



Reply by the Director-General to the discussion of his Report

1. Introduction

This 94th (Maritime) Session of the International Labour Conference has been a very special session for a number of reasons. The discussions have provided us with an opportunity to look back to the very beginning of the International Labour Organization and the prescience and vision shown by Members in 1920 and, at the same time, find a way to look forward to address the effects of globalization on employers, workers, and the workplace, encountered in the twenty-first century.

I have spoken to many delegates during the three weeks of this Conference. A consistent refrain was their enthusiasm and excitement about the ILO's efforts in the shipping sector and the implications of their work here for achieving decent work for all. A sense of purpose prevailed in all groups from all regions. It is without doubt this positive and creative approach that led the Committee of the Whole to propose the final text of the maritime labour Convention, 2006, to the Conference. As so many speakers have confirmed, this Conference will have historic impact.

I wholeheartedly endorse the many expressions of gratitude and recognition directed at this Maritime Session's President and its Officers. I congratulate Mr. Jean-Marc Schindler for the exemplary way in which he conducted this Conference. His wit, expertise, tact and diplomatic skills have been instrumental to the successful conclusion of this Conference. He has also been involved through the five years it has taken to develop this Convention. I also express my deepest gratitude to the Vice-Presidents: Mr. Dierk Lindemann (Employer), Mr. Brian Orrell (Worker) and Mr. Tatsuya Teranishi (Government). They too have been involved with the Convention since its early stages. Their hard work in the last three weeks was reflected in the positive and constructive atmosphere that characterized this Maritime Session. This Conference also tried a new approach, working as a Committee of the Whole for ten days to carry out the intensive tripartite review of the single item on its agenda: the proposal for a consolidated maritime labour Convention. I understand that the quality of the social dialogue in that Committee provided us with tripartism at its best. I congratulate and thank the Chair of the Committee, Mr. Bruce Carlton, for his work. I must also acknowledge and thank Mr. Tomada for the keen interest and support shown by the Governing Body for the maritime sector.

Finally, I would like to extend my personal thanks to all of you who have participated in this historic Conference. There is a saying that we "stand on the shoulders of giants" meaning that the present builds upon the past. The work of this Conference – to review and propose for adoption a maritime labour Convention that brings together and updates almost all the existing maritime instruments in a way that will attract widespread ratification and enforcement – would not have been possible without the extensive preparatory work in

which many of you have been involved over the last five years. The maritime labour Convention, 2006, really is your Convention. Your perseverance and determination have been remarkable and resulted in a Maritime Session that has been able to concentrate on refining and presenting a major new maritime labour Convention that expressly seeks to respond to the pressing issues of globalization.

We were also honoured by the presence of a number of special guest speakers who provided us with thoughtful observations and a wide range of perspectives on developments in the maritime sector. The Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Efthimios Mitropoulos, outlined his organization's achievements and provided us with his view of the ILO's role in the shipping industry. He reminded us of the many areas of cooperation between the IMO and the ILO. I am very thankful to him for his commitment to further the collaboration between our two organizations and his offer to contribute "to any work required to assist in the achievement of the objectives of this Conference and the Convention". Ms. Karin Yrvin, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry for Norway, assured us of her Government's determination to ratify and implement the new maritime labour Convention. Her passionate speech in support of the Convention, her knowledgeable observations and her good wishes for the future of the Convention set the tone and standard for a lively discussion. Similarly Mr. Xu Zuyuan, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Communications of China, provided us with a wise and thoughtful reflection on developments in the maritime sector and the role of the new Convention, which further enlightened our discussion. He pointed out that this new Convention will "effectively standardize the existing international laws regulating working and social rights of seafarers".

I mentioned that the Conference has carried out much of its work as a Committee of the Whole, albeit a rather large Committee with 104 members. This was a wise decision by the Conference and has proved to have been an entirely appropriate response to the fact that the review of the proposed Convention was the single item placed on its agenda by the Governing Body. However, within its framework almost all issues relating to achieving decent work in the maritime sector were considered. Not surprisingly, then, much of the discussion of my Report and the observations of guest speakers focused on the potential significance of this new Convention and what should be done next to ensure widespread and rapid ratification and implementation. However my Report also raised a number of other specific matters for the maritime industry such as the need to ensure increased ratification and implementation of the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185), and the need to address the concern we all share about the plight of abandoned seafarers, the importance of fair treatment of seafarers, the dangers of piracy and the ongoing quest to ensure equality in the workplace. Many speakers responded to these specific concerns and emphasized the need to make further progress in these areas. All of the comments made during the discussion were instructive and further served to reinforce the sense of cohesion at a global level and the mutual desire for fairness in this sector. My reply cannot do justice to either the quality or the quantity of these speeches. I would, however, like to provide you with a brief reaction to some of the ideas that we heard over the last few days. Like the proposed new Convention, the comments made by speakers were of course integrated, but, as I have just noted, they generally addressed matters within two broad themes: the significance of the maritime labour Convention in the context of globalization and the need to make progress on specific areas of concern to the industry that I raised in my Report.

2. The significance of the proposed maritime labour Convention, 2006

In my remarks to begin the discussion of my Report, I sought to place the work of this Conference and developments in the sector in the larger context of the pressures and tensions and opportunities presented by the phenomenon that we call globalization. I am particularly concerned by the social dimension of globalization. I proposed that the new maritime labour Convention may provide a way forward for the maritime sector and perhaps also provide an approach for other areas. In my view, effective and widely implemented international labour standards can help to address the social and economic impact of globalization and help to achieve sustainable development. I also noted the importance of achieving widespread early ratification of the Convention and sought your views on how this could be achieved. I was very interested in hearing your thoughts on these ideas.

Many speakers reiterated that shipping is a global industry. Several speakers, like Ms. Magdalena Schleegeer, Head of Division for ILO and UN Affairs, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany, saw the Convention as “an important contribution to the social dimension of globalization”. She added that “seafaring has the longest experience of the fact that the purely economic component of globalization needs to be complemented by an equally strong social dimension”. Mr. Pierre, Worker representative of Haiti pointed out that “the maritime sector is the first really globalized sector”. It is so, not only because of the mobility of its assets: ships; but also because of its transnational structure. Increasingly, the crews of ships are multinational, and they require protection on a global scale, global labour standards applicable to the entire industry. These global rules would safeguard the rights, welfare and human dignity of seafarers. Ms. Sulistyaningsih, representative of the Government of Indonesia, saw the proposed maritime labour Convention as “the result of our common endeavour to ensure a fair economic globalization through decent employment for seafarers”. Mgr. Silvano Tomasi, representative of the Holy See, paid homage to “those far-sighted delegates” who “pointed out that the shipping industry is the world’s first global industry” which “requires global labour standards applicable to an entire industry and such as that they can safeguard the rights, welfare and human dignity of seafarers.” Mr. Larcher, Minister for Employment of France, considered “that participants at this Conference have shown their sense of responsibility”. Mr. Larcher also mentioned a number of lessons learnt in the current process: that the evolution of standards and their updating is possible, that an integrated approach is possible, and that the certification of global social standards can be introduced in a Convention.

A great many of you have spoken of the great value of this Convention as a way forward. Mr. Dierk Lindemann, Managing Director, German Shipowners’ Association, and Vice-President of the Conference, said that the new Convention is a clear codification of what is required to ensure good working practices in the maritime sector. Several speakers also related this Convention to the work of the IMO, reiterating that this Convention will, alongside SOLAS, STCW and MARPOL, provide the “fourth pillar” of the international maritime regulatory regime. In his speech, Mr. Mitropoulos pointed out that the Convention is “not just an agreement on paper, but rather a formal confirmation of basic human rights” and that it will “complement the three key IMO Conventions by introducing the social element”.

Strong statements of support came from all of the ILO’s regions. From Africa, Ambassador Amina Mohamed of Kenya said the Convention would “achieve the ILO’s long-desired goal of policy coherence in a sector which has undergone tremendous changes over the years as well as enable us to cope with the challenges posed and opportunities provided by the process of globalization” and complimented the drafters for

the “clarity, unique structure and language employed”. From Asia, Mr. Abeyrathne Banda, Deputy Director, Merchant Shipping Division, Ministry of Posts and Aviation, of Sri Lanka, called the Convention “forward looking, addressing issues of contemporary concern ...”, while from the Americas, Ambassador Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos of Brazil said that “the new consolidated MLC gives us an excellent opportunity to extend to all continents, particularly in our case the American region, the benefits derived from the existence of clear and fair rules in this sector”. From Europe, Ms. Karin Yrvin, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry of Norway, noted that labour conditions have become a major point of competitive advantage for some ship operators. She suggested that “adopting and following-up on the proposed Convention should make the maritime industry more attractive to seafarers”. Ms. Schleegeer of Germany also pointed to the inclusion of a “no more favourable treatment” clause that will ensure that there are no competitive advantages for shipowners from States that have not ratified the Convention, and the essential enforcement provisions, including those concerning port State control.

I also hope that these innovations will prove successful and that we will be able to apply the experience in standard setting for other sectors. I am sure that the Governing Body will want to be kept apprised of the situation on these issues.

Many of you reminded us of the special nature of the shipping sector and about the long-standing need to modernize the ILO’s maritime labour standards and to move beyond making laws to making a real difference. Mr. Pdraig Crumlin, Vice-Chairperson of the Workers’ group and National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia provided us with examples of substandard conditions on ships and maritime casualties. He went on to emphasize the personal and moral aspect of these issues, saying that “what we want least of all is a rhetorical tour de force without practical assistance to those seafarers who survive or not on our progress here”. In his view, there is a “moral obligation on the part of wealthy nations to assist those nations whose economies or institutions are not as strong or as well developed, and where their capacity to implement and monitor compliance with international Conventions, no matter how committed they may be, is limited”.

And he is right. Of course, our work does not end with the adoption of the Convention. As Dierk Lindemann reminded us, it is the beginning of a new voyage – towards widespread ratification, entry into force, and full enforcement. Much work lies ahead.

In this respect, I was pleased to hear Mr. Joseph Keller, General Manager, Liberian International Shipping and Corporate Registry, Liberia, who said that “it is our conviction that the Convention will be ... widely ratifiable” and that “as a major flag State ... the Government of Liberia has every intention of ratifying this Convention”. He also noted that to be effective, the Convention must be widely ratified by flag States, port States and labour-supplying States alike. Mrs. Patricia Sto. Tomas, Secretary, Department of Labor and Employment, the Philippines, also declared support for early ratification, although I understand that the Philippines, like a number of governments, will need to deal with difficulties concerning the application of the Convention to its domestic fleet. It was very encouraging to hear Ms. Karin Yrvin of Norway say: “We intend to act as quickly as we can. We expect the same from all of you here today.”

For many Government speakers, technical cooperation will greatly assist their countries to move ahead more quickly. Ambassador Sameh Shoukry of Egypt said that he was convinced that joint action on technical cooperation could rapidly extend the circle of ratifying countries. I fully agree with him on this point. Several other speakers pointed to the importance of technical cooperation, either provided by the ILO or its member States. Mr. Ziheng Wu, Chairperson of the China Seamen’s and Construction Workers’ Union expressed the “need for technical assistance and training to developing countries to catch up with the technological development of the world shipping industry and meet the

technical requirements of the Convention”. Ambassador Alfred Rabeloson of Madagascar noted the need for the Office to intensify its technical cooperation activities regarding maritime labour standards. Mr. Rubén Arosemena Valdés, Vice-President of the Republic of Panama and Administrator, Panama Maritime Authority, stated that being aware of the scope of the Convention Panama had launched programmes at national level concerning qualification and recruitment of seafarers, regulation of placement agencies, compensation schedule for professional risks and inclusion of working conditions into the annual maritime safety inspections.

Several speakers called for cooperation among member States in the development of material and training. Ambassador Amina Mohamed of Kenya was among those who drew attention to the need for closer cooperation among member States in the implementation of the Convention.

3. The need to make progress on specific areas of concern to the industry

As I noted in the introduction, many speakers also provided us with insightful comments and observations on a number of other specific matters that I raised in my Report. These issues, the need to ensure increased ratification and implementation of the Seafarers’ Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185), the plight of abandoned seafarers, the need for fair treatment of seafarers, the dangers of piracy and the ongoing quest to ensure equality in the workplace as well as the need to both attract people to the seafaring workforce, have to be addressed.

As Mr. Dierk Lindemann reminded us, we must not forget that there are “also other challenges facing our industry (which) must be tackled and handled responsibly ...”.

Abandonment of seafarers

A number of speakers have commented on the issues under scrutiny by the Joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on Liability and Compensation regarding Claims for Death, Personal Injury and Abandonment of Seafarers.

Mr. Sigismund Buckman, the Worker delegate of Ghana, described the appalling situation of abandoned seafarers who were “trying to survive sometimes in extreme temperatures, with no fuel, no water, living on fish caught from the bow or the charity of others”. This situation, as he assured us, did not only concern the seafarers themselves, but also their families: “Their families at home with no income have to take children out of school. They are forced to borrow from moneylenders whom they may not be able to pay back.” Referring to views in the shipping community that in absolute numbers only a small percentage of the world’s seafarers were touched by abandonment, Mr. Sigismund Buckman also stated that “some seek to maintain that the scourge of abandonment is a minor issue affecting only a small percentage of the world fleet and therefore not worth addressing. We say that any number of abandoned seafarers is an out and out scandal”. He then outlined what steps the Seafarers’ group deemed necessary: “shipowners must be required to establish a system of financial security to provide seafarers’ maintenance costs and expenses in the event of abandonment”. He explained that “we don’t seek to dictate how the protections should be provided, what we want is a mandatory instrument – ensuring the level playing field within the industry – one that can be effectively put into practice”. Minister Patricia Sto. Tomas’ call upon delegates for “tripartite support for the database on cases of abandonment” would seem to provide us with a step towards tackling this problem.

Mr. Mitropoulos, the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, pointed out 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 seafarers are still subject to harsh treatment and unreasonable conditions”. He referred to the work of the Joint IMO/ILO Working Group, whose mandate was “pushing forward an agenda that we all share, that of helping to improve the life and protect the rights and welfare of seafarers”. He pointed out that, although the new ILO maritime labour Convention is likely to go some way towards providing a solution to many of the issues before the Working Group, the Joint IMO/ILO Working Group will continue its work.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, last week Mr. Mitropoulos and I sent joint letters to ten flag States, whose ships are registered as long-standing cases of abandonment in this database, alerting them to the situation of the seafarers concerned. While our joint initiative is not a solution to the fundamental problem, I am hopeful that it will be instrumental to improving the situation of the individual seafarers affected.

Fair treatment of seafarers

A large number of speakers have highlighted the need to ensure the fair treatment of seafarers following a maritime incident. Mr. Marcos Castro, the Workers’ delegate of Argentina, said that “frequently, the master of a ship involved in an incident is practically automatically prosecuted”. He pointed out that “the growing criminalization of seafarers will aggravate the skill shortage, in particular, of well-trained officers”. Ms. Veronica Mesatywa, the Workers’ delegate of South Africa, reminded us “seafarers are not criminals, they are the contributors to the wealth of this world, let us respect them”.

Mr. George Koltsidopoulos, Employers’ delegate of Greece, referred to such a specific case, where a master’s “treatment was an indictment to basic human rights”. He also pointed out that “criminalization was tarnishing the image of the seafaring profession at a moment when the industry is lacking qualified seafarers”. He also referred to coastal States’ concerns when he pointed out that “shipping needs a climate of understanding, cooperation and respect for seafarers given the arduousness and complexity of their work. And in this environment, we should cooperate to display the maximum care for and respect of the marine environment”. He welcomed the resolution by the Governing Body and the IMO Assembly regarding the fair treatment of seafarers and asked that “the issue should be kept in the agenda of both organizations for further assessment”.

These comments were all helpful and I can assure you that the ILO will further pursue this issue; the Joint IMO/ILO Working Group will convene again this March.

Piracy

I was very touched by the statements made on the subject of piracy. Some of the speakers have highlighted that piracy was a very direct concern to their nations’ seafarers. Ms. Amina Mohamed, the Government delegate of Kenya, informed us that “despite her Government’s efforts, [Kenyan] seafarers have not only been taken hostage and kidnapped, but also injured and killed”.

As I indicated in my Report, piracy constitutes an intolerable denial of the freedom and dignity of its victims and undermines the protection of the life and health of seafarers. It is clear that much more needs to be done in relation to this issue. I intend to respond appropriately to the call of Mr. Dierk Lindemann, who urged “the Office to work closely with other UN agencies to ensure diplomatic measures are taken to ensure seafarers [...] can work in a secure environment without fear for their lives”.

Gender equality and women seafarers

It is obvious that equality between men and women forms an integral part of our overarching goal of decent work. The ILO's mandate on gender equality is to promote equal opportunities and treatment policies. Although women delegates represent no more than 13.9 per cent of total delegates, 17.5 per cent of total delegates and advisers are women. This is a significant improvement compared to the last Maritime Session of the Conference in 1996 during which 9.8 per cent of delegates and advisers were women.

Many speakers called for more opportunities to be created for women in the maritime sector. As Mr. Dierk Lindemann pointed out, "if we are to meet the challenge of attracting more officers into the profession, we are going to have to be creative in our thinking as to how we can attract more women to the profession". However, as a number of speakers noted, there are still a number of issues that impact negatively on the objective of increasing employment of women in the shipping sector. Women continue to face discrimination in areas such as recruitment, job prospects and remuneration. Ms. Mesatywa, Workers' delegate of South Africa raised "the depressing issue of sexual harassment that brings a fear to many women who want to pursue seafaring careers", and drew attention to the need for a code of conduct to combat sexual harassment in shipping. I agree that clear anti-harassment policies need to be developed both at flag State and at company level. And, clearly, a lot more needs to be done in order to attract and retain woman seafarers in the maritime industry. The ILO will continue to be a major actor in efforts to this effect. I would like to share the expressed hope that the ratification of the proposed Convention will improve conditions on board ship and bring more women to careers at sea.

Attracting and retaining seafarers in the industry

Numerous speakers emphasized the importance, in view of the skill shortages, of promoting careers and attracting more young people into the industry especially for officer posts. I agree that this is crucial. However, as the Vice-Chair of the Workers' group, Mr. Padraig Crumlin, pointed out, "how can [the maritime] industry meet the intensification of the demands on its workforce without a framework encouraging skills development?" I strongly believe that with working and living conditions on board ships that are contrary to the objectives of decent work, we will not be able to maintain the morale within the seafaring profession and amplify the attractiveness of seafaring as a profession in the competitive international employment market. The rapid entry into force and implementation of the new Convention would send a strong message to prospective and serving seafarers, namely that the world maritime community is determined to improve life at sea.

Several developing countries raised the issue of on-board training, regretting, in the words of Mr. A.R.M. Abeyrathne Banda, Deputy Director of the Merchant Shipping Division of the Ministry of Posts and Aviation of Sri Lanka, a "mismatch and [...] lack of coordination between the demand and the supply of labour in [the maritime] sector". While having capacity to provide land-based training for seafarers, many countries seem to lack the capacity to provide adequate on-board training due to having small fleets. A call was made on shipowners to increase the number of berths for cadets. In this context, I was particularly pleased to hear support for the recommendation endorsed in my Report that possibly every commercial ship should have a minimum of 1.5 trainees on average. I recognize that the shipping industry trains a substantial number of seafarers every year, and I am strongly convinced that, as Mr. Pieter Sprangers, the Employers' delegate of Sweden, pointed out, "the shipping industry today is well aware of the effort required to ensure that [it] can provide [the] vessels with a new generation of skilled and well-trained seafarers in the years to come".

The Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185)

Many speakers underlined the necessity to ensure the welfare of the world's seafarers by protecting their right to shore leave, and drew attention to the fact that measures put in place to increase security, such as restricting shore leave, have added to the hardships of seafaring life. Mr. Hanafi Rustandi, Workers' delegate from Indonesia, noted that "Seafarers in a number of countries have lost jobs where the owner has been concerned over repercussions from security measures" and that an ITF report has indicated that many seafarers have been refused shore leave. Mr. Zia-Ur-Rehman from the Ministry of Ports and Shipping in Pakistan, pointed to the "massive difficulties" being faced by his country's seafarers in joining or leaving their ships due to "uncalled for and extremely restrictive measures" adopted in some countries.

This was linked to the issue of seeking ways to encourage ratification and rapid implementation of the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185). I was particularly gratified to hear the expressions of general appreciation for this instrument, as, for example, from Ambassador Sameh Shoukry, Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Egypt, who said that Convention No. 185 was an important element for creating decent work for the maritime industry. It has become clear that countries have been paying serious attention to ILO Convention No. 185, some informing of steps taken to implement its provisions (e.g. India) and others, such as Madagascar, of their intention to ratify it.

In light of the hardship this situation poses for seafarers and the impact on their ability to obtain work I strongly encourage member States to ratify Convention No. 185 as soon as possible and urge them to apply facilitated procedures to seafarers in accordance with the provisions of Convention No. 185.

4. Future work for the maritime industry: Full steam ahead together

It is clear that there were many important ideas and interesting and helpful comments made during the extensive discussions of my Report. You may be assured that I have taken them all "on board".

Mr. Brown Harcourt, representative of Bahamas has pointed out that the "quality of the ILO's service to the maritime industry should continue to be strengthened". I intend to ensure that the Office continues to provide the support which the maritime industry needs, to promote the Convention as well as to otherwise pursue the goals of decent work in the maritime industry. I call on donors to help us to reinforce our work in this area.

In my Report, I presented the ILO's future maritime programme as a partnership. The Office, governments and shipowners' and seafarers' organizations must work together to promote widespread ratification and with it rapid and effective implementation.

Governments, of course, have the main responsibility for the actions required for ratification. However, the scale of the efforts needed to achieve ratification and the nature of the industry and of the Convention itself necessitates an unprecedented level of cooperation among countries. Mr. da Rocha Paranhos, representative of the Government of Brazil, drew attention to the "level of commitment that will be needed for the effective implementation of the defined standards". Some of the mechanisms for cooperation exist already. For example, member States of all regions will have to work together within the regional port State control arrangements which should include the new Convention in their

respective agreement as soon as possible. However, it would be extremely constructive if Members would help each other through ad hoc arrangements for the exchange of legal experts and specialist instructors. Mr. da Rocha Paranhos added that “Aware of the magnitude of the challenge ahead of us, the Brazilian delegation calls upon all adherents to the new instrument to promote wider and more efficient cooperation in this sector, on the basis of a clear commitment of all to the establishment of rights, but also having in mind the need to preserve flexibility for their implementation in each country.” Exchange of appropriate legal documentation could also be useful. Ms. Mohamed, representative of the Government of Kenya, supported the “circulation of research findings, other works and guidelines [...] which could be used in the process of enactment of our maritime law”, adding that “To overcome the challenges experienced in this sector will, of necessity, require closer cooperation among member States”.

Welfare organizations and other NGOs working with seafarers also have a role in promoting this Convention. Mgr. Tomasi, representative of the Holy See, pointed to the global network of non-profit organizations which are grouped within the International Christian Maritime Organization which have “526 seafarers’ centres and 927 chaplains in 126 countries”. There is clearly a role to be played by those organizations in promoting and implementing the Convention. Cooperation with them, such as within the International Committee on Seafarers’ Welfare, will be pursued.

The Office’s work in the maritime industry has been and will continue to be aimed at helping secure decent work for seafarers. On that I should note in particular the “Decent Work in the Maritime Industry”, programme which has been supported by generous contributions from the International Transport Workers’ Federation and of the Government of France to whom I would like to express the ILO’s gratitude.

As many speakers have stressed, the implementation of the Convention implies a considerable intensification of cooperation with a number of international organizations. It is quite obvious that cooperation with the IMO, which is already quite close, will be strengthened in a large number of areas.

Finally, I must note that we are all indebted to the European Union for the important financial contribution which they provided towards the holding of this Conference. This has clearly demonstrated the European Union’s commitment to the objectives of the ILO and to the upholding of minimum standards on conditions of work in the shipping industry. I look forward to the continuation of the cooperation between the European Union and the ILO in the follow-up to the Convention. Mr. Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission for Transport will address the Conference at its closing sitting and will no doubt confirm that the European Commission intends to play an active role in promoting and implementing the Convention in Europe. I am hoping that the major maritime States of the European Union will be active partners in their own right in providing assistance to developing countries in the implementation of the Convention.

In closing, I was very pleased that the Conference has expressed full support for the International Labour Office to work towards the rapid entry into force of the new maritime labour Convention, 2006, and to pursue a number of issues which are important for the industry. As you have pointed out, the task which is at hand is multifaceted and will require dedication from all the ILO’s constituents. The Office will endeavour to coordinate the action of all the parties concerned to respond to requests by constituents for assistance. I therefore call on member States and all the relevant organizations to cooperate in the implementation of this Convention and to make their contribution to the technical assistance programme in order to meet the various pressing needs.

