



Fourth sitting

Monday, 20 February 2006, 3.20 p.m.

President: Mr. Schindler

Original French: The PRESIDENT

We are honoured by the presence of two special guest speakers. Firstly, Mr. Mitropoulos, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization; and Ms. Yrvin, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry of Norway.

ADDRESS BY MR. E. MITROPOULOS, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

Original French : The PRESIDENT

Mr. Mitropoulos is the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization which has for a long time had a very fruitful and cooperative relationship with the International Labour Organization. I was Permanent Representative of France at his organization for many years, and I also have many personal reasons to welcome him, so it is for me a pleasure as well as an honour to give him the floor.

Mr. MITROPOULOS (*Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization*)

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to address this Conference on such a momentous occasion. However, before I move on to addressing the specific issues of relevance to the IMO which this Conference aims to regulate, may I say how extremely pleased I was to learn how well you, Mr. President, have served the maritime community during both the preparatory stages and the Conference itself, displaying leadership and diplomatic skills of the highest level. But then, I would not expect otherwise, given your many years of training at the IMO in your capacity as the Permanent Representative of France.

Before I move on to specifics, may I say that I fully share the words of Mr. Somavia in his opening speech, when he described the new Convention you are about to adopt as a major step forward in ensuring better protection of workers, a level playing field for shipowners, and an effective instrument for governments in providing decent conditions to seafarers; in sum, greater clarity, productivity, safety and security for all.

Throughout my many years of service at the IMO and, through it, to the United Nations system as a whole, I, like all of you here, I presume, feel an eagerness, a quickening of the pulse, when witnessing the birth of a major new international agreement, whatever subject it deals with. It is truly satisfying to see the system working as it was designed to,

bringing nations, and other stakeholders in this case, together to agree basic standards of the kind that form the very building blocks of a civilized society. But in these particular circumstances, I feel an ever keener sense of anticipation: from my position as a former seafarer enables me to speak very much from the heart, when I say that, for the approximately 1.2 million seafarers in the world today, the instrument that you have come here to finalize and adopt is so much more than just an agreement on paper. To them, it represents formal confirmation of what we all recognize as certain basic human rights. Rights which so many of us, fortunately for us, are able to take for granted.

Everyone should have a right to decent working conditions. That is something that we can all agree. But for seafarers, the negative impact of conditions that fail to meet acceptable standards can be more than usually damaging. For most seafarers, their place of work is also for, long periods, their home. If conditions are poor, there is often no respite, no comforting family to return home to, for months on end. That is why the work you have performed since the opening of this Conference, and of course during the preparatory sessions which preceded it, is so very important.

When the ILO's Governing Body decided in March 2001 to convene a Maritime Session of the International Labour Conference this year, to adopt a new instrument to consolidate and update more than 65 international maritime labour standards adopted since the ILO was founded in 1919, it was aware, I am sure, that it was setting the Organization a Herculean task. To go about consolidating and updating those standards into a single document that fully reflects modern conditions and is couched in modern language is truly a mammoth undertaking. Nevertheless, the Governing Body had the foresight to recognize the compelling need for a process that would bring the system of seafarers' protection contained in the existing standards closer to them, in a form that would be consistent with the demands of this rapidly developing, globalized business sector, as well as improving the applicability of the system, so that those shipowners and governments that are committed to providing decent conditions of work do not have to bear an unequal burden in ensuring such protection.

As we can now see with the finalization of the new Convention, the huge efforts expended by the ILO, and in particular by the High-Level Tripartite Working Group on Maritime Labour Standards and

its Subgroup, have borne fruit; and that can, without hesitation, be described as a massive achievement. As is so often the case, reaching agreement on every aspect of the new "super Convention", as it has been nicknamed, has not been easy. But it is the unique tripartite structure of the ILO, in which governments, employers and workers participate as equals, that gives the various ILO measures their special strength, and this Convention, too, will benefit from the rigorous process that brought it into being.

I am also pleased to note, incidentally, that the draft instrument contains a more effective enforcement and compliance system and that it will be possible to keep it updated, as may be necessary, thanks to an accelerated amendment procedure. Both of these have been modelled on the well-established systems for certification and enforcement of, and amendment to, most of the international standards contained in IMO treaty instruments.

Your new Convention has frequently been referred to as the "fourth pillar" of the international regulatory regime for quality shipping, being bracketed in this respect with three of the most important IMO Conventions, namely the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.

Collectively, these Conventions address the technical aspects of ship design, construction, equipment and operation from the points of view of safety, security and protection of the marine environment, as well as the education and training of seafarers and the competencies that they should be required to demonstrate before they are taken on the various shipboard positions.

The consolidated text that will emerge from this Conference will complement these key IMO technical provisions and Conventions perfectly, by introducing the social elements necessary to ensuring decent working conditions for seafarers and catering for such things as the prevention of accidents, health protection and medical care, seafarers' hours of work and the manning of ships and the repatriation of seafarers. Of course, the links between the ILO and IMO in this respect go far further and deeper than simply having the good fortune to have developed complementary maritime Conventions. Indeed, our organizations both have a mandate in the shipping sector and have collaborated most effectively over the years, and there are a number of joint IMO/ILO bodies that bear witness to this.

Currently, for example, the IMO and ILO have two Joint Working Groups in the legal field: the Joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on Liability and Compensation regarding Claims for Death, Personal Injury and Abandonment of Seafarers; and the Joint ILO/IMO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the Event of a Maritime Accident. Let me tell you a few things about the two Joint Groups' work in pushing forward an agenda that we all share – that of helping to improve the life and protect the rights and welfare of seafarers.

The Joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on Liability and Compensation regarding Claims for Death, Personal Injury and Abandonment of Seafarers, which was specifically men-

tioned as I am sure you will recall, by the distinguished Workers' delegate of Ghana this morning, was established in 1999 under the provisions of the Cooperation Agreement between the IMO and ILO, in order to ensure, through the operation of appropriate international instruments, the rights of seafarers when they are abandoned, often in foreign ports far from their countries of origin, by the owners or operators of ships on which they have been serving.

The Group's major achievement so far has been the development of two resolutions and related guidelines (one on Provision of financial security in case of abandonment of seafarers, the other on Shipowners' responsibilities in respect of contractual claims for personal injury to, or death of, seafarers) adopted by the IMO Assembly in November 2001, and by the Governing Body of the ILO (also in November 2001). Both the resolutions and associated guidelines, the aim of which is to provide seafarers and their families with a level of protection that has hitherto been lacking in respect of two fundamental areas of seafarer welfare, took effect on 1 January 2002.

It is regrettably a matter of fact, that while the vast majority of seafarers work under fair conditions and have the support of their employers when things go wrong on board ship, some are still subject to harsh treatment and unreasonable conditions. It is therefore for organizations such as the ILO and IMO to look for appropriate standards to safeguard their legitimate interests.

Although the new ILO Maritime labour Convention is likely to go some way towards providing a solution to many of the issues before the Joint Working Group, the Group, in accordance with its revised terms of reference, will continue to examine all the issues of financial security for seafarers and their dependants with regard to compensation in cases of personal injury, death and abandonment, taking into account the relevant IMO and ILO instruments, including the new consolidated Convention before you, and to monitor the implementation of the Guidelines adopted by the two resolutions I mentioned before.

Furthermore, the Group will consider the development of longer-term sustainable solutions to address the problem of financial security with regard to compensation in cases of death or personal injury and abandonment, and will make appropriate recommendations to the Legal Committee of the IMO and the ILO's Governing Body.

The Conference may be interested to know, as the Director-General mentioned this morning, that, having identified some ten long-standing cases of seafarer abandonments in various parts of the world, Mr. Somavia and myself last week signed joint letters to the flag States concerned apprising them of the situation and urging them to do the utmost, as a matter of urgency, to facilitate the resolution of each case, including the repatriation of the seafarers concerned and the payment to them of all outstanding remuneration and contractual entitlements. We both look forward to receiving good news soon.

On the other hand, the Joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the Event of a Maritime Accident was established to work on the development of appropriate guidelines, for enforcement by both Organizations. A resolution prepared by the Group was adopted by the IMO Assembly last December echoing the serious concern about the need to ensure the

protection of the rights of seafarers in case of criminal proceedings initiated against them, in particular their prolonged detention following a maritime accident. The Group is expected to complete its task next month so that the guidelines can be promulgated by the IMO Legal Committee and the Governing Body of the ILO soon thereafter.

Once that has happened, I would urge all States to make good use of the guidelines, so that fairness and the upholding of the basic rights of seafarers become a consistent good practice throughout the world. You will recall the emphasis the Director-General, Mr. Somavia, placed on to the word “fairness” this very morning. Seafarers should, in all instances, be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, in full recognition of their vital contribution to the community, seaborne trade and the economy at large. In the same vein, we should pay great attention to ensuring that we do not act in any manner which might demoralize them or, even worse, seek to punish them unduly.

The IMO has always acknowledged the central role of seafarers in the maritime world. The Memorial to Seafarers at the entrance of the IMO’s headquarters is a constant reminder of our commitment to them, symbolizing not only their fortitude, in sailing into the unknown in defiance of the elements and in pursuit of shipping’s peaceful aims, but also their solitude in an environment which increasingly looks alien compared to that of their fathers and grandfathers. The Memorial also reflects the importance we attach to the human element in safety of navigation, maritime security and prevention of marine pollution – indeed, our Maritime Safety Committee has asked all its subsidiary bodies to keep uppermost in their minds, in any regulatory work they undertake, the role of the human element in safe operations. This is because general analyses of marine accidents and incidents have revealed that, given the involvement of the human element in all aspects of marine endeavours (including the design, manufacture, management, operation and maintenance of ships), almost all marine casualties and incidents involve human factors.

Ships, operate in a highly dynamic environment: frequently, the people on board follow a set routine of shift work, interrupted only by their arrival at, working in, and departure from port.

This is an existence which involves living in the place of work for prolonged periods, creating a unique form of working life that almost certainly increases the risk of human error. Undeniably, the most crucial central and pivotal role in the IMO’s work relating to the human element is played by our Sub-Committee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping, which has the mandate to regulate how shipmasters, chief engineers, deck and engine-room watchkeepers and ratings – in other words, the entire human element manning ships – should discharge their responsibilities relating to safeguarding life at sea, property and the marine environment.

Last year the STW Sub-Committee went along with the decision of the ILO Preparatory Technical Maritime Conference calling for the transfer of the ILO provisions on the training and certification requirements for able seamen to the STCW Convention, and last month the Sub-Committee prepared definitions and agreed to sea service requirements for “able seafarers” and “motormen”. It also agreed, among other things, to proceed on a two-stage grading structure, while developing competencies for

ratings; that appropriate transitional arrangements should be put in place so that existing seafarers, certified in accordance with the provisions of the ILO Certification of Able Seamen Convention, 1946 (No. 74), are not at a disadvantage; prepare preliminary tables of competence for able seafarers and motormen for further consideration; and to prepare draft regulations providing mandatory minimum requirements for the certification of ratings as “able seafarers” and “motormen” in a manned engine-room, or designated to perform duties in a periodically unmanned engine-room. All of this is likely to contribute to the next major piece of work for the IMO which, subject to the concurrence of the Maritime Safety Committee in May, might be a comprehensive review of the STCW Convention to ensure that it continues to meet adequately any new challenges facing the shipping industry.

Occupational safety, the health of seafarers, and the assurance of decent working conditions, are more than just desirable outcomes in their own right. They can also have a direct impact on the safety and security of shipping and, therefore, on the protection of the marine environment.

The outcome of recent analyses of accidents at sea indicates that fatigue has emerged as a significant contributory factor, along, with several other factors, such as communication, competence, culture, experience, health, situational awareness, stress, and working conditions.

The link between working conditions and fatigue is clear. An analysis of 187 instances of groundings and collisions carried out by the IMO Sub-Committee on Flag State Implementation indicates that in 150 cases, or 80 per cent of the instances analysed, the human element was a contributory factor. Broadly equivalent results have emerged from similar analyses carried out by the accident investigation bodies of several countries, including the 2004 study on bridge watchkeeping safety prepared by the United Kingdom’s Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

In this context I will mention here another example of coordinated work by our two organizations: the development of the IMO/ILO process for investigating human factors, a step-by-step systematic approach for use in the investigation of human factors in incidents and accidents. This is included as an appendix to the Guidelines for the Investigation of Human Factors in Marine Casualties and Incidents adopted in 1999 by the IMO Assembly to form part of the IMO Code for the Investigation of Marine Casualties and Incidents.

Casualty analysis is all too topical in the wake of the tragic loss of the ferry Al Salam Bocaccio 98 earlier this month. I know that all here share my sentiments of sorrow, grief and compassion for the families of all those lost in the accident. The IMO has facilitated the provision of independent technical expertise and advice intended to ensure that the outcome of the investigation into the Red Sea disaster will not only identify beyond any reasonable doubt what caused the accident, but will also identify what lessons, if any, may be learned so that, through the IMO system, prompt and expeditious action will be taken to prevent similar accidents happening in the future.

In looking at the issues which can affect casualty rates, the IMO principles of safe manning identify all the many variables involved in determining safe manning levels and are quite comprehensive, as are

the principles to be observed for establishing watchkeeping arrangements and the hours of rest provisions within the STCW Convention. However, against the background of continuing accidents attributable to fatigue, a view has emerged that perhaps the time has come for those principles to be reassessed. It might be appropriate, for example, to identify factors against which flag and port State administrations can evaluate manning levels on ships of similar size, type and trade. To this end the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, at its next meeting in May, will be asked to consider the approval of a new STW Sub-Committee work programme item dealing with the review and revision of the principles of safe manning, something which I believe will complement many of the measures contained in the new ILO Convention.

At the IMO, whenever we consider the effect of global implementation of the organization's safety, security and environmental standards, we are always aware of the debt that we all owe in this respect to seafarers, as well as to all the other dedicated professionals who contribute to making the shipping industry what it is today. I cannot think of anyone who would not recognize the importance of maintaining morale within the seafaring profession, or who would not be concerned about any moves, albeit made in the name of greater security or environmental protection, that may have the undesirable effect of restricting, or even denying altogether, seafarers' much-needed shore leave, or introducing measures for incidents at sea not attributable to wilful acts.

In the case of shore leave, I should like to express my appreciation of the relatively new ILO Convention on the seafarer's identity card, the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185), which came into force last year. There can be no doubt that it represents a major step towards strengthening security measures on the high seas and the in world's ports and, at the same time, ensuring the rights and freedoms of maritime workers and facilitating their mobility as they exercise their profession, when, for example, they board their ship to work, take shore leave, or return home. It is a welcome development which will certainly boost the attractiveness of seafaring as a profession in what today has become a very competitive and international employment market.

This is particularly important when seen against the background of the reported shortage of seafarers that continues to cause concern. The recently released BIMCO/ISF manpower update has provided a more encouraging picture than that projected in the 2000 study, with the global shortage of officers being estimated at around 2 per cent, reportedly due to increased levels of training in the ASEAN region. While the updated study indicates that there is an overall surplus of ratings, it also shows that recruitment levels need to be increased to meet anticipated demands, particularly for officers, and at the same time that is imperative to reduce the number of officers leaving the industry after only a few years of service. Of course overall economic factors will continue, more than any others, to increase need for qualified, capable and motivated seafarers. Take, for example, the global requirement for cleaner fuel. This has led to an unprecedented increase in demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG), which in turn has led to record orders for new LNG tankers. These technologically advanced ships, and

of course the related shore-side facilities, need to be staffed by high-calibre recruits, appropriately qualified and with up-to-date training. Indeed, our STCW Subcommittee has agreed that training standards for personnel serving on LNG carriers should be developed in the near future for incorporation in the STCW Convention.

To conclude: seafaring can be a lonely profession. The work is demanding and occasionally dangerous and the hours long. Seafarers deserve an all-embracing and adequate supporting framework, and that is precisely what the new ILO Maritime labour Convention will give them and their families. They deserve it as much as the shipping industry needs it – if it is to continue to be a viable and attractive career option for the sort of high-calibre people it increasingly needs.

I would like to reiterate the words of your President when he described the Conference as a new and unique event in the history of the ILO, adding that the Convention to be adopted marks the first attempt to create a global instrument for a specific sector of the industry.

The ILO has been very successful in regulating seafarer issues and together, the ILO and IMO have served the maritime community well. I look forward to continued close cooperation between the two organizations in the future, including in the drafting of legally binding requirements for the recycling of ships and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in support of developing countries which nowadays supply much of the labour that keeps ships moving.

I wish the Conference every possible success as it reaches the home strait, and hope that all the efforts you expend towards achieving a positive conclusion prove worthwhile. It is my fervent hope that the ILO Maritime labour Convention will be adopted, entering into force internationally, and will be implemented widely and effectively, thus taking its rightful place along with the principal IMO instruments as the fourth pillar of the international regulatory regime guaranteeing quality shipping.

The momentum created by the Conference should be sustained and every effort should be made to bring the Convention into force as soon as possible. The IMO stands ready to add its contribution to any work required to assist in the achievement of the objectives of this Conference and the Convention that is about to see the light of day.

Original French: The PRESIDENT

Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, for that contribution, which once again highlighted the significance of the work that we have done over the past two weeks and the preceding years.

Close cooperation between the IMO and the ILO and the time that you have invested in this work indicate the recognition of the crucial part this Convention will be called upon to play – a Convention which, as you say, is destined to become the fourth pillar of the international regulatory regime governing the lives of seafarers.

I would also like to underline, very seriously, the exemplary nature of this cooperation between two major international bodies.

**ADDRESS BY MS. YRVIN, DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRADE
AND INDUSTRY, NORWAY**

Original French : The PRESIDENT

I would now like to give the floor to Ms. Yrvin, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry of Norway.

Norway has a long tradition of sea transport and is one of the leading maritime nations of the world. It has always very energetically supported the work of the ILO in this area and we are very happy to welcome Ms. Yrvin here today.

Ms. YRVIN (Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, Norway)

I would like to congratulate you all on the important work that has been carried out since the Geneva Accord was adopted. The work done by the High-level Tripartite Working Group on Maritime Labour Standards and also at the Preparatory Technical Maritime Conference held in 2004 is definitely supported by the Norwegian Government.

World trade depends on good transportation, and shipping will continue to be a key factor in the future. Today, we see a clear public demand for quality shipping. To satisfy this, ships must be navigated and operated in a safe and efficient manner. This is only possible if you use qualified seafarers who are given decent living and working conditions.

We aim to do our part so that the industry and we – the authorities – can meet the challenges together. A good partnership between the authorities and the industry is essential in order for us to meet the challenges. This partnership will only work if all involved contribute.

We have been ambitious in laying the basis for this future maritime industry. Norway wants to play an active and positive role in setting international standards. We intend to act as quickly as we can. We expect the same from all of you present here today.

International regulation of trade and industry is necessary, as well as rules for working and living standards. Decent working and living standards and the prevention of work-related accidents and illnesses must be our aim.

The fight against poverty, and for sustainable development, democracy and human rights are all important. My Government will contribute in meeting those challenges.

Norway has three equally important goals for the new consolidated maritime labour Convention. First, we must not allow the industry to compete by using poor working and living conditions to lower prices. Seafarers should not be the ones who pay by risking their lives, injuries or illness. Substandard shipping is not acceptable. Second, we need to develop a level playing field. Most shipowners and flag States take their responsibilities seriously. They should not be disadvantaged or pushed out of the industry by those who do not take their duties seriously. Third, we would like to see the Convention as the fourth pillar of the international shipping industry, together with the SOLAS Convention concerning ship safety, the MARPOL Convention concerning the marine environment and the STCW Convention concerning training and certification.

It is with high hopes for the continuing work that I deem that the proposed text of the Convention gives us every opportunity to fulfil these objectives.

Today, ships transport about 90 per cent of all internationally traded goods. Even though shipping is

the safest and most efficient mode of transportation, there is still room for improvement.

Norway is a maritime nation with a long and proud history. Shipping is important for life along our long coast. In addition, Norwegian shippers have become important for transport between countries. Our shipowners control one of the largest fleets in the world. They also control the second largest offshore fleet in the world. Within Norway, shipping companies make up the core of a wide maritime cluster. Shipping is also our second largest export industry. It is our Government's aim to help secure jobs as well as growth in the maritime industry; and this can only be achieved through sound international regulation.

Today, large numbers of workers in the world, including seafarers, suffer injustice, hardship and privation. The failure of any nation to adopt humane labour conditions is a burden for all of us. It is also a barrier for other nations who wish to improve conditions in their own countries.

Work to consolidate and update maritime labour Conventions is as important today as it was when we started, 86 years ago. I am impressed by the cooperation we have seen between our three basic groups in the ILO. Our work should serve as a model for others. It also underlines the role that decent working and living conditions play as a major, if not the major, factor for safety at sea.

The globalization of our economies makes developing international labour standards even more important. Worldwide adoption and implementation needs to be our goal. Any new standards should also be in line with our common aim, which is to provide the chance for women and men to gain decent and gainful work in conditions marked by freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

A report issued in the lead-up to this session of the Conference gives us some cause for concern. I am referring to the report, *The impact on seafarers' living and working conditions of changes in the structure of the shipping industry*. This report states that the connection between flag States and the seafarers on their ships has been weakened and also that labour conditions have become a major point of competitive advantage for some ship operators. These factors lie behind our belief in the need for changes in the industry. Changes are necessary to break the downward spiral of low freight rates, to stop poor conditions and standards, to break weak national regulatory mechanisms and to turn around the general reluctance to enforce international labour standards.

The important work already done at this session of the Conference is not the end, but the start of a "new deal." We need to join our efforts to regulate, implement and enforce international regulations on seafarers' working and living conditions.

Norway supports the introduction of certificates of maritime labour conditions. We also support the need for a declaration of maritime labour compliance. We are prepared to take on the work needed to implement and enforce those obligations. We also believe that there is a need for a stronger and more coordinated system of port State control. The changing nature of international shipping makes this even more important. Today's focus on safety, preventing pollution, decent working and living conditions and human rights issues needs to be addressed. Guidelines on port State control should be devel-

oped through the Regional Memoranda of Understanding on Port State Control.

We further believe that adopting and following up the proposed Convention should make the maritime industry more attractive to seafarers, and that it is important for both member States and the ILO to keep focused on securing rapid ratification, implementation and enforcement of this Convention.

This should send a strong and very important message to the world. The same could be said for the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185).

To ensure that new regulations are followed, there is a need to recruit and train maritime labour inspectors. We also believe that there is a need for a supervising "recognized organization" that might be delegated work under the Convention.

Even though we have been concerned about the time taken to ratify and implement important ILO Conventions, we are optimistic in this case. This is because we had a high level of cooperation leading up to the development of this instrument, wide agreement on the need for the Convention, and we have introduced a "no more favourable treatment" clause.

From the Norwegian side, we urge member States to be prepared to promote the application of the Convention, to assist member States with technical cooperation and to establish the follow-up called for by the Convention.

To all intents and purposes, Norwegian regulations comply with the Convention. Some changes need to be made, and will be made. The main task ahead is that of enforcing and certifying working and living conditions. Even though classification societies can take on some of this work, the main responsibility lies with shipowners and the authorities. Developing information material and training for those who will enforce the Convention is important. There is much to be gained by doing this through cooperation between governments. The results of this work should also be made available to others.

After this session of the Conference is finished, priority should be given to the work of promoting

the Convention and hastening its entry into force. All parties including seafarers', shipowners' and non-governmental organizations, in addition to governments, should cooperate in this important task.

We look forward to hearing the Director-General's views on how we can effectively contribute to the important work ahead of us.

To conclude, I once again urge this session of the Conference to adopt the proposed text of the Convention. I likewise urge member States to effectively and swiftly complete the work needed to ratify the Convention.

Original French: The PRESIDENT

Thank you for that contribution. Your country has always made the defence of workers' rights an absolute priority as is witnessed by the fact that your country is one of the founder Members of this Organization. Its history is closely linked to the sea and its interests in the maritime sector are recognized worldwide. That is why your point of view and your assessment of matters are particularly significant for this Conference and I am sure that all of the participants here would join me in expressing my very sincere thanks not just for your contribution and your remarks but also for the continuing support that your Government has provided throughout our shared endeavour.

**REPORTS OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE GOVERNING
BODY AND OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL: DISCUSSION
(CONT.)**

Original French: The PRESIDENT

Ladies and gentlemen, we will now resume the general discussion that we began this morning on the report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and the Report of the Director-General. The first speaker on my list is Mr. Larcher, Minister for Employment, Labour and Employment of Young Persons of France.

(The sitting continues with delegates' statements.)

(The Conference adjourned at 4.45 p.m.)

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