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International Labour Conference – 109th Session, 2021

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Start of the plenary debates

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Monday, 7 June 2021, 1 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Opening statements

The President

It is my great pleasure to declare open the second plenary sitting of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.

We have a very full agenda today. In a few minutes, our Conference will have the honour of hearing a statement by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Guy Parmelin. Following that, I shall deliver my own statement. The sitting will then continue with the opening statement of the Director-General. Let me remind you of the reports that he has submitted to the Conference this year, namely his report entitled *Work in the time of COVID* and the appendices to that report on *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories* for 2020 and 2021; and the report entitled *Decent work results: ILO programme implementation 2018–19*.

We will then hear the presentation, by the Chairperson of the Governing Body, of the *Reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body for the periods 2019–20 and 2020–21*. The Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups will then provide us with statements on behalf of their groups. During the last part of this sitting, we shall begin the general discussion of the reports of the Director-General and of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body according to the list of registered speakers.

Statement by His Excellency Mr Guy Parmelin, President of the Swiss Confederation

The President (Original French)

I now have the honour of welcoming His Excellency Mr Guy Parmelin, President of the Swiss Confederation, host country of the headquarters of the International Labour Organization. Mr Parmelin was elected to the Swiss Federal Council in 2015. In 2016, he took over as Head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport. Since 2019, he has been the Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research which, as you may know, also deals with social affairs.

It is a great pleasure for the ILO to welcome the President of the host country to its annual General Conference and we sincerely thank Mr Parmelin for joining us today.

Before listening to Mr Parmelin, I give the floor to Mr Guy Ryder, Secretary-General of this Conference, so that he can also welcome him.

Mr Ryder Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference (Original French)

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to introduce His Excellency Mr Guy Parmelin, President of the Swiss Confederation, on the occasion of the official opening of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference. Your presence is

a testament to the ties that bind the ILO to Switzerland and its tripartite constituents, which go far beyond the protocol-based relations that link an international institution to its host State.

Switzerland has always been at the forefront of advocacy for rights at work, and your participation illustrates the shared understanding and the unwavering support of your country for the values defended by our Organization and for its work; we are infinitely grateful to you. Your intervention is further evidence, if any were needed, of Switzerland's commitment to international Geneva and to the ILO in particular, and to multilateralism and the values it stands for.

We are also fortunate today to have among us a President who comes from the world of work, who understands it and appreciates social dialogue, as he has been able to demonstrate during the management of the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. I warmly welcome Switzerland's commitment to the ILO and to a real social partnership. We are honoured to hear from the President of the Swiss Confederation.

Mr Parmelin
President of the Swiss Confederation
(Original French)

The Government and people of Switzerland would have been very happy to host, once again, the International Labour Conference in Geneva. We are, nevertheless, able to meet, on an exceptional basis, in a virtual format.

I convey our greetings to Mr Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General, and to the President of the Conference, Mr Omar Zniber, whom I congratulate on his election.

You have granted me the special honour of addressing you at the opening of your annual Conference. It is a particularly important global conference, at a time when our labour markets are still in a state of shock and when we must continue to support our economies, our workplaces and our populations. It is an opportunity for me to demonstrate Switzerland's attachment to the ILO and its support for the Organization, as well as my personal commitment to the work of the ILO.

By virtue of its mandate and its tripartite structure, the ILO has been a pioneer in contributing, through international social dialogue, to the establishment of the most appropriate conditions for equitable economic and social relations. The ILO's core purpose and its activities are based on values to which Switzerland is very much attached: first of all, social partnership and employment promotion; and secondly, cohesion and solidarity.

Switzerland's efforts are focused on seeking consensus, solidarity and multilateralism, and it assumes particular responsibility in the context of international efforts aimed at promoting cohesion in sustainability.

Unemployment is still a central concern for governments. We must endeavour to eliminate the damage caused by the crisis on the labour market.

The crisis is not a temporary phenomenon. We must learn lessons from it and act responsibly. Let us no longer remain paralysed by fear of innovation, but rather seize the opportunities that are offered to us by any crisis.

The crisis is forcing us to manage new forms of interdependence, in particular between health, the environment, education, finance, the digital sphere, work and social

life. Such interdependencies require greater cooperation, firstly among governments, but also with the social partners, in order to face the challenges of this crisis and to respond to economic, social and environmental concerns.

During its centenary, the ILO adopted a declaration that offers us guidance on the measures to be taken to ensure economic recovery with a significant social dimension that is human-centred. We must work tirelessly to implement it. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work specifies that we must invest in: strengthening the capacities of all people, lifelong learning and quality education; universal access to comprehensive and sustainable social protection; labour market institutions; and sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. By adopting this Declaration, Governments made commitments.

A year and a half ago, the ILO published its four pillars to support countries at the beginning of the crisis. These pillars were: stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes; protecting the occupational safety and health of workers; and relying on social dialogue for solutions. These four pillars remain essential to the social and economic recovery. I believe that I can say that Switzerland has observed these principles closely during the past year. Measures of support for enterprises, employment and income have been significant. This is unprecedented since the end of the Second World War.

The economic recovery must be sustainable. In the past few months, we have witnessed an improvement in the prospects for recovery of economic growth. We should be pleased with this, but remain cautious. First, because of the pandemic, which is not yet behind us, but also because much of the world's population is still suffering disproportionately. In addition, we are witnessing a downturn in the productivity curve.

We must never forget that, above all, it is enterprises and the private sector that create jobs. These actors play a fundamental role in the recovery. We must therefore have the wisdom to continue to encourage innovation and creation. Investment in basic training, but also lifelong training, is the key to success.

During this Conference, we must be able to reach agreement on a response to the crisis that is ambitious and that is felt beyond the ILO. We must also, as a matter of course, promote cohesion in the multilateral system. The ILO is the global social regulatory authority, but it cannot guarantee a sustainable recovery on its own. Cohesion stems from the strengthening of the synergies between the international institutions responsible for economic governance.

The ILO is the natural partner of the International Monetary Fund and of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Conference and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Their objectives are equally essential if we are to achieve a globalized economy with a real social conscience in the world of tomorrow. Switzerland is committed to strengthened collaboration between these institutions. Furthermore, I welcome the idea of an international political forum in support of a human-centred recovery. For that purpose, specific initiatives must be developed upstream, in particular with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Switzerland is ready to participate actively in the preparations.

For Switzerland, cohesion and solidarity also mean adopting a clear policy towards the ILO. I wish to congratulate the ILO on its prompt response to the crisis through the adaptation of its economic cooperation programmes. It focused, appropriately, on occupational safety and health during the pandemic.

Switzerland strengthened the social and economic pillar of its cooperation in April 2021. It renewed its framework cooperation agreement with the ILO on sustainable development and support for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In parallel, we are devising a new programme on productivity and decent work. Switzerland is convinced that productivity is a key driver of economic growth and employment creation.

Switzerland is going to work hard to ensure that, starting in the international city of Geneva, the economy and the labour market remain human-centred. Our objective is globalization that links economic progress and social progress. It must contribute to the development of all, by promoting increased productivity, innovation investment and, finally, the enhancement of well-being.

The President (Original French)

On behalf of the Conference, I would like to thank His Excellency Mr Guy Parmelin, President of the Swiss Confederation, for his important and eloquent statement and for reminding us of the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in these times of great economic and social hardship and human suffering caused by the pandemic.

It was an honour and a privilege to listen to his message, delivered on behalf of the host country of the headquarters of the International Labour Organization. If I may, I would also like to address a few words to this august assembly in my capacity as its President.

Statement by the President of the Conference

The President (Original Arabic)

Our Conference is being convened in its present form under exceptional and inexorable international circumstances that have made it necessary to postpone this annual event, which was planned to be held last year. However, these circumstances have not prevented our venerable Organization and all of its constituents from carrying out activities and adapting to the circumstances with resolve and determination to move forward, and to work together to overcome the health, economic and social consequences of the current crisis. At the outset, I would like to express my great appreciation for the efforts made by all in order to convene this session as well as the previous sessions of the Governing Body.

As you are all aware, the unprecedented health crisis has had serious, widespread and disproportionate consequences on States around the world, as well as a profound impact on the world of work. The crisis has demonstrated, palpably, our vulnerability in the face of external shocks as well as the degree to which labour markets and economies are interdependent and integrated; this interdependence must be redefined in the future, in order to make the world of today and of tomorrow more inclusive and sustainable for all.

The adoption of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work constituted a milestone in the history of the ILO, placing people at the centre of the future of work and focusing on three priority areas of action, namely, increasing investment in human potential, in labour institutions and in decent and sustainable work. It is this that makes the Centenary Declaration a valuable tool at our disposal; we must make the best possible use of it, as a future road map.

The world today faces major environmental, demographic and economic challenges, in addition to those associated with modern technologies, in particular the use of artificial intelligence. These challenges undoubtedly have an impact on shaping the current and future world of work and require all stakeholders to adapt gradually. These challenges also require a forward-looking approach that can anticipate and address their consequences in a way that contributes to building a fair, inclusive and secure future of work, which goes hand in hand with full, productive and freely chosen employment, as well as decent work for all.

The agenda of this session includes items of great importance. Of these I mention, to name but a few, the reports submitted by the Director-General, including his report *Work in the time of COVID*, from which it is expected that a Conference outcome document will emerge as a global call to action for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. This will also contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The strategic objective of social protection will also be discussed at this session, as part of the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008). We are also certainly all looking forward to the outcome of the two general discussions scheduled for the second part of this session, on skills and lifelong learning, and inequalities and the world of work.

Looking forward to your positive and constructive discussions on all of the items on the agenda of this session in the same spirit of responsibility and consensus that has always characterized the work of the Conference, I would like to emphasize that its success depends primarily on every one of us, by strengthening our commitment to jointly defending the principles of the ILO.

In conclusion, allow me to thank you once again for the trust and honour bestowed upon the Kingdom of Morocco by entrusting it with the presidency of this session; I reiterate once again that I am fully committed, as are my Vice-Presidents, to mobilizing our efforts to make its work successful.

Morocco has launched a project of reform to achieve universal social protection by 2025. Under that project, following two years of consultations with the social partners, a committee set up by His Majesty King Mohammed VI has developed a new social protection plan for Morocco, which will open up new prospects for the future and bring radical change to our society so that we have a clear human-centred vision.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my – and my country's – commitment to the success of this session, and look forward to your continuing support so that we can take advantage of the opportunities available, in accordance with the time schedule established, keeping fully in mind the circumstances and the facilities that have been mobilized, in order to arrive at the best possible outcomes.

Opening statement by the Director-General

The President

It is now my honour to call once again on the Director-General of the International Labour Office, Mr Guy Ryder, to address the Conference and to share his views on the work to be accomplished at this session.

Mr Ryder

Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference

Let me begin by reiterating my welcome to all participants at this 109th Session of the International Labour Conference and my congratulations to all those elected to hold office.

The President of the Conference and the President of the ILO's host country, Switzerland, have just recalled the challenges before this Conference and the circumstances that require us to meet virtually on this occasion, following the postponement of the session last year. It is, of course, disappointing that we are not in a position to be together in Geneva. Because our tripartite Organization, more than any other, thrives on the personal interaction and informal exchanges of this global parliament of labour.

But, equally, it is extraordinarily important that this Conference takes place, and an extraordinary achievement that we have found the technical and political ways of making it happen after the interruptions of 2020. We have some 4,700 registered participants from 176 Member States, and this is comparable to the numbers of past years. And there is some good news, as well, in respect of women's participation. At 38.3 per cent, it is significantly better than it was before.

The need to ensure business continuity and the institutional integrity of the ILO is one reason why this Conference matters so much. Over the last 15 months, my colleagues and I, mostly operating remotely, like so many enterprises and workers around the world, have striven to pivot our activities to analyse the social and economic impact of COVID-19, to facilitate the exchange of information on what is being done to respond to it, and to offer guidance and support to our constituents.

I have to say that it has been gratifying that the ILO's role has been widely recognized and welcomed. And this Conference offers us the chance to advance our efforts still further. Can there ever have been a time in the history of our Organization when the responsibilities of this Conference have been heavier, or the expectations of it greater, than they are now, at this moment of pandemic-induced crisis in the world of work, and as people across the globe hope and reach for a recovery that leads to a resilient, sustainable, fairer and better future?

There may be parallels and comparisons with 1919 when the "wild dream" of the ILO was launched, or with 1944 when the Declaration of Philadelphia pointed the way out of global conflict to shared prosperity and social justice, or even just two years ago when we last met to chart the course to the future of work that we all want. But we are in the here and now. And we need to act, here and now. And that has to begin with a lucid assessment of what the pandemic has done to the world of work. As my report to Conference sets out, the impact has been devastating – cataclysmic. The year 2020 saw an equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs lost; US\$3.7 trillion wiped off labour income; millions of enterprises under threat, particularly small and medium-sized ones; and 108 million people pushed back into working poverty, with the most vulnerable and already disadvantaged hit hardest – young people, women, informal workers and migrants. Taken as a whole, this represents a world of work crisis four times as severe as the one that was triggered by the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009.

It has not gone unanswered. Governments have stated their determination to do whatever it takes to overcome the health crisis and to mitigate its social and economic

consequences. And, indeed, they have generally done whatever they could. Some US\$16 trillion has been spent or announced for crisis response to date. In line with the policy framework advocated vigorously by the ILO, this has been channelled towards efforts to stimulate economic activity, to support enterprises, jobs and incomes, and to protect the safety and health of working people. And to an encouraging extent, this has been done in the framework of cooperation and dialogue between governments and workers' and employers' organizations. These efforts have been unprecedented. It has been estimated that, without them, the damage brought by the pandemic would have been three times greater than it actually was.

But, what exactly have we learned from the drama and the trauma of the last months? My report points to four lessons. First, that the world was ill-prepared for the pandemic, and that this is true for the world of work as much as it is in respect of health. Consequently, the policy response has had to be through serial ad hoc interventions and decisions made in real time, conditioned by the evolution of the pandemic and by the resources available. For example, the ILO has recorded more than 1,600 newly introduced measures of social protection. That is a remarkable response, but surely evidence too that building systemic resilience into the recovery process alongside sustainability and inclusivity must be part of building back better.

Secondly, the pandemic has confronted us – with unbearable brutality – with the reality and consequences of the multiple and growing inequalities in our societies. We need to be honest about this. We have talked about inequalities often and for a long time. We will do so again later at this session of the Conference. But we have failed to stop the situation from deteriorating, and the sum of human suffering caused by the pandemic is all the greater for that collective failure. In this house of social justice, we, more than most, need to draw conclusions from this. All the more so because the pandemic has made these inequalities worse and we can see, if we care and we dare to look, how they have hardened into deep structural injustice. The working experience of this pandemic for some has been one of inconvenience, tedium, stress and frustration. For others, it has been about fear, poverty and survival.

As we increasingly look to the recovery process, with some economies growing quickly – very quickly – and jobs now being created at great speed, I think that we need to be conscious about just how uneven that recovery will be if it continues on its current trajectory. Put in the simplest terms, countries that enjoy the greatest advantages in access to vaccines, that have the most fiscal space to stimulate their economies and that enjoy the highest levels of connectivity can look forward to getting back quite rapidly to pre-pandemic levels of GDP – and, within a couple of years, of employment too. It will not be painless; and it will not be without problems. There are great uncertainties, but this is where the high-income countries are heading. But, for low-income countries, and most of the developing world, the prospects are starkly different. The fact is that gross inequities in vaccine distribution and vastly different fiscal firepower would inject a double dose of more inequality into the world of work, with a booster from uneven digital connectivity. That is, unless deliberate action is taken to prevent it and to prevent long COVID from taking hold in the world of work, making it more unequal, more unjust, less resilient, less inclusive and ultimately less sustainable.

This is where the third lesson comes in. It is an obvious one. That this terrible global crisis requires a truly global response. It is unfortunate that the pandemic has probably made a more persuasive and tangible case for multilateral cooperation than the many speeches emanating from our Organization and from others. I can echo the observation by UN Secretary-General Guterres that “We are seeing an overwhelming public appetite

around the world for more, and more effective international cooperation". At a time when we all know that the value of multilateralism has been widely questioned, and the system has come under considerable pressure, this hands to us not just an opportunity, but a responsibility to step up and meet the hopes and expectations that are invested in us.

The fourth lesson, the last one – and this one expands our opportunities – is that we can do things differently. We have seen in recent months that long-established policy settings and work arrangements can be modified in ways that were previously unimaginable. It has taken an existential threat and a commitment to do whatever it takes to overcome it to give us this perspective. Of course, this is not a permanent state of affairs; emergency measures are not forever. But we have learned that we can handle technologies differently, we can allocate resources differently, we can reassess social priorities and values – for example, how we reward the front-line workers who have emerged as the heroes of this crisis.

This lesson in particular, reinforced by the others I have set out, brings to mind compellingly the one key idea of our ILO Future of Work Initiative, which dominated the last session of the International Labour Conference in 2019 just as much as the COVID-19 response does this one. That idea was that the future of work is not predetermined, but instead is for governments, employers and workers to make together. And that this needed to be done in conformity with the values that we share in this Organization: social justice and decent work for all.

Today we need to apply precisely that understanding to the task of constructing a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. We are well equipped to undertake this task, because the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted two years ago by this Conference, gives us an agreed and highly-valued road map to guide our efforts. Through the programme and budget, which I trust will be adopted by this Conference, and our existing Strategic Plan, the ILO is already focusing sharply on implementing that Declaration today in the context of the COVID-19 recovery.

The adoption by this Conference of an outcome document calling for, and shaping, a global response for such a human-centred recovery will be of the very greatest value in this context. It will strengthen the ILO's own contribution. It will help underpin the activities of our constituents at the national level. And, I hope that it will serve to promote cooperation with others in the multilateral system, and the coherence of our overall work.

The pandemic has highlighted just how inextricably linked health, social and economic, financial, trade and intellectual property policy really is. That has always been the case, but we are paying more attention to it now because of the dire circumstances of the moment, and we need to lever that realization to forge better system coherence on a permanent basis, just as the Centenary Declaration urged us to do. That could help us make good on the renewed commitment that has been made by the international community to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The world had already fallen badly behind with this before the pandemic, and COVID-19 has stalled progress further, or even thrown it into reverse. The ILO can be, and needs to be, a catalyst for the combined efforts of the international community to change to "fast forward" in the run in to 2030.

I take it as a strong statement of attachment to the institution of the Conference that you, our constituents, have decided, despite the real constraints of virtual working methods, that it should undertake a full agenda, rather than a streamlined programme

of work. That has required considerable innovation and, above all, enormous commitment from you all. I want to salute both your ambition and your readiness to work in what I am sure are often challenging circumstances, at inconvenient times of the day and for a prolonged period until we can finally bring our session to a close in December. Thank you. This is remarkable. Your dedication means that the Conference is going to be in a position to tackle three technical items which, while they were placed on its agenda before COVID-19 struck, have now acquired even greater significance and, I would say, urgency. This is not accidental. In fact, there are clear reasons why major pre-existing decent work challenges now return to us with increased force.

The Conference has already begun its recurrent discussion on social protection, exactly at the moment when the inadequacies of current arrangements are being so cruelly exposed. The conclusions to be adopted will undoubtedly provide very valuable guidance as to how we must weave better levels of protection and wider coverage into a human-centred recovery, with the Centenary Declaration's ambition of universal social protection very much in mind.

And then, in its reconvened session in November and December of this year, the Conference will address the issue of inequalities, with the intention, I trust, of helping to ensure that the recovery builds in deliberate measures to bring much greater equity to labour markets, preventing it from running ahead along a course which would drive us still further apart.

That, of course, will be accompanied by the discussion on skills and lifelong learning. This subject stands out, I think more than any other, as the issue on which strong consensus quickly emerged during our Future of Work Initiative. We agreed then that we need to make lifelong learning opportunities a feature of everybody's working life – and the disruption and the change brought about by the pandemic can only underline that need more strongly. But we have a long way to go, to work out how to make this happen: what will the delivery systems look like? What are the precise and respective responsibilities of enterprises, the workers and the State within them? And where does the financing come from?

In addition to all of this, we will be doing familiar but nevertheless vitally important Conference business: adopting a programme and budget for the next biennium and electing a Governing Body for the next three years. I am also presenting for consideration a programme implementation report for the biennium 2018–19. And, as for each Conference, I am reporting on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, where recent weeks have witnessed renewed conflict and loss of lives.

Of course, the Conference will also undertake the crucial task of supervising the application of international labour standards. It is, perhaps, inherent to the nature of this normative activity of our Conference that it is often one of the more contentious and difficult parts of its work. This has certainly been my experience as Director-General, because we have had to contend with the combination of heightened tensions in the world with the increased social conflict that that often brings, and the reality of long-standing disagreement among constituents about issues that have far-reaching implications for the operation of our standards system.

Whatever views delegates bring to this Conference, and whatever the interests each is here to defend, I think there are some responsibilities that we all share. Each of us is required to approach the normative issues with objectivity and openness. And we should, I think, all take care to abstain from any action that could weaken or damage the ILO's normative function. Because that function is critical to everything this Organization

does and gives it strength, authority and relevance. And, indeed, it would be much easier to deconstruct that than it has been to build it up. So, I count on everybody to proceed with the great sense of care and responsibility that this situation requires.

With these thoughts, let me wish success to all participants – wherever you happen to be, and whatever your specific role in our Conference. Above all, your contribution matters because it sustains and advances the ILO in these most difficult times. I thank you for that and look forward to our victory over this COVID-19 pandemic, which will enable me to welcome you all personally back to Geneva next year. I thank you for your attention. Good luck with this Conference.

The President (Original French)

Thank you very much, Director-General, for presenting your report to the Conference. Of course, I do not intend to summarize your statement but I would nevertheless like to mention, from my point of view, some of the key messages you put forward.

You spoke about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the world of work and highlighted how we are now facing challenges on a scale that is perhaps unprecedented for our Organization; you also highlighted what sort of efforts need to be made to tackle the crisis and to achieve the necessary results, in order to mitigate, limit and overcome the consequences of the crisis.

In particular, you mentioned a number of lessons learned from the crisis that we have all faced, the consequences of which are regrettably still being felt. How can we be better prepared in the future? How can we ensure that the ILO serves as a house of social justice, now more than ever before?

You also mentioned the challenges that a number of countries are facing, in particular developing countries, and highlighted the crucial role of international cooperation, which is also perhaps more necessary now than ever before. Echoing the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in this regard, you mentioned how the entire international community has to work together to move past this crisis, to shape the best possible conditions for the world of work.

You also spoke about the agenda of this session and in particular gave some valuable advice on how this Conference can be a success for us all. For this I thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.

Presentation of the reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body

The President

It is now my honour to call on the Chairperson of the Governing Body for 2020–21, Mr Apurva Chandra, to present his report on the activities of the Governing Body during his tenure and that of Ambassador Litjobo, his predecessor.

Mr Chandra

Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office

Let me begin by saying that it has been a great honour and privilege to serve as Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office over this past year. As the Director-General mentioned, at the ILO we benefit a lot from personal

interactions; unfortunately, however, during my tenure, all our sessions have been held virtually. Nevertheless, the ILO has adapted very well to these new ways of working and a lot has been achieved over the past year, despite the virtual format.

It is my pleasure to present to you today a document entitled *Reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body for the periods 2019–20 and 2020–21*, which covers the work of the Governing Body under my leadership and under that of my predecessor, Ambassador Litjobo of Lesotho. In it are summarized the most noteworthy discussions held by the Governing Body since the closure of the Centenary Session of the Conference back in June 2019. Needless to say, many aspects of our world have changed radically since then, including the functioning and dynamics of ILO governance, the new challenges that are being faced by the world of work and international politics in the multilateral system at large.

Following the last in-person meeting of the Governing Body in November 2019, you will no doubt recall that the March 2020 session of the Governing Body did not take place and the June 2020 session of the Conference had to be deferred. Despite the challenges that the pandemic posed to holding meetings, the ILO rapidly adjusted to ensure the business continuity of its governance organs. A system was put in place, allowing the Governing Body to adopt urgent decisions by correspondence, thereby laying the groundwork to adapt procedures to an entirely virtual setting. Although it was not possible for the Conference to hold its annual session in 2020, tripartite constituents gathered for a virtual ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work in July 2020. Since then, and thanks to the collective efforts of the constituents and of the Office, it has been possible to hold meetings in a fully virtual format, as is clearly demonstrated by this virtual session of the Conference.

Turning more specifically to the work of the Governing Body in the last two years, I am pleased to note that the Governing Body continued to discharge its role in the oversight of the work of the International Labour Office, acting on the recommendations of the External Auditor, the Internal Auditor, its Independent Oversight Advisory Committee and the independent evaluation function.

As far as the work of the Governing Body goes in relation to ILO governance, I am pleased to note that the Governing Body was able to conclude its comprehensive review of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference, initiated in November 2017, and that the Selection Committee has now recommended the amended text for adoption by the Conference. This work ran in parallel with the negotiation of the special procedures necessary to adjust the functioning of the Governing Body, the Conference and technical tripartite meetings to the context imposed by the pandemic. These parallel endeavours are the product of many hours of negotiation, which I have had the privilege to witness come to fruition in the past 12 months.

It is also worth mentioning that sincere efforts were made towards achieving full, equal and democratic participation in the ILO's tripartite governance in response to the call contained in the Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work. The Governing Body set up a tripartite working group on the full, equal and democratic participation in the ILO's tripartite governance, which has concentrated its efforts on promoting the entry into force of the 1986 Instrument for the Amendment of the ILO Constitution. The first step in that process will be the consideration at this session of the Conference of a resolution on the principle of equality among ILO Member States and fair representation of all regions in the ILO's tripartite governance. We hope that, with the impetus we have gained through the Governing Body's work on this matter, we shall soon be able to bring this amendment into force.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention the Governing Body's interest in the United Nations reform and in promoting the advancement of the Decent Work Agenda in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Governing Body also made a call for greater engagement with other agencies in the multilateral system to ensure better policy coherence in pursuit of the ILO's human-centred approach to the future of work.

When I reflect on the challenges faced by the world of work today, I cannot help but feel how the Global Commission on the Future of Work was premonitory of some of the radical changes accelerated by the effects of COVID-19. Although our current paradigm offers certain opportunities, it raises innumerable challenges. Recent work of the Governing Body in the area of occupational safety and health, gender equality, disability inclusion, just transition or productivity, to name just a few, are as relevant as ever in our current context.

I could not conclude my comments without mentioning the important work accomplished by the Governing Body with regard to its role in the ILO supervisory system of international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work. Even though some aspects of the road map of the standards initiative were temporarily brought to a halt by the pandemic, the work of the Standards Review Mechanism and other aspects of the standards initiative have continued. The Governing Body's goal is to make sure that the ILO has an up-to-date set of labour standards whose implementation is supervised by an effective, efficient and cohesive supervisory system. It is my hope that the Governing Body and the ILO as a whole will continue building on that strength.

As Chairperson of the Governing Body, and since this was my first interaction in the ILO as such, I have observed that there are many ILO Conventions on different subjects for which the number of ratifications by Member States is quite low. As the ratification of a Convention is legally binding, a Member State would want to ensure that all of the provisions of the Convention are accounted for in national law. There may be a few provisions of a Convention that are difficult for most Member States to apply. For example, in the case of the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), a Member State is required to ensure the applicability of various provisions in both the private and the public sectors on an equal footing. Allowing Member States some flexibility in this regard would perhaps increase the number of ratifications. I will leave this thought with the ILO: perhaps we will have to build in some form of flexibility because although some of these Conventions date back maybe 20 or 30 years, they have still not been widely ratified. We must look into why this is the case and what can be done to ensure that the benefits of these Conventions, which have been adopted after many deliberations at various levels, can be felt. Until these Conventions have been ratified by a large number of countries, the benefits of these Conventions will be denied to the labour force at large.

As my mandate as Chairperson of the Governing Body draws to a close, it is my sincere hope that the spirit of dialogue and consensus, which we all hope to see in our work at this virtual session of the Conference, will carry over to the Governing Body at its 342nd Session, which will take place on Friday 25 June.

With these words, I submit this report on the work of the Governing Body for the years 2019–21 to the Conference.

The President

Thank you very much, Mr Chandra, for your presentation. As your report shows, the Governing Body addressed many significant issues, in particularly difficult times, which,

as you stressed yourself, has included meeting in a virtual format since March 2020. I very much appreciate the hard work of all Governing Body members, as well as your leadership, which has been instrumental in achieving tripartite consensus when seeking the way forward. I should like to congratulate you warmly, on behalf of the Conference, on your successful guidance of the debates in the Governing Body over the past year, and my congratulations are also extended to your close colleagues, the Worker and Employer Vice-Chairpersons, and to all of the Governing Body members. Furthermore, our gratitude also goes to the Screening Group, whose tireless discussions enabled the Governing Body's business continuity over the last year. Mr Chandra, you and your colleagues have our heartfelt gratitude.

Opening statements by the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Conference

The President

I am now pleased to move on to the next distinguished speakers and invite the Chairpersons of the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Conference to deliver their opening statements, in which they will put forward their groups' views on the work that the Conference has before it.

Ms Hornung-Draus

Employer (Germany), Chairperson of the Employers' group

Let me begin by congratulating the President and Vice-Presidents of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference on their election. They are presiding over a historic session of this Conference during an extraordinary global crisis, in an unprecedented and challenging virtual format. I have great respect for the dedication each of them bring to their role.

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the Employers' group today, in a difficult context, the opening of the first ever session of the International Labour Conference being held in a virtual format, which unfortunately does not allow for the many informal personal contacts that characterize the event normally.

The last session of the International Labour Conference, the Centenary Session, in June 2019, ended full of hope. We were proud of our joint work and conscious of the shared responsibility to translate the policy goals of this house and the commitments made by all of us into concrete actions that benefit workers, employers and governments.

Together, we celebrated the adoption of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. Employers were satisfied that the role of the private sector was properly recognized as a generator of employment and decent work. My colleagues and I looked forward to the Office, under the leadership of Director-General Guy Ryder, strengthening its focus on enhancing an enabling environment for business development, entrepreneurship, innovation and productivity growth, strengthening its policy guidance on skills and tackling informality to shape a future of work that is replete with prosperity and dignity.

When closing the 2019 session, none of us could have imagined that only a few months later, at the start of 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to contain it would have such a devastating impact on people's lives and livelihoods. More than 3 million people have lost their lives as a direct or indirect

consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to combat it. Hundreds of millions have been affected by the ensuing economic and social crisis.

Numerous governments adopted containment measures, including lockdowns and related restrictions, to prevent the spread of the virus. These measures, although maybe necessary in certain cases, have had a devastating impact on labour markets. While demand for labour increased in certain sectors, such as in the health and food retail sectors and in online commerce, other sectors, such as tourism, aviation and transport, non-food retail, hospitality and so on, completely collapsed. Over one year on, millions of jobs and livelihoods have been lost.

The crisis has affected enterprises across all sectors and of all sizes. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, lacking the necessary human and financial resources to weather a crisis of this magnitude, have been severely affected and many have closed their doors. In some regions, close to 20 per cent of businesses have been or will be forced to shut down.

The economic and social crisis is far from over. The percentage of workers living in countries with COVID-19-related restrictions remains very high, and 93 per cent of the world's workers are currently residing in countries where some form or another of workplace closure measures are in place.

Employers have made huge efforts in the last 12 months to adapt to and survive the pandemic, to ensure business continuity and to protect the health and well-being of workers. In these turbulent times, employers have been a trusted partner for governments and workers and a key information resource for their employees.

The 2021 session of the Conference is a defining moment for tripartism and global leadership, providing an opportunity to reshape the economic and social landscape for decades to come. The pandemic has opened many ILO Member States to new ways of thinking; it has stimulated consensus for action; and it has motivated individuals, organizations and entire societies to confront together the increasingly unpredictable and complex challenges of our time.

However, this, unfortunately, is not the case everywhere. There are, regrettably, several Member States where efforts to achieve real and meaningful consensus for action have been blocked and where employer and worker organizations have not been properly involved in attempts to build a better, more sustainable and resilient future.

Our invitation today is to make this Conference a forum for inspiration and aspiration and a step towards triggering real and impactful action at the national level. Together, we need to aspire to build consensus, work hard towards finding sustainable solutions to the employment challenges and pave the way for a post-pandemic world that ensures an enabling environment for business and innovation and that is resilient, equitable, inclusive and fair. To achieve this, all actors need to embrace a culture of constructive collaboration at the workplace.

I would like now to share the Employers' views on the major topics on the agenda of this session. The appendices to the Report of the Director-General on *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories* for 2020 and 2021 depict a dramatic situation in a hugely complex part of the world. The recent upsurge in violence is one more example of the complexity of the situation. All efforts to improve the situation of workers and employers in these territories are highly dependent on the relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the achievement of peace in the entire region. We welcome the work of the ILO with other United Nations (UN) agencies in the

development cooperation programmes, and we call on the ILO to focus more of its efforts on improving employment opportunities and capacity-building, especially for women and young people, wherever possible.

On the Report of the Director-General, *Work in the time of COVID*, the Employers' group would like to recognize its important positive aspects, including: the overview and the attempt to outline what has happened, what has been done and what we have learned, the road to recovery and ILO action; the increased Office engagement with the UN agencies, including with the World Health Organization, which is more than we have seen in previous years; and the increased programme linkages to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and international discussions on this matter.

However, in terms of content, the report falls short of addressing the key concerns of employers during the pandemic and on the path to recovery, in respect of business continuity, productivity, skills and informality. These concerns are well reflected, however, in the Centenary Declaration and should be put into concrete context and action today. We expect the ILO's response to COVID-19 to meet the expectations of all constituents, including the employers, and to elevate tripartism and the ILO.

With that in mind, the Employers strongly urge that the response should integrate clear guidance from the Office on steps to support constituents in their pursuit of a sustainable and resilient human-centred recovery. The ILO should remain solidly committed to a focused and accelerated implementation of the Centenary Declaration, which must be the driving force behind its response. The response should include key priority areas for urgent action including: business continuity; productivity enhancement; skills; support for entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity; more intensive efforts to tackle informality; efforts to harness the opportunities which digitalization offers; and measures to promote trade and investment. Governments need to create an enabling environment for private sector growth and resilience. The pandemic has brought into the spotlight the importance of the private sector, the undeniable value of small and medium-sized enterprises and the relevance of global supply chains, which indeed, have been brutally disrupted during the COVID-19 crisis. Conducive environments for business are not an aim per se, but the basis for employment, growth and development. If governments do not create such environments, growth cannot take place and productive jobs cannot be created. They are therefore essential for any sustainable and job-rich recovery.

The recurrent discussion on social protection is central to recovery. However, social protection cannot be considered in isolation. Countries are facing very different challenges on these issues. Understandably, the focus since the start of the pandemic has been on groups of workers not covered by social protection systems. However, we need to acknowledge that developing economies do not necessarily have the fiscal space required to build sustainable systems. They will need to explore other funding options without any prejudices or limitations, also including private schemes, for establishing effective and efficient social protection systems. And these funding models, as we know, vary greatly from country to country, depending on national culture, law and practice. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to funding models and social protection systems per se.

In addition, social protection systems must anticipate new realities. More and more people are engaged in new forms of work and will assume greater autonomy and responsibility for their own careers and income security. Increasingly frequent transitions across and between jobs, and periods in and out of work, may impact individuals' access to social protection schemes. Social protection systems need to

develop a much more supportive function, especially for those who are active in these new forms of work.

We cannot ignore either the sustainability challenges of countries with a rapidly ageing workforce. Challenges in this regard need to be addressed, in the interest of ensuring equity between generations. There is an urgent need to identify solutions beyond our usual scope and that avoid creating an excessive burden on younger generations and on companies.

Finally, informality must be addressed simultaneously. As long as more than 60 per cent of the global workforce is in the informal economy, we will never be able to make decisive progress in reaching the goal of social protection for all. The development of national social protection systems needs to go hand-in-hand with policies to address the obstacles that individuals in the informal sector face to join the formal sector.

The Committee on the Application of Standards – which provides the highest tripartite guidance on the implementation of ILO standards – is meeting and its discussions are based on a prioritized agenda. The Centenary Declaration is clear that “[i]nternational labour standards also need to respond to the changing patterns of the world of work, protect workers and take into account the needs of sustainable enterprises, and be subject to authoritative and effective supervision.” In undertaking its work this year, the Committee must make clear its commitment to a balanced supervision taking also into account the needs of sustainable enterprises. This should be reflected in the discussions and also in the outcomes of the Committee’s debates. While divergences of views on substantial issues exist among constituents and between the Committee on the Application of Standards and the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, we, the Employers, will continue to voice our views in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. We also trust that the discussion of the individual cases will be focused on the framework of the Conventions at stake, the boundaries in the Experts’ observations and the written submissions provided by the governments, avoiding discussions and conclusions of a different nature.

As I said at the beginning, our invitation today is to make this first ever – and hopefully last – virtual session of the Conference a moment and a forum for inspiration and aspiration, and for triggering real and impactful action at the national and global levels. Inspiration for consensus building and inspiration for facing the systemic challenges that prevent countries from developing sustainably and creating opportunities for all. Let us seize the momentum created by this session to reinvigorate our global multilateral system and build solid institutions that are able to meet the challenges of our time. And let us seize the moment to create an enabling environment for business development, innovation and productivity growth, in the interest of decent work and full employment.

Over the next two weeks, Governments, Employers and Workers have an opportunity to address long-standing flaws in labour markets and education systems that hamper productivity and growth, and limit opportunities. We are acutely aware that the virtual format is very problematic and will never replace face-to-face discussions due to its strong limitations: poor connectivity in some areas of the world, limited decent timing convenient to all, and a complete absence of informal face-to-face interaction, which is so important to find consensus. This is why we advocated for a split format and managed to agree with all of our colleagues on two critical policy items to be discussed at the end of the year: skills and inequalities in the world of work.

Confronting all these challenges, we, the Employers, remain committed and determined to find consensus and relevant outcomes that will determine the path for a sustainable, resilient and human-centred recovery. Over the next two weeks, undoubtedly we will negotiate very intensively. And, when we hopefully reach a common understanding and a shared goal, we will write history.

Ms Passchier

Worker (Netherlands), Chairperson of the Workers' group

This is a unique session of the Conference. In the 100-year history of the ILO it is the first, and I do hope the last, virtual session that we will ever have. I am addressing this session with mixed feelings. While I am pleased that we can hold a Conference after having had to cancel the 2020 session, I am also fully aware of the devastation that the pandemic has brought to the lives of millions of workers and their families around the world.

The impact of the pandemic on the world of work has been brutal, particularly for the millions of workers in the informal economy or in precarious jobs in the formal economy who have not been able to benefit from the protection offered by social security and labour laws.

I want to pay tribute to the millions of workers, many of whom are women, on the front line: in health and care, in retail and other sectors including seafarers, for keeping our economies and societies going, often with great risk to their own health and safety and that of their families, while often not sufficiently being rewarded beyond rounds of applause. I want to remind us all of the millions of workers who have lost their jobs and livelihoods in tourism, culture and other sectors hard hit by the crisis.

Last but not least, I want to salute workers and trade unions that, right now, are standing up for democracy and peace, workers' rights and freedom of association, many of whom are prosecuted and hunted down for the very reason of their participation in peaceful protest in countries and regions where fundamental rights are systematically violated, among them Myanmar, Belarus, the occupied Arab territories and Colombia.

Some of these violations will be addressed in the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards. We welcome the Director-General's analysis of the extremely worrying situation in the occupied Arab territories which shows once more the need for an end to the occupation, in order to achieve lasting peace. As some of our colleagues there may be listening to these proceedings from their places of hiding or exile, I want to bring them a strong message of solidarity from the Workers' group at the ILO. We keep our fingers crossed that you all stay safe.

As constituents of the ILO, we now need to do our utmost to promote a recovery from the pandemic that is based on the unique tripartite structure and normative mandate of the ILO, addresses the flaws of the current model of development and promotes a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. In recent times, the notion of a new social contract is increasingly used to express the need to address major inequalities and challenges in the world by concerted action.

The Director-General, in his report to this Conference, makes reference to, and I quote "the widespread, if still under-defined, public sentiment that the existing social contract has lapsed or has been broken, and that a new one is needed".

Last year, UN Secretary-General Guterres made a clear reference to it in his Nelson Mandela lecture of 18 July 2020, entitled “Tackling the inequality pandemic: A new social contract for a new era”. In this speech, he said – and I quote:

Growing gaps in trust between people, institutions and leaders threaten us all. People want social and economic systems that work for everyone. They want their human rights and fundamental freedoms to be respected. They want a say in decisions that affect their lives. The New Social Contract, between Governments, people, civil society, business and more, must integrate employment, sustainable development and social protection, based on equal rights and opportunities for all.

At a moment when the constituents of the ILO want the ILO to take a leadership role to guide the way out of the COVID-19 crisis towards a more sustainable and equitable world of work, it is important not to leave the fundamental discussion on the need for a new social contract to others in the multilateral system.

The Workers’ group considers the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work as laying the foundation for such a new social contract, requiring tripartite concerted action to provide for decent work, shared prosperity and environmental sustainability.

We have ten key messages to this Conference.

Firstly, any human-centred recovery by the ILO must be rights-based and provide for jobs and recovery plans based on social dialogue. The Centenary Declaration reconfirmed the importance for the ILO to act, based on its unique tripartite and normative mandate. The human-centred approach must be firmly rooted in the concept that we must act on social justice to achieve peace and resilience.

There cannot be a human-centred approach to recovery without a rights-based approach and the recognition of the key role of social dialogue, based on the enabling rights of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

During the COVID-19 crisis, in many countries the tripartite actors have shown that concerted action can deliver more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all. But regrettably we have also seen how the crisis resulted in many human and labour rights’ violations.

The relevance of standards, and a strong role for social partners at all levels to support and shape a human-centred recovery, must be part and parcel of any ILO call to action. Let us tackle head on the single strongest concern of workers around the globe: they need jobs, and not just any jobs but decent jobs.

This is the moment to call for tripartite commitment and action to negotiate and agree job and recovery plans, to create and support a job-rich and inclusive recovery providing for decent jobs in health, care, education and sustainable infrastructure and tourism among others, taking into full account the challenges of climate change.

Second, precarious work will lead to a precarious recovery. A job-rich and inclusive recovery must pay special attention to young workers who are at risk of becoming a lost generation. Millions saw their job perspectives dwindle because of the pandemic, but also because of the proliferation of precarious jobs.

The COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted workers in precarious employment, exposing their extreme vulnerability. Short-term workers, freelancers and workers on zero-hours contracts were among the first ones to lose their jobs during lockdowns. With some exceptions, most of these workers find themselves without unemployment benefits, income support or other forms of social protection. Other workers, for instance those in informal care work, essential services or food delivery, continued to work, often

without any protective equipment. They cannot afford to stop working when they are sick, because they have no entitlement to paid sick leave. This not only endangers their own lives, it also puts others at risk and makes it more difficult for countries and governments to contain the virus.

During the pandemic, we have seen a further proliferation of all these forms of precarious work. Now, we must prevent at all costs, the recovery being built from a further expansion of them, as this will inevitably lead to a precarious recovery. A human-centred recovery must mean that we ensure that all workers – irrespective of their employment status – have adequate labour and social protection, including access to healthcare and paid sick leave, and benefit from income support in times of crisis.

Third, the growing inequality in the world of work must be reversed. A human-centred recovery must be a recovery that reverses the dramatic inequalities that were exposed during the COVID-19 crisis.

There was already a growing consensus before the pandemic that inequality had reached unsustainable levels. The Centenary Declaration noted that “persistent poverty, inequalities and injustices, conflict, disasters and other humanitarian emergencies in many parts of the world constitute a threat to those advances and to securing shared prosperity and decent work for all”.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased inequalities. Therefore, there is no doubt that if measures are not taken urgently, the pandemic will leave us with a legacy of inequality and division. What exactly must be done to reduce inequalities will be the subject of a separate technical discussion which is taking place later this year.

However, we must now lay the foundation for that in this Conference and the COVID-19 outcome document, as there is no doubt that measures will need to span across different policy areas, such as formalization, social protection, non-discrimination and macroeconomic, fiscal and wage policies, while recognizing the key role collective bargaining can play in reducing inequalities, negotiating and implementing health and safety measures, improving wages and working conditions, and regulating remote working and just transition.

Fourth, without universal access to vaccination, the vaccination gap will further exacerbate existing economic and social inequalities and leave especially the global South behind. Many colleagues from all over the world have expressed the need to address the issue of vaccine equity with the utmost urgency. This is not just a global-health interest.

Vaccination is gaining speed in the global North and thereby increases chances of opening economies there soon, whereas countries in the global South are struggling to get access to vaccines at all, or cannot afford to purchase them.

Inequality in access is leading to a growing global vaccination gap, which will inevitably increase economic and social inequality in the world of work and globally between countries and regions, threatening to undo decades of progress to reduce poverty and achieving decent work for all. This will be a major obstacle to a sustainable and equitable recovery everywhere. We must act now and decisively. There cannot be a human-centred recovery without universal, free and immediate access to vaccines and other vital public health tools.

Fifth, safety and health are fundamental to decent work and to recovery. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that health and safety at work are not to be taken for granted.

Respect for health and safety of workers should therefore be at the core of recovery policies based on relevant ILO standards and, especially for frontline workers, COVID-19 should be recognized as an occupational disease.

We can only reiterate that the pandemic has shown the relevance and urgency of declaring occupational safety and health as a fundamental right. We welcome the fact that the Governing Body of the ILO has taken the first steps to ensure that this issue will be on the agenda of next year's Conference.

Sixth, any recovery policy or action must be gender inclusive. The pandemic has a feminine face. Women in essential sectors and jobs have sustained societies and economies, often underpaid and overworked with excessive workloads and working hours, running high risks for themselves in terms of their health and safety, while juggling work with family and education duties.

Women were also disproportionately impacted by the crisis: they are over-represented in sectors which went into lockdown and they do most of the unpaid care work in the household when schools are closed.

These trends risk setting us back years in the struggle for gender equality. The pandemic has shown that we can no longer put gender equality as an afterthought. The Centenary Declaration called for urgent implementation of the transformative agenda for gender equality. We must now ensure that all strategies proposed to address the recovery are gender-inclusive.

We must also ensure that racism and discrimination against migrants, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, that have seen dramatic increases during the pandemic, are addressed with the utmost urgency.

Seventh, the key role of the public sector must be recognized and reinforced. If the pandemic has shown anything, it is that billions in taxpayers' money have been spent to support enterprises in order for them to survive, and that the health and care sectors were sustaining economies and societies. In many countries, the crisis has exposed the fact that decades of austerity policies and cuts in public spending have weakened health and care systems and public service provision, with detrimental effects for all. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to recognize the vital role of the public sector, and the need to reinforce it and invest in it. This requires the availability of public money, which brings in the issue of fair and progressive taxation. All those enterprises that have greatly benefited from the crisis, sometimes at the expense of others, must also provide for their fair share in contributing to the recovery. In this context, we very much welcome the decision of the G7 last week to introduce a global minimum tax for multinational enterprises.

In our view, it is also very necessary to link government support for enterprises in need to decent work and social and environmental responsibility as well as due diligence along supply chains.

Eighth, universal social protection will not come about without global solidarity and global resource mobilization. Ensuring comprehensive and adequate social protection and social security is one of the core elements of the decent work agenda, and a longstanding commitment of the ILO and its tripartite constituents. We must now act to ensure universal social protection, address existing gaps in coverage, make contributory social security systems more inclusive and ensure adequate social protection floors. We also need to provide for global solidarity and global resource mobilization to support low-income countries, which do not even have basic systems of social protection in place,

to develop those with the utmost urgency. Our colleagues in the recurrent discussion on social security will certainly address all these matters and we hope they will come up with strong and impactful conclusions.

Ninth, digitalization, telework and platform work require proper regulation to harness the opportunities and eliminate the risks involved. Digitalization and technological change have accelerated because of the crisis. The digital divide between countries and people is growing and must urgently be addressed, to prevent it from increasing inequalities in the world of work. Digitalization should also be seen in the context of sustainable and green recovery.

With regard to remote working, there are clear risks and challenges in relation to wages and working conditions, contractual relations, social protection and privacy; but if properly managed there may also be opportunities with regard to work-life balance, cost effectiveness for business, and reduction of CO₂ emissions when current reductions in global travelling persist beyond the crisis.

Proper regulation as well as social dialogue and collective bargaining are essential to reduce the risks and harness the opportunities.

Tenth, a strong leadership role is necessary for the ILO. We strongly support a central role for the ILO in promoting policy coherence in the multilateral system, to promote a human-centred and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, based on the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda. We firmly believe that the pandemic has made it more urgent than ever to realize the mandate of the Philadelphia Declaration. The ILO should play a central role in assessing all international economic and financial policies and measures in the light of its constitutional objective of social justice.

In conclusion, I am looking forward to a session of the International Labour Conference that will deliver on all of our high expectations, and I assure you of the full commitment of the Workers' group to strong and impactful outcomes.

Principles governing the discussion of the Reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body and of the Director-General

The President

We shall now begin the discussion of the Reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body and of the Director-General. Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I should like to make a call on all those who will speak on these reports to do so with both the openness and the dignity that are appropriate to the highest international body in the realm of social and labour-related matters.

Freedom of expression is a vital feature of the International Labour Organization. To exercise this freedom in a spirit of mutual respect, it is essential that all delegates respect the accepted procedure, use parliamentary language, refer only to the items under discussion and avoid raising any questions that are foreign to these matters. The respect of these principles is necessary if we want our work to be effective and successful.

Please note that the duration of speeches is limited by the special arrangements and procedures for the 109th Session to four minutes only. This time limit will be strictly applied. It is therefore strongly recommended that delegates reduce courtesies to a minimum. The same restrictions will apply to pre-recorded messages.

For the sake of transparency, and because respect for time-keeping is a collective responsibility, the countdown will be on display for all interventions. This will also enable delegates speaking further down the list to see how fast progress is being made and to prepare themselves for making their presentations.

Should you wish to raise a point of order or make a request for the right of reply in the plenary, you can do so through the chat function by indicating whether it is a point of order or a request for the right of reply. In the latter case, please also indicate the intervention in respect of which the right of reply is sought.

In the event of a right of reply, please be reminded that it should refer only to the matter in question. It should not exceed two minutes, and it should be delivered in respectful, parliamentary language. Please keep in mind that it is not the practice in our Organization to allow a right to reply to a reply.

May I also say that it is a firm agreement on the part of the Officers to begin our sittings strictly on time. It is only in this way that we will manage to complete the debates within the time schedule.

(The Conference continues its discussion of the Reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body and of the Director-General.)