. And I might add that we made a very good start last Friday with a productive meeting of the Board of the Turin Centre.

For these reasons, let me focus for a moment on the issues before the Governing Body which result directly or indirectly from the Centenary Declaration and the Centenary Conference.

The most substantive is the programme of work for 2020–21 to which I will return in a moment. But there is much else.

In the negotiations on the Declaration there was no agreement on the idea which had been raised of elevating safety and health at work to the status of a fundamental principle and right at work. But the accompanying resolution adopted by the Conference instructed the Governing Body to consider as soon as possible proposals in this regard. And so we have before us a time-defined roadmap for doing that, which could culminate in an outcome document for the Conference in 2021. We should not underestimate the complexities – political and technical – associated with this matter. Nor indeed the seriousness of the world of work realities involved. Each year some 2.7 million people die because of the work they do or have done.

The Declaration itself, expresses the desire to democratize the governance of the ILO by ensuring fair representation of all regions and establishing the principle of equality among member States, with the accompanying resolution mandating Governing Body action to definitively democratize the functioning and composition of our governing bodies.

These provisions take up issues which have been under longstanding review here, specifically in relation to the ratification of the 1986 Amendment to the ILO Constitution, on which the regular progress report is presented to the Governing Body Session. In the light of the Conference decisions, the question is what more might be done in respect of the 1986 Amendment and what else might be done to achieve the agreed objectives. The suggestion is that a tripartite working group be established to examine these matters, reporting back to the Governing Body one year from now.

In addition to the Centenary Declaration, and hardly less significantly, the Conference adopted a new Convention – the first since 2011 – concerning the elimination of violence and harassment at work, with an accompanying Recommendation. Since the Conference, I have been struck by the remarkable resonance the adoption of these instruments has had – among our tripartite constituents, and beyond. Its significance is recognized by all – and people want to see it quickly and widely ratified and implemented. And this is why the promotional strategy before this session merits your particular attention as the basis of the national and international action which is in such demand.

Let me now revert to the proposed ILO programme of work and results framework 2020-21, which I take the opportunity to commend formally for your adoption. We will all recall that on this occasion we have followed an exceptional procedure for adoption of the programme and budget. Put simply, the budget was adopted by the Conference in June, while finalization of the substantive programme was held over until now precisely to allow for it to be informed by the outcome of the Centenary Conference.

And the key point I need to make follows directly from this. It is that the backbone of the proposed programme, in the shape of the eight policy outcomes, has been formulated very deliberately to translate

the provisions of the Centenary Declaration into operational action. This lies at the heart of maintaining the momentum of the Centenary and realizing the opportunities of which I have already spoken.

So it is that the outcomes reflect the investments which are contained in the Human-Centred Approach to the Future of Work set out in the Declaration: in people's capacities equipping them to navigate future work transitions successfully; in the institutions of work to ensure socially acceptable labour market outcomes; and in the sustainable jobs of the future for decent work for all.

Policy outcomes 1 and 2 are the necessary foundations of the whole programme, promoting the capacities of the ILO's tripartite constituents and then their interaction in effective social dialogue, and providing the body of relevant international labour standards supported by authoritative supervision, which are the essential normative basis of everything our values-led Organization does.

Outcomes 3 and 4 focus on how to shape the economic, social and environmental transitions which are and will be fundamental to the future of work and on promoting sustainable enterprises, always with a view to the achievement of full employment and decent work for all.

Outcomes 5 and 6 bring in the imperative of skills acquisition and lifelong learning so crucial to enabling people to benefit from the opportunities of change at work, while renewing the agenda for gender equality so that all are empowered equally with none left behind.

And Outcomes 7 and 8, tackle the key challenges of promoting adequate and effective protection to all in a transforming and increasingly diversified work setting so that change can be navigated in truly human conditions of work, and in a context of comprehensive human security.

With regard to resource allocations, you will see that the document before you presents the proposed distribution of the agreed strategic budget between policy outcomes and integrates regular budget allocations with those expected from extra-budgetary sources. We have sought a satisfactory balance between the policy outcomes and have invested particularly in those on skills and on gender in the light of the provisions of the Centenary Declaration.

This proposed programme of work is an agenda for action which addresses the opportunities and challenges of the future of work. It is the start of a journey which must continue beyond the next two years. It combines continuity with change, because there are things the ILO must always do, and because there are new realities which it must address and change. It is an agenda for social justice and decent work adapted to today's realities and those of tomorrow.

It will be noted too that these policy outcomes absorb the cross-cutting policy drivers of the past-biennium (on standards, non-discrimination, social dialogue, and environmental sustainability) and at the same time build directly upon the seven centenary initiatives which have proven so important, I think, in pivoting the ILO towards the crucial issues of the future. Of course the substantive content of the initiatives will continue to figure centrally in ILO work. Standards is a notable example. So is the way in which the End of Poverty Initiative has served to align the ILO's programme with delivery of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an alignment which is enhanced in the proposed programme as set out very clearly in its appendix II.

Indeed, the overall results framework presented includes significant innovations in line with the ILO's continuing commitment to relevance, impact, and accountability. The intention is to better track and measure achievement through a "theory of change" for decent work, operating at three levels: the impact level, which addresses the longer perspective of advancing social justice through decent work; the outcome level, which homes in on the medium-term building blocks; and the output level, which is about the ILO's

own interventions in the course of the biennium. This three-tiered approach to the realities of bringing change and improvement to people's lives is well-fitted to enhance monitoring and reporting to you, our constituents, on what the ILO has done, and to what effect.

Our commitments in this regard are closely related to our corresponding responsibility to continue to strive for optimal efficiency and quality in our work and for transparent and equitable governance. As before, the three proposed enabling outcomes have been formulated so as to build on what has been achieved to date and to do better still. These are issues where there is no definitive point of arrival; continued improvement remains the watchword, allied to the need to adapt according to emerging needs. I would draw the Governing Body's attention also to the important linkages between these enabling outcomes and other items on its agenda; for example the research agenda, improvement in the functioning of the Conference and various human resource items.

I very much hope that the Governing Body will see the merits of the proposed programme of work as appropriate follow-up to our Centenary. But we need to be conscious too of the need to supplement its implementation with further innovative approaches. We will return to the matter of international policy coherence and the reinforcement of the institutional arrangements between the ILO and other international organizations next March. In addition, I have been struck, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, by the extraordinary level of interest in future of work matters that the Centenary has generated outside the ILO's tripartite constituency. One consequence of this is that we have new and exciting possibilities to explore and establish innovative partnerships – with companies, with foundations, with the academic community in the international system. I am not convinced however that our current processes or reflexes are entirely conducive to exploiting fully such opportunities, and this too is a matter to which we might usefully return.

The fact that a budget was adopted in June does not dispense me entirely from addressing all matters of a strictly financial nature. As the Governing Body has instructed, the source of savings to finance the ILO's contribution to the UN resident coordinator system is set out in paragraph 301 of Information annex 1, while the financial implications of the ILO Administrative Tribunal judgement concerning the Geneva post-adjustment index is dealt with in a separate document before the Governing Body. In this latter case, because the proposal is to absorb through savings the costs concerned, no adjustments to the programme are proposed.

There is, of course, a considerable volume of business before the Governing Body which I have not addressed directly and do not propose to cover in any comprehensive manner now.

Suffice to say that we have a quite large number of country specific items on our agenda: Guatemala, Qatar, Myanmar, are among them. We will also have the annual report on the ILO's programme of development cooperation for the occupied Arab territories. And in addition, I would recall that the Commission of Inquiry established last year to consider the Article 26 complaint against Venezuela adopted its report in September, and it was then communicated by me to the Government on the 27th of that month. The Constitution stipulates that the Government has three months to inform the Director-General whether or not it accepts the report's recommendations. So I trust that we will be in a position to return to this matter at our next session with the benefit of that reply.

In addition to these important and sensitive matters, which, as I have the habit of saying, need to be dealt with through a proper combination of principle and perseverance, we will also be dealing with other important matters which have, in some cases, been before the Governing Body for quite a long time, pre-dating the ILO's Centenary. I think here about the ongoing work on global supply chains; the integrated strategy on decent work deficits in the tobacco industry; our efforts to improve diversity in the composition of ILO staff; and of course the standards review mechanism.

These items have taken on the characteristics of old acquaintances; we are familiar with them, we know their strong and weak points, we know what we like about them and what irritates us; and of course we care about them.

But just as for the more recent issues flowing from the Centenary, it is incumbent on us all to seek agreed outcomes through respectful dialogue and compromise, because here too we are under scrutiny, expectations are high, and we need to show how multilateralism and tripartism, uniquely combined in this house can and do deliver.

In this spirit, I am convinced that this Governing Body, under your direction, will navigate this most significant juncture in the ILO's history with great success. But even though, as I have recalled, the Centenary is drawing towards its close, this session does not mark its final act. That honour falls rather to the 14th African Regional Meeting which will convene in Abidjan in December and let me say to all African members and to you Mr President that I look forward greatly to participating in that very fitting culmination to a great year.