



108th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2019)

Agenda item IV

Briefing Note for Workers' Delegates

ILO Centenary outcome document

BACKGROUND

This year's Centenary Conference of the ILO takes place at a time when fundamental workers' rights are under increasing attack, with workers across the world confronted by income and other inequalities and insecurity. 300 million people are working in poverty, official unemployment is at 190 million and 60% of the world's workers are trapped in informal work. The majority of the world population still lacks access to social protection and precarious work is on the rise. The state of the world of work today is a major factor in declining public trust in institutions and in political processes.

The adoption of the ILO Constitution in 1919 represented the formalisation of the social contract internationally. Article 427 of the Treaty of Versailles which established the ILO stated: "labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or an article of commerce". The social contract was renewed by the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944, which reiterated that "labour is not a commodity".

With its focus on social justice, decent work, its normative mandate and tripartite governance, the ILO has been a crucial bulwark against exploitation and repression. However, the social contract has been broken by decades of corporate globalisation. With the emergence of the existential challenge of climate change and the rapid and profound transformations brought by digitalisation, the social contract must be renewed.

The ILO Centenary Conference will adopt a "Centenary outcome document", which it is expected will be in the form of a new ILO Declaration.

Previous Declarations adopted by the ILO Conference include the Philadelphia Declaration, the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008). The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (5th Edition, 2017) was adopted by the ILO Governing Body.

In his report to the 102nd session (2013) of the International Labour Conference, the Director-General proposed seven Centenary Initiatives, including one on the Future of Work which were subsequently endorsed by the ILO Governing Body.

The Director-General report to the 2015 International Labour Conference focused on the Future of Work Initiative. As a result of this discussion and in preparation for the 2019 Centenary session of the International Labour Conference, the ILO created a Global Commission on the Future of Work, which released its report "Work for a brighter future" https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_662410/lang--en/index.htm on 22 January this year. That report is expected to be presented to the Centenary Conference as the official Report of the Director General, and thus will be debated by the Conference Plenary.

The Global Commission was co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr Stefan Löfven, and the President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa. They were joined by 25 Commissioners, including three worker representatives: Luc Cortebeek - former chair of the ILO Workers' Group, Philip Jennings – former UNI Global Union General Secretary and Reema Nanavaty – a leader of SEWA, India.

A draft of a Centenary Declaration, prepared by the ILO following discussions in the Governing Body and consultations with the Workers', Employers' and Government groups of the Governing Body, has been published on the ILO website:

https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_700622/lang--en/index.htm.

Observations on the draft Centenary Declaration

This section contains a preliminary analysis of the draft Centenary Declaration.

The Centenary Declaration should be a global call to action to renew the social contract. It should be ambitious, it should provide the foundations and create the conditions for social justice now and in the decades to come, and it should have an historical significance which corresponds to the first two iterations of the social contract in 1919 and 1944.

The Centenary Declaration should reconfirm that social justice, decent work, and the protection of workers and their families against old and new risks in the world of work, as part of a fair model of globalisation, continue to be the best recipe for peace and stability and need to be at the core of ILO priorities.

This is also the place to come back to the “unfinished business” of the Philadelphia Declaration, in terms of promoting policy coherence, with a strong role for the ILO “to examine and consider all international economic and financial policies and measures in the light of the objective of social justice”, going beyond what has been done so far, and requiring a central role for social justice and decent work in the context of globalisation, the financial system and trade.

The draft Declaration contains a number of positive elements, notably:

- The inclusion of guarantees for all workers of their fundamental rights, an adequate living wage, on working time, privacy and personal data protection, as well as safety and health at work which is given the status of a fundamental right;
- Just transition to an environmentally sustainable future of work;
- Promotion of decent work for youth;
- Universal social protection;
- Life-long learning, although the Declaration should explicitly establish this as a right;
- A strong commitment on gender equality;
- A rights' based approach to the governance of migration;
- Investment in infrastructure and the green, care and rural economies;
- The re-affirmation that the setting and supervision of international labour standards is of fundamental importance to all ILO activity together with the importance of ratification and implementation; and,
- ILO partnership and leadership role in the international multilateral system to promote coherence in the pursuit of the human-centred approach for the future of work.

At the same time, there are a number of key areas in which the draft Declaration should be strengthened. These include:

- The opening section explicitly recognises growing inequalities and the decent work deficit inherent in the existing model of globalisation. However greater emphasis should be put on rising income inequalities. It should reaffirm the statement from the Philadelphia Declaration that “labour is not a commodity”, and it should inspire hope and assert a clear vision of social justice for the future;

- Sections I and II should also include clearer and stronger references to the normative mandate of the ILO, with special emphasis on freedom of association and collective bargaining, as the basis for a renewed social contract building on the visionary commitments of 1919 set out in the ILO Constitution and in subsequent ILO Declarations;
- The need for regulation of new and emerging forms of business, in particular platform businesses, and for due diligence in supply chains and corporate accountability;
- The need to re-affirm the continued relevance of the employment relationship as a means to provide legal protection to workers and the need to guarantee rights and benefits to all workers regardless of their contractual arrangements;
- The crucial role of quality public services in providing the foundation for sustainable economies and social justice;
- The need to give a strong message on the need to formalise the informal economy and not merely to reduce or eventually eliminate it;
- The importance of taxation and of trade, industry and sectoral policies;
- Recognition that humans must always be in control of “artificial intelligence” and other applications of digital technology with protections for workers from intrusive surveillance and from intrusion of work into leisure time;
- Reaffirmation of full and freely chosen employment as a central objective of macro-economic policies along with decent work;
- The need for member states to renew their commitment to the universal ratification of the fundamental labour standards; and
- The key role of collective bargaining in setting adequate wages and decent working conditions.

The Workers’ Group will also need to remain vigilant and ready to oppose any attempts by employers or by governments to weaken or undermine the ILO’s mandate, its body of standards and supervisory system, the extension of rights to all workers regardless of their working arrangements, or to promote business models (such as “micro-enterprises”) which have the same effect.

Worker delegates to the Conference are invited to include these points in their engagements with governments and employer organisations in the lead up to and during the ILO Conference.

Methods of Work of the Committee

The discussions at the Conference on the draft Declaration will take place in a “Committee of the Whole”. Participation in the Committee is open to all Conference delegates, however it is necessary to register to take part in the Committee.

The Declaration will be discussed through a process of amendments. Consultations between the Office and the tripartite constituents over the modalities for the Committee’s work are currently taking place.

Discussions are also on-going on adopting a brief Resolution in addition to the Declaration that would focus on how to implement the Declaration, notably when it comes to issues related to policy coherence. Updated information on these two issues will be provided to worker delegates taking part in the Committee of the Whole.
