

NFS - Tallin, Estonia, 6-7 October 2016 – Decent Work Day 2016

Anna Biondi –

Deputy Director ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)

Dear

Magnus Gissler, General Secretary of the Council of Nordic Trade Unions,

Jarkko Eloranta, President NFS and SAK Finland

Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, Deputy President, ITUC and President of LO, Sweden

Peep Peterson, President EAKL, Estonia

Ministers, Colleagues and friends, sisters and brothers,

It is wonderful to be here in Tallin and meet new colleagues, but also to be able to interact with those whom I usually see in Geneva, such as Jens Erik at the Governing Body and Katja and other colleagues who are regular International Labour Conference's participants.

Allow me first of all to bring you the warm greetings of our Director General Guy Ryder, who insisted for having an ILO presence in your important gathering and I am honoured to be the person delivering a commitment that is of the Organization as a whole, but in particular of the Bureau for Workers' Activities, with its Director Maria Helena André. Your support to ACTRAV towards training and other activities in Eastern European countries has been (and will be) very much appreciated and also my colleague Sergeyus Glovackas sends warm regards.

I am particularly pleased to be here to celebrate October 7th, Decent Work Day, since you would remember that it was indeed Guy Ryder, as General Secretary of the ITUC, who established the World Day in 2008. As Goda and Hans mentioned, different activities can and should be organized and this is a wonderful example of what is possible.

At the time the Decent Work Day was created, I was the Secretary of the ILO Workers' Group and Director of the ITUC Geneva Office and I remember that some colleagues in the labour movement were scared that this day would diminish the importance of May Day.

Yet time has shown that both initiatives are necessary: a time of affirmation of workers' power and rights in May and a reflection on how to implement them and the Decent Work Agenda in full in October.

2008 was also an important year in the ILO with the adoption of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, which institutionalized the concept of Decent Work. The Declaration affirms the need to work on the four pillars of Decent Work (employment, social protection, which includes social security as well as labour protection, social dialogue and fundamental rights at work; as well as the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and non-discrimination). This should be certainly done still through tripartite dialogue and consensus at national level, but also creating partnerships and policy coherence at sub regional, regional and global level. This is why your initiative is so important: only through exchanges as such we can create a movement that is able to affirm rights at work in a globalized context.

The United Nations as a whole last year has also given an answer through a set of universal goals to be addressed by all countries (while in the past the targets were only directed towards developing countries it is now clear that the efforts need to be collective and those who have more need to do more): the Sustainable Development Goals.

I have brought you some material that summarises the link between the Decent Work agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: it is important indeed to emphasise the whole set of SDGs, each of them complementary and necessary for the development of stable and progressive democratic societies.

Different parts of the UN and its agencies are particularly mandated to lead on each of them. The ILO is in charge of Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth. “Decent Work” is at the core of the ILO mandate: governments, employers and workers organizations have agreed that the way forward for pursuing a fair globalization is through promoting employment, guarantee rights at work, extend social security and labour protection and promote social dialogue. As the Social Justice Declaration states: “The four strategic objectives are inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive. The failure to promote any one of them would harm progress towards the others”.

And yet, roughly half the world’s population still lives on the equivalent of about US\$2 a day. And in too many places, having a job doesn’t guarantee the ability to escape from poverty, including in our countries where workers, mostly young workers, are destined to precarious jobs with no rights nor benefits. A continued lack of decent work opportunities, insufficient investments and under-consumption lead to an erosion of the basic social contract underlying democratic societies: that all must share the fruits of progress. Part of the equation, as already stated by SAK President Eloranta is to offer quality public services to all, as basis for democratic and stable societies.

Of the four pillars of Decent Work, the ILO constituents (not only the Workers, but also Governments and Employers’ representatives) have agreed that “respecting, promoting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work (meaning a world of work without child labour, forced labour and discrimination and with the possibility of workers to exercise freedom of association and the rights to collective bargaining) is of particular significance, as

they are both rights and enabling conditions that are necessary for the full realization of all of the strategic objectives, noting:

– that freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are particularly important to enable the attainment of the four strategic objectives.

I think our reflection in the upcoming days will use this last statement as reality-check for the trade union situation in the region as well as the effective possibility of workers to exercise their rights and be part of shaping the socio-economic policy through social dialogue.

Dear friends, you know very well what the ILO is: the first agency of the United Nations, actually preceding the birth of the UN since it is the only international body that survived the League of Nations established after World War I. The ILO was therefore established in 1919 and we are soon celebrating its 100 years of action.

I think you are an audience that understand very well how that historical period is important and we are proud to stick to the values that should be leading our action as current universal reference: freedom, human rights, solidarity and what is still the Northern star of the ILO: social justice.

The ILO Director General Guy Ryder has launched a Centenary initiative, not in a simple celebratory mood, but asking us to address the world of work today and its most important Decent Work deficits.

Guy Ryder stands as a non-contested candidate for the re-election to Director General of the ILO at the upcoming Governing Body on this November 7th. Today the UN will choose its new Secretary General. I think we have a real chance to use the upcoming years for a “make or break” (I hope make!) in the world global governance.

Allow me to recap as food for thought for the upcoming days the ILO Centenary initiative.

It is centred on three major axes:

Jobs, poverty and social protection (there is the need to create 600 million jobs, social protection only available to 27% of world’s population, 40% of the world’s working-age youth are either unemployed or have a job to live in poverty)

The quality of work (half of population in informal economy, rise of precarious jobs with changes in the employment relationship taken as a “given”, each year around 2,3 m workers lose their life in accidents at work, poor health and disability)

Internalization of production (global value chains and Export Processing Zones without workers’ rights in particular freedom of association and the right to bargaining collectively,

lack of fair fiscal policies for starting or maintaining quality public services, but also the challenge of the 150 million international migrant workers, who – because of current policy trends as well as work organization and immigration policies risk to become those with no chance to climb the social ladder, being stuck to the least desired jobs in a given society).

Allow me a brief reference also to the recent increases in refugees and other forcibly displaced people, which is unfortunately likely to increase in the future, hence the need for a joint and urgent response. First, let me point out that this is not just a European crisis: 80% of the displaced people are in developing countries.

Furthermore, the ILO has launched 4 conversations

1 – Work and society: Which is the role of work in life? Access to work as a precondition to personal development and social inclusion; how are we able to speak to political parties and civil society organizations that seem to relegate the issue of work to a marginal topic, while in the past it had been always central to political reflection at large? President Peterson rightly pointed out that a strong fight against populism and xenophobia is needed, and it has to start with showing that the progressive agenda offers Decent Work opportunities to those workers who are now scared and lured towards undemocratic positions.

2- Decent Work for all: ILO was created to work on full employment and rising standards of living. Discussion about technology and how it has to contribute to human beings not viceversa.

3- the organization of work and production: global value chains, regulation of companies across borders, labor rights usually linked to the national labour code, which have been weakened, is it possible to create better regulation across States?, precarious jobs not only linked to low wages but also to low social security for workers while companies double the profits.

4- governance of work: the need to maintain enabling laws and regulations vs CSR, voluntary initiative (useful, but not a replacement for industrial relations or respect of the rule of law). CBAs are often denied or are pushed towards factory level bargaining, while it is clear that workers' strength can only be exercised at its best in a national sectoral context and beyond (Global Framework Agreements). The need to maintain tripartite consultations and negotiation to implement socio-economic policies or introduce new labour legislation: too often a neoliberal model is adopted without inclusion of protection of rights at work or even the presence of the union around the table.

The ILO has asked all its Member States to start national dialogues in 2016. I am not sure of the different stages of this process in the present countries, but in any case allow me to urge you to either initiate or continue these dialogues (either at tripartite, bipartite or as trade union initiative) during the year to come, since they will be not only important here, but also

in Geneva, where a Global Commission will be established ahead of the celebrations that will take place in 2019, so it is important that new (and old) ideas will be presented.

Dear colleagues, I recalled this dense agenda not only in view of the ILO Centenary per se, but because I think it is important in general for the ILO to re-establish closer links with your constituencies (and I am pleased that also government and employers' representatives will be part of the dialogue these days) based on ILO mandate and standards.

It is normal that in the past years a lot of attention was concentrated in Baltic countries on the relationship with the EU and its institutions. And yet, it is now accepted in all European countries that the ILO standards -which once were perceived mostly as a tool for developing countries- are rediscovered as what they have always been: a universal tool for avoiding social dumping and build fairer societies. I am very happy therefore that the links between ACTRAV, ITUC, TUAC and ETUC are becoming much closer these days.

The ILO Workers Group has always stated that, as membership in the ILO is universal, all countries, not only developing countries, should have Decent Work Country Programs, in order to set a series of priorities around the Decent Work Agenda, to be discussed and acted upon by the tripartite constituents. Now that quite a bit of emphasis is placed on the universality of the Sustainable Development Goals, allow me to ask the same commitment towards DWCPs which can build a strategy with governments and employers on policy decision, social dialogue and respect for rights at work.

For example, Minister Ossinovski spoke of the real challenge of current Social Security schemes: without entering into numbers, what it is important is indeed to discuss issues jointly, such as productivity and inequality; or active labour market policies as well as macroeconomic policies at large, in order to set a framework for policy coordination and coherence for Decent Work.

Let me finish through emphasising a reference to a topic that is particularly dear to my heart.

When I left Geneva yesterday I was part of the team that was negotiating the first step towards the revision of the Tripartite Declaration on Multinational and Social Policy of the ILO. Established in 1977, it has never really been updated – such as the OECD Guidelines or such as the newly established UN Principles on Business and Human Rights.

This is not because of the Worker Group: certainly at the beginning Workers were scared to lose some of the good language enclosed in the Declaration (especially the section on Industrial Relations), but lately it was always because Employers did not want a strong ILO into this line of work, citing that the ILO needs to talk to governments only.

Even if the way forward is not yet clearly established (we are hoping that next year, on the 40th anniversary of the Declaration, we will have a newer text, apt to be used in the

globalized world of work, with an updated list of standards and a viable implementation mechanism), it is important to create space for that company-union dialogue across borders that – although not always easy (in particular when jobs are lost in a country or in another) – is absolutely necessary for supporting meaningful Global Framework Agreements. It is encouraging to have in the room so many colleagues who are or have been leaders in Global Union Federations.

I remind you that next year the ILO European Regional Meeting will have, among other themes, a specific discussion on MNEs and social consequences of their presence (inclusive positive ones), supported by a questionnaire that will be distributed in the spring and which I hope you will address.

The joint action of Nordic and Baltic trade unions is therefore crucial to address this topic as well as the strengthening of the labour movement on both sides of the Baltic sea (and down to Mediterranean and beyond!).

I salute therefore your efforts: as Peep Peterson said, steps can be longer or shorter, but as long as they go in the right direction they are all right.

I look forward to contribute to your upcoming deliberations.

Thank you.