

REPORT OF THE WEBINAR: “TIME FOR SDG 8 IN ASIA-PACIFIC: DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRADE UNIONS AND UN RESIDENT COORDINATORS”

HELD ON 07 FEBRUARY 2023, 08.00 -10.00 AM BRUSSELS TIME

Welcome and opening

The general secretary of ITUC Asia-Pacific, Shoya Yoshida, expressed his hope that this meeting would be the beginning of an enhanced co-operation between trade unions and United Nations Development Teams to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs in the region. Mr. Yoshida also praised the International Labour Organization's (ILO) valuable support to trade unions to enhance their capacity and make their engagement in development processes effective.

Ms. Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa, ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, congratulated the ITUC for organising the meeting and reminded all participants that the Singapore Statement endorsed by the ILO 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting made clear the importance of developing tripartism throughout the UN system at all levels.

Finally, the Regional Director for Asia-Pacific of the UN Development Cooperation Office, David Mclachlan-Karr, stressed the importance of broadening the range of partnerships to achieve the objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF), hence the importance of working towards a renewed partnership between UN Resident Coordinators (UNRC) and trade unions.

Session 1: Union priorities in the national dialogue on SDG 8 with the UN System

In her introductory remarks to the session, Ms. Asada-Miyakawa recalled that social dialogue, rights and decent work are now an integral part of the UN's Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) and stressed that Goal 8 remains central to the region's recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

Three union representatives then took the floor to present their work on SDG 8 with the UN System at the national level.

Julius Cainglet, vice-president of the Federation of Free Workers in the Philippines, shared the work that unions have undertaken to defend workers' rights with the support of the ITUC and the UN in the Philippines. As part of the dialogue with the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Cainglet highlighted the trade union participation in the design of the UN Socio-economic and Peace Framework and Common Country Analysis in 2021, the support of the UN Country Team in the launch of the trade union [15-point labour agenda](#) in December 2022 and in the establishment of an ILO high-level tripartite mission to the country, which has led president Marcos to set up a special commission, [as unions demanded](#).

The general secretary of the Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress, Aminur Rashid Chowdhury Repon, talked about the work undertaken by unions to advance decent work in the country, including their contribution to the current UNSDCF, and highlighted the recent passing of a law [establishing a national universal pension scheme](#), which he described as “a breakthrough for unions”.

Finally, Elly Rosita Silaban, president of KSBSI in Indonesia, talked about the collaboration of unions with the ILO Jakarta office on such matters as the mitigation of climate change, social justice and equality. She underscored unions' struggle against the government's recurrent attempts to dismantle workers' rights and stressed unions' continuous fight to ensure the inclusion of informal workers in the ongoing pension and social protection reform.

In the questions and comments session that followed the intervention, the UNRC in Samoa and the Cook Islands, Simona Marinescu, and the UNRC of Lao PDR, Sara Sekkenes, mentioned the progress done in the respective countries to institutionalise tripartite mechanisms in the consultations on CCAs/UNSDCFs. Moreover, Rajgopal Dashrath Chandrashekhar from the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) shared the challenges of advancing on ILO Conventions with the current government, and the trade union attempts to establish a dialogue with the UNRC for India.

Session 2: Upholding SDG 8 in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks

Mr. Mclachlan-Karr chaired the session and invited the UNRCs of Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines to share their experiences.

Valérie Julliard, UNRC in Indonesia, stressed the importance of trade union participation in the UNSDCF, given their knowledge about the priorities of working people in a changing world of work. She also underlined that trade unions have been consulted in the design of the UNSDCF, that includes a specific chapter on economic transformation, and thanked the ILO for its important work in facilitating unions' engagement in development processes.

Gwyn Lewis, UNRC in Bangladesh, acknowledged the key role of trade unions in advancing labour rights and social protection in the country, as well as the contribution they made to the current UNSDCF. She also highlighted the importance of building up this partnership with trade unions and the ILO in the challenging process of graduation of Bangladesh from Least Developed Country in 2026.

The UNRC in the Philippines, Gustavo González, highlighted three workstreams of the current unions' engagement with the UN Country Team: 1) knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, as trade unions have been contributing to the CCA/UNSDCFs; 2) enhanced accountability, for example through the trade union shadow report to the government's Voluntary National Review on the SDGs in 2019 and 2022, and through the effective use of the UN Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council to keep the government accountable with international agreements and treaties; and 3) Advocacy, where the UNRC has been facilitating the trade union call for the recognition of labour rights as human rights.

The presentations were followed by a question and comment session from all participants.

From the side of the UN Resident Coordinators, Sara Sekkenes, UNRC in Lao PDR, explained in a commentary that the ILO's work in the country has been central to ensuring that the Lao Federation of Trade Unions becomes a key stakeholder in a number of dialogues with different parts of the UN Country Team, including on social protection, rural development, private sector and skills development, digitization, and migration policy.

The UNRC of Papua New Guinea, Richard Howard, expressed his interest in working through social dialogue for the upcoming UNSDCF and announced that the country was on its way to ratify ILO Convention 190 on harassment and violence in the work place, which he saw as a great opportunity to engage trade unions in its implementation.

The UNRC of Samoa and the Cook Islands, Simona Marinescu, highlighted that tripartite social dialogue is critical to leaving no one behind on the pathway to sustainable development, and stated that UNRCs should advocate for the institutionalization of tripartite dialogue, to be systematic and formally recognized by governments as a mechanism to vet policy and legislation.

The UNRC of the Maldives, Catherine Haswell, also shared the work of her UN Country Team on improving working conditions, including the long awaited minimum wages for Maldivians, and flagged that the UN Country Team is working with trade unions.

From the side of trade unions, Mahendra Prasad Yadav from NTUC Nepal highlighted the situation of Nepal's mostly unregulated labour market and underlined trade unions' willingness to engage in a dialogue with the UNRC to contribute to making the new social contract a reality in Nepal; Bidur Karki from GEFONT Nepal added a shared concern related to migrant workers' conditions in the country and the deteriorating economic situation in Nepal.

Maroof Zakir from MTUC Maldives also shared the current struggle to engage with government and employers on the SDGs implementation in the country.

Speaking from India, Harbhajan Singh Sidhu from HSM and Chandra Shekar from INTUC explained that SDG progress in the country is very slow and that the state of the labour market is very bad with no labour inspections and no respect of labour rights, the situation being particularly dire for informal workers. Both asked the UNRC in the country to engage with trade unions.

Conclusions

Shoya Yoshida thanked all participating UNRCs for the enthusiasm and willingness to promote space for trade unions. He also proposed to deepen the cooperation between UNRCs and trade unions by establishing a formal, periodic and structured dialogue mechanism between UNRC and trade unions.

His proposals for strengthening the partnership between trade unions and UN Resident Coordinators included the following:

- Periodic information exchange on the programming/timeline of UN Cooperation Frameworks and the related Common Country Analysis, in order for trade unions to be able to engage in their design;
- Formal inclusion of trade unions in the consultations organized by the UN Resident Coordinators on the UN Cooperation Frameworks and the related Common Country Analysis;
- Structured dialogue between trade unions and UN Resident Coordinators, at least once or twice per year, on the implementation of the UN Cooperation Frameworks and related processes;
- Promotion of more opportunities for dialogue between the DCO and its UN Resident Coordinators on the one side, and the ITUC-AP and its national affiliates on the other side (eg. involvement of the UN Resident Coordinators in the activities organized by ITUC national affiliates).

Chihoko Asada-Miyawaki welcomed the proposals of Mr Yoshida and stated that the ILO stands ready to support it. She insisted on the fact that tripartism and social dialogue are more necessary than ever against the backdrop of rising inequality in the region.



Finally, David Mclachlan-Karr said that the role of the UNRC should include advocating the inclusion of trade unions in development processes, create spaces for dialogue between unions and governments; support the development of national strategies to protect labour rights, and raise awareness of the role of trade unions in promoting decent work and economic growth.



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