Statement by Mr. Somavia, Secretary-General of the Conference to the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2002 on ILO Programme Implementation 2000-2001

Original French: THE PRESIDENT — Before starting the general discussion of the Report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Report of the Director-General, it is an honour for me now to give the floor to Mr. Somavia, Director-General of the ILO, so that he can present his Report entitled “ILO programme implementation, 2000-01”.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL — The Report before you responds to a challenge that we all decided to tackle together three years ago: the challenge of strategic budgeting, which was to transform an administrative programme and budget mechanism into a strategic policy tool to manage change in our complex, globalizing world.

We agreed on decent work for all as the vision to guide the ILO into the twenty-first century. Its implementation has been a team effort of the Governing Body, our management and staff in Geneva and the regions. I welcome your frank and honest assessment of how we are doing, and your guidance for the future.

Let me begin by saying that something I have felt very strongly is that this institution has always shown extraordinary resilience and adaptability. Now, once again, a fresh breeze of creativity is blowing through the ILO. Let me give you a sample of the innovative products, initiatives and opportunities coming from this new energy; a new energy that I see in this room and that I see every time I visit the regions and the countries. Just some examples: we have just completed the first gender audit of our work, and the senior management team will be discussing the recommendations later this week. This participatory self-assessment is the first of its kind in any United Nations body.

As you know, we have forcefully promoted the notion that the workplace is one of the most effective spaces to combat HIV/AIDS, and we developed a practical tool — our tripartite code of practice — which I was proud to present to last year’s United Nations AIDS Conference. I must report to you that recently, when the heads of agencies met with the Secretary-General, they decided to endorse this instrument as a basis for their own work. It is now a system-wide instrument, not just an ILO instrument.

In the aftermath of the terrible terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the airline and tourism sectors chose the ILO as the relevant place to meet and work out a global response to the crisis threatening hundreds of thousands of jobs, and the survival of many businesses, and we continue to be involved. The question was raised where such a critical issue should be discussed, and it was decided to do it in the ILO.

Our major report on health and safety at the workplace showed that in the year 2000, 2 million farm, construction and other workers were killed on the job, that is 5,000 every day. For these workers in the most hazardous industries every day is a September 11th — their families can never be sure whether they will come home. The Conference Committee on Occupational Accidents and Diseases will further reinforce our SafeWork activities and this is no doubt the one area in which there is a joint interest in reinforcing productivity by reducing accidents and ill health at the workplace.

In August last year, in Bangkok, our Asian Regional Conference launched the idea of national plans of action for decent work, including indicators for regular monitoring.
and evaluation. The Philippines adopted the first one. Bahrain and Bangladesh have expressed their interest to follow. China is the first country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the ILO based on the goal of decent work and its four strategic objectives. Other countries are increasingly using the Decent Work Agenda as a mobilizing and organizing frame for their development plans. I must report to you that we are receiving a strong demand to make national decent work programmes a central feature of our strategic planning with many, many countries.

We have deepened our partnership with the Organization of African Unity’s tripartite Labour and Social Affairs Commission. A few weeks ago in Ouagadougou we continued the process of including a strong decent work focus in regional development initiatives, notably in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). This also features prominently in the agenda of our American Regional Meeting to be held at the end of the year in Lima.

My Report covers the first two full years of follow-up to the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* and indicates its positive impact worldwide. Ratification and reporting compliance are up; so is demand for advice and technical cooperation. This new openness is a first step towards greater progress. The global reports under the Declaration — we are now into our third one — have become the authoritative and up-to-date source of information and analysis on basic human rights at work.

This year’s Report entitled *A future without child labour* attracted exceptional attention worldwide when it was launched simultaneously in 17 different countries. We will be discussing it in detail on Wednesday, and we must use our first World Day against Child Labour on 12 June 2002 to renew our commitment to the eradication of child labour, and scale up and spread our IPEC programmes.

After years of painstaking work, the opening of a liaison office in Myanmar “Burma) just a few weeks ago marks a breakthrough which should enable the ILO to work closely with the authorities and all relevant parties to ensure that forced labour is finally eliminated from that country.

Our successful Global Employment Forum last November, to which the Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Body referred, inaugurated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, showed that the ILO is able to convene major actors to formulate the contours of a much needed comprehensive new global employment framework. The next step, of course, is to move the ILO into a position of policy leadership in this matter.

We have friends in many places. Still, I must say that it was quite stimulating that the Director-General of the ILO was invited to both the Davos annual World Economic Forum, this year held in New York, and the Porto Alegre World Social Forum, to speak on the same issue, our Decent Work Agenda. It shows that our voice is perceived to be relevant by people with diverging perspectives on the economic and social dimensions of globalization. I believe that we can play a bridge-building function. Our Governing Body Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization can take credit for creating space for debate within the multilateral system about new approaches to globalization. It has been addressed by the heads of UNCTAD, UNHCR and WTO, as well as the Labour Ministers of Argentina and Afghanistan, who analysed their critical national situations.

We have now gone a step further and brought together 25 eminent personalities in our World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. This ambitious project has started under the leadership of two co-chairs, President Halonen of Finland and Mkapa of the United Republic of Tanzania. This is the first World Independent Commission ever headed by two Heads of State. The Commission aims to deliver its report within 18 months. It has already met twice, and it began by addressing an inventory of issues, analysing different perceptions on them, and agreeing on a process for wide consultation.
This year we celebrated 50 years of the work of the Committee on Freedom of Association. We cannot really quantify all the lives saved, prisoners released or doors opened towards democratic freedom by its work. And yet, as Belarus, Colombia and other countries to be analysed by the Committee on the Application of Standards, show, the struggle continues.

We cannot rest on our laurels. We must move forward in the standards field. The new integrated approach to standards developed by the Governing Body has, I believe, tremendous potential. Next year’s session of the Conference will review the range of occupational safety and health Conventions and Recommendations with a view to updating and consolidating the whole package. The idea is to build on past progress and to make our standards more user-friendly, easier to apply, wider in coverage and more effectively implemented.

As we move forward with the integrated strategy for standards, we will extend and strengthen our links with Parliaments who ratify ILO Conventions and translate our standards into national laws and regulations. We have recently published a joint handbook on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), with the Inter-parliamentary Union.

These very diverse activities that I have summarized are just a sample of the new energy in action of the ILO, and there is much, much more to share. But I wanted to give you a feeling, a sense of the sorts of things that have happened since our last meeting. All of these things occurred between last year’s session of the Conference and this year’s, as you can see in the very wide array of ILO activities. I believe that the fact that we are dealing with relevant questions, and that the activities are seen to provide relevant solutions to those questions, gives us strength and hope for the future.

Let me ask you to pause a moment to reflect on the widespread humanitarian crisis of the Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories. The report before you tells it straight. We have gathered the facts in an objective way.

More than that, a particular effort was made to address the deeper, subjective aspects of the situation: the humiliation and frustration felt by Palestinians as a result of the combination of closures and military action by Israel.

The notion of “collective punishment” seems to explain best the underlying anger. The report also reflects the sense of insecurity in Israel owing to the suicide bombings and the economic crisis.

The present situation cannot continue and only dialogue can lead to peace.

Let me appeal to Palestinian and Israeli constituents to take the risk of embarking on social dialogue across the present divide in their specific areas of competence. We shall assist and support you in all possible ways.

With your backing, I commit the Office to put in place urgently an expanded technical cooperation programme for Arab workers and other constituents in the occupied Arab territories as I have proposed in the report. It will be guided by our constitution, which states that “universal and lasting peace can only be established if it is based upon social justice”.

The whole of the ILO has a responsibility and we cannot shirk it. Beyond the ILO, the international community must respond to the aspirations of all families in the region: families at work, children at school, security in the streets, peace in the community. This remains the deepest hope of the large majority of Palestinians and Israelis and we, and the world, must help them to get there.

Let me move on to say that I believe that a different form of globalization is possible, and that there is a key role for the ILO in it. In the ILO, our discussions have not focused on whether there should be more, or less, globalization, or that it should
stop altogether. For us, it is about what sort of globalization we want, for whom and how to get there.

Few of us come to our debates with the presumption that we must throw overboard open economies and open societies. All of our countries are moving in that direction.

Rather, it is about fairness, accountability and transparency. It is about enterprise and productivity. It is about getting the balance right. But it is also about new ideas, out-of-the-box thinking and imaginative solutions.

Fundamentally, we need a concept of globalization that commands legitimacy in the eyes of the voters around the world because they feel that it responds to their fears and aspirations. This cannot be a one-size-fits-all model but rather a broader approach within which choices can be made through democratic decision-making.

The ILO has a key role to play. We have a unique perspective that links how globalization is seen through the eyes of people to how people’s lives are interconnected by commerce, investment and integrated chains of production.

We should not be shy about our strengths. Of course, we have our arguments between ourselves when we meet, but we are specialists in the art of constructive consensus building. Tripartism is an under-used asset. We have a responsibility to use it more often and better.

We must aim to build as large a consensus as possible within and beyond the ILO around an inclusive form of globalization based on a level playing field, on fair rules of the game and real opportunities for families and countries. We all know that this is not easy, but we also know that it can be done. The ILO is a privileged place in which to try this, as was recognized by the International Conference on Financing for Development, held recently in Monterey, Mexico.

Do we have the will, the character, the ideas to show that globalization can be oriented in a way that gives people opportunities, and that gives countries a reason to back it?

So, let us look to the future. I believe that the present form of globalization has not produced enough jobs for all who seek them or in the places where they are most needed. This is probably its biggest failure. There are a lot of things said about globalization, but, when all is said and done, it is the fact that it is not producing the jobs that the world needs that is the fundamental reason why people feel uncomfortable with it. They are told that this is extremely good for them and when they look at their life at work they cannot see the results.

Currently, more than a billion women and men are unemployed, underemployed or working poor. A direct consequence of this is the decision of a 120 million migrant workers and their families to leave their home countries in the hope of finding a job somewhere else.

Furthermore, we will need 500 million new jobs almost entirely in the developing world over the next decade to absorb new entrants to the labour market, largely youth and women.

No-one is projecting a scenario for the next decade based on the need to fill this yawning decent work deficit, but we know that a sound combination of public and private policies can make it happen.

Let me suggest five areas to explore.

First, we need to concentrate much more on local development, on local markets, on local entrepreneurship, on basic networks of organization and social protection, on
local capacity to cope. International trade and foreign investment are of course important, but experience shows that only around 15 developing countries have captured the major share of those benefits. For the rest, the results are meagre, particularly for the least developed commodity-exporting countries. We must creatively foster the potential for social mobilization of sustainable local economic development and enhance appropriate global linkages. It is not a question of withdrawing, it is a question of having the right linkages towards the outside. We must also explore strategies for balanced community investment. Think of the community when you think of development. The new Convention being worked on by the Committee on the Promotion of Cooperatives is a vital tool in this effort. There is tremendous scope for pooling together the range of our country-level projects and, through social dialogue, developing them into national decent work programmes for poverty eradication rooted at the local level. ILO has a lot of experience in these matters. We will be sending a tripartite delegation to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development to ensure that ILO action is integrated with the global sustainable development strategy it is expected to adopt. We need the right balance among economic, social and environmental objectives.

Second, we must release the creativity and productive potential of women and men trapped in the informal economy. It is central to the ILO’s commitment to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. A new approach to governance and the way public institutions interact with workers and small private businesses is central to any effective strategy for moving the world’s most disadvantaged through and out of the continuum of informality described in our Report to the Conference. The Committee on the Informal Economy has a large and complex task. I am confident that they will deliver guidelines to expand our work in ways that are perceived to be relevant by the people living in the informal economy. If we want to have the right conclusions we need to connect with the people living in the informal economy.

Third, we should examine avenues for basic economic and social security for all people and their families. Employment continuity is an increasingly fragile foundation for the social protection system, especially for the most vulnerable who are likely to be in constant flux between precarious low-paid jobs and periods of unemployment. If we are to extend social protection to the billions of people in the informal economies of the developed world, as called for at last year’s session of the Conference, we will need to think creatively about how income and other forms of support to the poorest should create a pathway towards decent work. South Africa and Brazil are experimenting with providing a basic minimum income to ensure that children are in school and parents can find productive work. Other countries are pursuing other routes that are worth tracking, like the earned income tax credit in the United States. But if I raise this issue it is because I want to suggest that the ILO needs to position itself at the fore of this discussion.

Fourth, we must demand policy coherence on the goals of our system of international organizations, but promote policy pluralism on the means to achieve those goals. I believe this is very important. Let us have coherence on where we want to go. Let us have policy pluralism while we can actually do it. We need a broad consensual framework that is large enough to allow for a reasoned debate and democratic choice about the balance and pace of policy reform and the best options for poverty reduction and employment creation. For example, as our Global Employment Forum suggested, with a strong policy framework for the labour market we can have faster growth and more decent work without accelerating inflation or unsupportable budget deficits. We can also open markets more successfully because we can sequence and manage the necessary adjustments better. We need to build on these insights and reflect the value of policy pluralism. Countries and societies have the right to review their options and make their own choices. It is not up to the international system to go and tell countries what they are supposed to do in their own house. Today’s single-minded globalization has a price for everything but it has nothing to say about basic human values. The ILO, on the contrary, is living proof that universal values do not mean homogeneity or cultural domination. Indeed, our pursuit of freedom from poverty, discrimination and oppression has created a space for diversity and creativity, from standard setting to enterprise development. Decent work itself is a vision that links shared values to practical policies to improve people’s and family lives. It provides a development framework for choice and
for setting priorities on how we can respond to changes in the global economy and the
world of work. It can become, if we debate it, discuss it and promote it internationally, an
integrating goal for a new type of globalization that responds to people’s needs.

Fifth, let us keep up the rhythm of change in the ILO. All sorts of institutions —
international agencies, governments, corporations, trade unions, NGOs, churches and
others — are engaged in processes and dialogue to formulate the reform strategies
needed to ensure public trust and confidence. As you know, throughout the world there is
a growing lack of trust of institutions and of authorities of any sort. New movements of
market activism are creating new frameworks for corporate, social and environmental
accountability, for which our Declaration on Multinationals is very relevant.

I have to bring to the fore of this Assembly that accountability of international
organizations is a key issue in the global agenda of today. We score well because of our
tripartite structure and open methods of work. But few people outside our halls know for
example that the sessions of our Governing Body are open to the public or that we do not
impose Conventions on any country. They are voluntarily ascribed to through ratification.
Yet, we must never become complacent.

As we approach our 85th anniversary in 2004, we must test our ideas by listening
to a wide range of opinions, from those who like our work, and also from our critics. Not
to do this would be a sign of weakness. On the contrary, listening to new voices in
society is a sign of the strength of tripartism and our confidence in its durability.

Our capacity for absorbing ideas, developing them through social dialogue and
coming up with policy innovations to meet the needs of working people and enterprises is
a tremendous asset to address the problems of globalization.

But when all is said and done, it is you, all of you here representing governments,
representing workers, representing employers, it is you, the constituents, who are the
real strength of the ILO. It is your personal commitment to make the values and
instruments of the ILO work back home. That is the crucial difference. Dialogue in
Geneva is essential, but dialogue back home is the real test of our relevance. I want to
invite you to be daring, to innovate, to be risk-takers, to try new solutions, to respect
each other.

We are all heirs of a magnificent tradition. We are challenged to find the answers of
today. Let us stand up and hand in hand deploy the strength of our consensus-building
energy for all the world to see.