Introduction

In accordance with a recommendation of the ILO Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in Postal and Telecommunications Services, held in Geneva, 13-17 May 2002, the ILO organized a tripartite seminar in Lima, Peru, 18-20 August 2003, in conjunction with the UPU and in cooperation with UNI, in order to promote social dialogue in the postal sector of the region. It was also a follow-up of Objective 6 of the UPU’s Beijing Postal Strategy (1999) and of the ILO-UPU Joint Regional Seminar on Social Dialogue in Postal Services in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, 23-26 May 2000.

The seminar brought together nine government representatives (from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela), ten worker delegates (from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru), and representatives of private employers from Argentina and Peru. Additionally, workers from Bolivia and Peru, as well as employers and government participants from Peru, attended as observers. The Seminar was supported by a team of experts from the ILO, UPU, UNI and the IOE (International Organization of Employers).

The seminar participants unanimously agreed on the following: (a) the need to promote social dialogue in the postal sector; (b) the need to offer and maintain the universal postal service; and (c) the need for modernization and reform of the postal service. The seminar recognized that efforts must be made to achieve these objectives, and that the social dialogue begun by the UPU, the ILO and UNI at this seminar must be further strengthened. The postal administrations and the workers’ organizations of the region have deepened their mutual understanding. Government representatives, and those from the postal administrations in particular, recognize the responsibilities and contributions of the workers and their representatives in achieving higher quality and greater development of postal services.

The national reports at the seminar indicated great differences between the countries of the region, although some characteristics are common to all. In some countries, there is

---

1 Unanimously approved by the participants.
no social dialogue in the postal service, while in the majority it works more or less effectively. Solutions need to be found to improve and modernize postal services and to achieve greater satisfaction for workers, employers, governments and especially the clients of the service. It is important to promote the role of an efficient and modern universal postal service that is able to compete fairly and effectively.

**Issue 1: Modernization of Postal Services in Latin America and Managing Organizational Change: The Impact of Structural and Legal Reform on the Sector and Postal Workers**

There is a consensus on the urgency and need to modernize and reform postal services. However, modernization, restructuring or creating a postal enterprise does not mean privatization or granting postal concessions. The postal sector is undergoing change throughout the world, and countries are at various stages of the process. Whatever stage they are at, the challenge facing stakeholders is how best to manage the process. The key factor is the active and constructive participation of workers’ organizations and the postal administrations. In view of technological and economic change, the modernization of the postal sector has become crucial for the sector’s ability to remain relevant for society and serve customers effectively.

The seminar recognized the requirement to fulfil the strategic action commitments established in the UPU Congresses in Beijing, Seoul and Washington. Achieving these commitments should be the responsibility of all stakeholders involved, that is, governments, the postal administrations, workers’ organizations, and in this effort the committed participation of all of them must be ensured. The stakeholders should recognize and address the concerns of postal workers, share information and carry out consultations before changes are instituted. Account should be taken of legal reforms and the specific conditions of each country, where often-cited and serious problems result from the lack of sectoral regulation and the excessive politicization of human resources management polices for postal services in the region. Training and information programmes in the postal companies are also necessary.

The seminar noted the specificity of the high percentage of women working in postal administrations in the region, and thus advocated that care should be taken that structural reforms do not substantially affect workers, particularly women workers. The protection of the interests of women workers must be ensured. The ILO, UPU and UNI must also promote a greater participation of women in their meetings.

The participants also acknowledged the primary responsibility of the public authorities in terms of promoting efficient postal services that guarantee universal service and at the same time offering stability and decent working conditions. It is essential to bear in mind the human element when managing change. The companies and workers must
develop long-term plans to modernize and improve services for the clients, and to institutionalize such plans.

The UPU, UPAEP (Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal) and the ILO should try to provide cooperation and technical assistance for these ends. Governments should promote efforts to provide financing for modernization programmes of public postal entities.

**Issue 2: Social Dialogue in the Postal Services**

The administrations and workers’ organizations appreciate the organization of this seminar by the ILO, the UPU and UNI to promote social dialogue at the national and regional level.

The concept of "Codes of Conduct" or "Framework Agreements" based on ILO and UPU standards should be studied, as they could be useful for social dialogue in postal enterprises.

The various forms of social dialogue, such as collective bargaining, information sharing, formal and informal consultations, must be well designed. The postal administrations and the workers’ organizations should cooperate so that the postal services develop within this dialogue scheme.

Where there is genuine social dialogue and where it is based on the principles of understanding and mutual benefits, respect, transparency and trust, the workers and their representatives must have knowledge of the intentions of management, including plans.

It was agreed that the principles and rights included in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up must be promoted in order to encourage social dialogue in the postal sector. Collective bargaining agreements must include a clause urging respect for these fundamental principles and rights. The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy of 1977 is also relevant to the sector. The application and implementation of these principles and rights will contribute to promoting decent work in the postal sector.

Formal relations between the UPU and UNI-Americas Postal should be promoted. It is also hoped that in order to promote social dialogue and ensure mutual collaboration, the UPU can extend the status of observer at its meetings to UNI-Americas.

A basic responsibility of government is to consult the social partners to generate the appropriate framework for social dialogue and guarantee that the social partners
operate within this framework. In this sense, governments are urged to create an environment conducive to significant social dialogue. It should secure the free exercise of workers’ rights. It was recommended that the dialogue bodies meet on a regular basis with an agenda previously agreed upon and include representatives freely elected by the parties. In order to be effective and to guarantee the strengthening of tripartism, these bodies require appropriate administrative support.

**Issue 3: The Universal Postal Service and the Evolution of Postal Reforms in Latin America**

National obligations in terms of universal postal service are based on the fundamental rights enshrined in national Constitutions. They are also based on the international commitments of the Universal Postal Convention, adopted at UPU Congresses. The services considered there refer to the obligation of States to provide at least postal correspondence and package services, which are essential to social communication and economic development.

The countries of the region need to intensify their efforts to incorporate rapidly into their national legislation the commitment to establish the obligations of service agreed in the Universal Postal Convention.

The State’s responsibility to maintain the universal postal service and comply with their obligations to society must be the main goal of postal reform. This crucial responsibility, on the most viable and sustainable way to finance postal services, constitutes the key element in the measures to be adopted.

The current conditions of postal services in the region require special efforts from the governments to address the challenges and risks that threaten the survival of the services. The reforms have been slow in the region, and adequate legal frameworks are required in order to develop the sector.

The weaknesses of the sector itself and of the postal services it provides are numerous. Therefore, they require the attention of the interested parties in order to support thoroughgoing reforms that cover legal reforms, the transformation of postal entities into business organizations, and the use of technology and investment to modernize and develop.

**Issue 4: The Role of Workers’ Organizations: Towards Better Labour-Management Relations?**

The employers recognize that workers’ organizations are an important partner in achieving the objectives of the company, whereby both parties must act with
responsibility and commitment. At the same time, workers’ organizations trust that postal employers will consider them valid representatives of the workers. The basis of relations between the parties must be founded on dialogue, respect and consultation.

The administration and workers’ organizations must consider each other as partners in the task of training workers and resolving the problems that arise between employers and workers, with professionalism and understanding of the enterprise’s realities and conditions. Good relations between the management and workers are essential to ensure that the interests of the workers and the employers are addressed.

**Issue 5: The Impact of the Growth of Electronic Communications on Jobs and Working Conditions**

Technology, electronic communication and new products offer new areas for growth through which workers and the postal operator could be in a more viable and appropriate position to offer better terms and conditions of employment. The UPU and the postal administrations, in cooperation with workers’ organizations, should combine their efforts to establish the best joint strategies for taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the development of electronic commerce and other technological innovations. With the technological changes in the postal sector, training and retraining must be carried out to increase the employment potential of postal workers, improve productivity, and redeploy the workers according to their abilities and skills.

There was agreement that the introduction of new technologies as necessary and inevitable and that it must be supported. Nonetheless, it also brings negative effects that must be mitigated by means of appropriate training and retraining in order to resolve problems with redeployment, for which social dialogue to agree on the introduction of new technologies is essential.

**Final remarks**

This seminar is a good example of social dialogue at the international and regional level. The participants are grateful that the ILO, the UPU and UNI have launched this discussion, and urge them to adopt other initiatives to institutionalize or formalize a mechanism for social dialogue and to extend it to other regions of the world.

The seminar highlighted the importance of social dialogue in postal services of Latin America. This represents a great challenge for the regulators, employers and workers. Social dialogue to strengthen and modernize postal services must represent a positive sum for governments, companies and the workers. Using as a basis Objective 6 of the Beijing Postal Strategy (1999) and the conclusions of the Joint Regional Seminar in
Bangkok (May 2000), of the ILO Tripartite Meeting in Geneva (May 2002), and of the UPU Strategic Conference in Geneva (October 2002), the Seminar participants recognize the importance of social dialogue that is adapted to the realities of each country for finding joint solutions.

**Follow-up**

In accordance with the conclusions of this seminar, the participants propose that:

- The ILO, the UPU, the IOE and UNI-Americas Postal prepare a study based on a questionnaire to be sent to governments, postal administrations, employers and workers’ organizations;
- The four organizations meet in April or May 2004 to discuss the outcome of the study and to arrange follow-up;
- The workers’ organizations request that UPAEP invites them to participate in their next meeting, in the coming year.

---

2 Discussed in the closing session of the seminar and drafted by consensus on 21 August 2003 by the ILO, the UPU and UNI-Americas.