

As written

ICPD+5 The Hague Forum

Statement by the International Labour Organization

*(delivered by Mr. Rizwanul Islam, Deputy Director, Development Policies Department)
on 9 February 1999*

Mr. President, Mme Executive Director, UNFPA, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to take the floor on behalf of the ILO. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development has in common with ILO the fundamental concern to promote the basic principles of human dignity and equality in rights. It puts human beings at the centre of development concerns as the most important and valuable resource of any nation. This people-centred approach to development is very much in line with ILO's focus on social dialogue and social justice in the world of work. The ILO is fully committed to the Programme of Action of the Cairo Conference, as well as those of other UN conferences, including the Beijing Conference, and the Social Summit. The population and development issues incorporated in the Programme of Action are major concerns for the ILO also. We are actively engaged in the implementation of the Programme of Action in partnership with UNFPA and sister UN agencies.

The ILO has been in the forefront in analysing the linkages between population and labour market issues such as human resources development, gender equity, migration for employment, and child labour. It has also assisted governments in the implementation of national population policies and programmes. The basic rationale for ILO involvement in population activities is the impact of demographic dynamics, including rapid population growth and changing age structure, on the attainment of basic ILO objectives related to social justice such as:

- the attainment of full and freely-chosen productive employment
- reduction of youth unemployment and marginalization
- the achievement of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women in employment
- the elimination of child labour and the economic exploitation of children
- the improvement in conditions of work
- ensuring the sustainability of social security systems
- safeguarding the rights of migrant workers.

Rapid population growth fuels future labour force growth, rendering even more difficult the tasks of creating full productive employment and of improving earnings and conditions of work. Changes in age structure have major effects on labour supply, especially youth, and on national social security systems. Also, high fertility saps women's health and accentuates labour market inequalities between men and women.

Recognising these linkages, ILO undertakes various advocacy activities to sensitize its constituents, employers and workers' organizations as well as governments to the importance of population in development policies and programmes. Its constituents are encouraged to become actively involved in programmes which provide education and services for the reproductive health and family welfare of workers, as well as national population programmes. For example, the ILO, in collaboration with UNFPA and the regional trade union organizations, has organized regional workshops in Asia (The Philippines), Africa (Ghana), and the Latin America (Costa Rica) on the roles of trade unions in the implementation of national population policies and programmes.

As contribution to the objectives of gender equality, the ILO has adopted a number of programmes which include programmes on home workers, capacity building in the area of gender, poverty alleviation and employment, and promotion of high quality employment for women.

Considering the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on society, especially the decimation of the workforce, ILO continues to work in this area. A recent ILO publication on HIV/AIDS and employment deals with the legislative and regulatory framework, enterprise practices and recommendations for practical strategies.

As concerns international migration, the ILO's constitution includes specific responsibility for the protection of interest of workers employed in countries other than their own. Two ILO conventions: Migration for Employment Convention (no. 97 of 1949), and the Migrant Workers Convention (no. 143 of 1975) are expressly concerned with the rights of migrant workers. The ILO was a lead agency in the symposium at The Hague on international migration in June 1998, organized as one of the ICPD +5 activities. The ILO has also brought out a volume on international migration statistics, which provides guidelines for improving data collection systems.

Given the comprehensive perspective of the Programme of Action and its concern for

human dignity, it is not surprising that many of the issues on which ILO has adopted international labour standards as a means of promoting social justice and the dignity of people in their work are being addressed as an integral part of population policies: the elimination of inequalities between men and women in education, skill development and employment; the promotion of policies to facilitate the compatibility between labour force participation and parental responsibilities; the safeguarding of the rights of international migrant workers; the need to eliminate child labour and the exploitation of children; the need for social security systems which take into account the increasing proportions of elderly people in certain countries; and the priority which should be given to investments in human resource development. The *ILO Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work* adopted at the 1998 International Labour Conference commits the Organization's 174 member States to respect the principles inherent in seven core labour standards' and promoting their universal application, with an obligation to respect the fundamental principles involved, whether or not they have ratified the relevant conventions.

The ILO is going to have new leadership next month, and the new Director General-designate, Mr. Somavia, has already outlined his commitment to the respect for workers' rights, placing development and gender as crosscutting issues. He wants an ILO which is a team player within the UN system, and an institution that brings its unique specificity, as a tripartite organisation. The emergence of a global economy poses enormous challenges, and he sees as the single most important challenge in the 21-st century *giving stability to societies through social justice, human dignity for women and men and the opportunity for workers to claim a fair share of wealth they have helped to generate.*²

As one of the partners in development, we look forward to assisting the Governments and the ILO constituents, within the framework of UNDAF and with UNFPA and other sister agencies to pursue shared goals.

Thank you for your attention.

¹ These are: Convention No. 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, 1948), Convention No. 98 (Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, 1949), The Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), the two Conventions on discrimination (No. 100, Equal Remuneration, 1951 and No. 111, Discrimination - Employment and Occupation, 1958), and the Minimum Age Convention, (No. 138, 1973).

² Somavia, Juan, *Farewell Address to ECOSOC, New York*, 19 January 1999.