



▶ Record of proceedings

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Plenary sitting: Outcomes of the work of the COVID Response Committee

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Thursday, 17 June 2021, 2.35 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Presentation and discussion of the outcomes of the COVID Response Committee

The President

The time has come to turn our attention to the work of the COVID Response Committee and its proposed resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The document was web-posted yesterday as *Record of Proceedings No. 5A*.

The Officers of the Committee are: His Excellency Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman (Bangladesh), Chairperson; Ms Renate Hornung-Draus (Germany), Employer Vice-Chairperson; and Ms Catelene Passchier (Netherlands), Worker Vice-Chairperson; and the Reporter is Ms Vicki Erenstein Ya Toivo (Namibia).

I now call on Ms Erenstein Ya Toivo to present the Committee's report.

Ms Erenstein Ya Toivo Reporter of the COVID Response Committee

My government, the Government of Namibia, and I are honoured to present to the Conference the report and the outcome of the COVID Response Committee. I am proud that the Committee has succeeded, against considerable odds, to agree on and adopt a bold global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

How did we succeed? First, the Governing Body had the foresight to plan for a tripartite discussion at the Conference that would take into account the urgent need to act, the longer-term prospects for recovery and the complexities of forging an equitable global strategy in an unequal world. The common denominator was the collective desire to make a unique and concrete contribution to global and national efforts to build forward better.

The planning included six Office consultations with the tripartite constituents in the run-up to the Conference. The Committee itself held ten virtual sittings. In those sittings, a sense of solidarity developed across the tripartite divide as we faced the enormity of the impact of the pandemic. The interventions by the group spokespersons reflected the compassion, commitment, expertise, hard work and unprecedented discipline of all who participated. With delegates from different time zones attending late at night in Tokyo and early in the morning in Buenos Aires, we can truly say we worked around the clock!

The road was rocky at times. Delegates in some countries had difficulties connecting. We were challenged to coordinate group positions in cyberspace. We certainly missed the human interaction that would have made it so much easier and speedier to exchange views and to reach an agreement. Differing views and opinions were frequently expressed because, to an extent, some constituents approached issues narrowly out of parochial self-interest or minor semantical concerns.

Ultimately, we succeeded in refocusing on substance and reaching an agreement because so many employers and workers are suffering right now and because the stakes of building forward better are so high. The Committee succeeded because it drew on the

full power of the ILO's tripartite approach, leading ultimately to compromise and to consensus. I am sure that I can speak for everyone in attendance when I say we greatly appreciated the commitment and ability of the spokespersons to find solutions.

The global call to action is structured in three parts. The introductory part provides a succinct and sobering overview of the devastating impacts of the pandemic, but it also sets out the ways in which the world of work can build forward better. To start with, all people must have access to COVID-19 vaccines. There can be no recovery unless we overcome the vaccine gap. But to truly build forward better, the ILO and its constituents must accelerate the implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. It must do so through increased emphasis on widening the benefits of trade and investment and by ensuring that the Centenary Declaration finds expression in public policy, enterprise actions and international cooperation.

Part I of the global call to action sets out the commitments of governments and employers' and workers' organizations in placing full employment and decent work, the needs of the most vulnerable, insecure and hardest hit by the pandemic, and support for sustainable enterprises, jobs and incomes at the heart of inclusive and gender-sensitive recovery strategies. These commitments are set out in four sections focusing on: (1) inclusive economic growth and employment; (2) protection of all workers; (3) universal social protection; and (4) social dialogue.

Part II calls on the ILO, with its mandate for social justice and decent work, to play a leadership role with its constituents and in the international system. It calls on the ILO to use all its means of action and to reinforce its cooperation within the multilateral system – including by driving the organization of a major multilateral policy forum – to support its Member States in the design and implementation of recovery strategies that leave no one behind.

Before closing, I wish to thank, from the bottom of the hearts of the Committee's participants, the following colleagues who led us to success. First, the Chairperson of the Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman, for his supremely diplomatic and insightful management of the discussions. Second, the Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Renate Hornung-Draus for the Employers and Ms Catelene Passchier for the Workers, for their commitment to ensure that the global call to action reflects and responds to the concerns and aspirations of employers and workers around the world in this time of COVID-19. Third, The Government members of the Committee who shouldered the responsibility for speaking for the regional groups, and other Government members for their engagement and constructive inputs. And fourth, the members of the Secretariat, led ably by the unflappable Mr Greg Vines, representative of the Secretary-General, and his deputy, Mr Rick Samans. We particularly thank the interpreters, technicians and hygiene workers; you are the unsung heroes who enabled us to run this tripartite marathon (or is it a triathlon?) with relative ease, given the challenging circumstances.

At times we thought that we would not reach a consensus. We originally thought we would complete our business in three days, but ended up working for ten. Yet we persevered. We set aside what divided us and came together to find solutions. We managed to ensure that the tripartite ILO can respond to the greatest challenges of our time. With the global call to action, we now have a powerful message of hope and determination to share with everyone around the world who is committed to building a better future of work on the rubble of the pandemic. With the global call to action, we are giving the ILO a clear mandate to pursue its leadership role in the international system. We are confident that the ILO, with its Centenary Declaration at the heart of

human-centred recovery strategies, will be an even greater source of inspiration and hope for millions of employers and workers around the world.

A luta continua!

Ms Hornung-Draus Employer Vice-Chairperson of the COVID Response Committee

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it have deeply impacted all aspects of the world of work. Already a year ago, in June 2020, we had an ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and its implications for the world of work. The global call to action we adopt today is an important commitment by all of us to address the long-standing flaws in labour markets and education systems that have hampered decent work, productivity growth and sustainable development. It is an important commitment to build back better. It also gives clear guidance to the ILO to support its constituents and to show leadership in the multilateral system.

On behalf of the Employers' group, I would like to thank the Chairperson of the COVID-19 Response Committee, Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman, for his constructive management and facilitation of the Committee's plenary sittings. It certainly was not an easy task, especially in this virtual setting. We also thank the Worker Vice-Chairperson and the various Government regional coordinators for their input into the process. Most of all, I would like to thank all the members of the Employers' group for their support under the challenging circumstances of this online International Labour Conference. We see that the Office has managed the technical challenges very well, despite the nature of online discussions. For that, please accept our great thanks and gratitude. Many thanks to all the staff who worked very hard, late nights, not least to the interpreters, translators and technicians. The proceedings would not have been possible without your help.

I will repeat what I said last Monday evening. We are pleased to see that we have achieved an outcome which is consensus-based. Going to a vote would have given a negative political message. We needed to show to the world that in this crisis all three constituents are together, and that at the end of the day we are a united front. We have a common goal to get out of this crisis as safely and as fast as possible. Tripartism and social dialogue are at the heart of the ILO. Inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic recovery is within our reach if what we have agreed here in the International Labour Conference can be implemented throughout the whole world at the national level.

This resolution, together with the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019, which provided the basis for it, shall act as our guiding beacons out of this storm. Our group is particularly pleased to see that this negotiated resolution highlights the importance of, for instance: a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, supporting business continuity; an enabling environment for innovation, productivity growth and sustainable enterprises, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; an enabling environment for entrepreneurship; boosting productivity through diversification and innovation; promoting skills development and opportunities that are responsive to labour market needs; prioritization and mainstreaming of strategies to address informality, and promoting fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies that aim at achieving inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic growth as well as full, productive and freely chosen employment.

The resolution also recognizes the challenges linked to business income as it mentions enterprise closures and bankruptcies. It also recognizes the important role of

the private sector for a broad-based, job-rich recovery with decent work opportunities for all. And it recognizes that it is crucial to strengthen the capacity of employers' and workers' organizations so that they can effectively engage in national recovery strategies and effectively support their members in the recovery.

It is most important to bring the world back to work. Employment is the key to lifting people out of poverty. We need to modernize labour markets to ensure that they open up possibilities for employment. New or diverse forms of work provide significant opportunities for employment and productive growth as economies are opening up again, especially for groups most at risk of labour market exclusion because of the pandemic.

I also would like to note that in many countries, labour market responses to COVID-19 included retention policies that have protected all forms of work in the formal economy and also those without a guaranteed income. We now must make sure, as ILO Members and social partners, that effective implementation takes place in our countries. This is a global call to action. It needs to be transformed into reality, otherwise it will be a dead letter. In concrete terms, this means that the resources need to be prioritized, partnerships need to be strengthened and implementing agencies need to be mobilized in coordination with employers' and workers' organizations. This will certainly not be easy in practical terms, and this is where our agreed action points under social dialogue shall reveal their usefulness. We hope that the global forum which is being prepared will make a major contribution to this.

Just like the Centenary Declaration, this resolution gives us a clear understanding of what needs to be done on the ground. It has clear guidance on what the ILO needs to do to support its constituents for a focused and accelerated implementation of the Centenary Declaration post-COVID. It has clear guidance on how the ILO can be empowered within the multilateral system to build forward better. This means that the ILO has a clear mandate to engage and work with the UN resident coordinators together with their social partners. We look forward to participating in this policy forum, as highlighted at the end of the resolution. The political will is there. It is now up to us to identify the barriers to implementation, find ways to overcome them and implement the various action points.

We should not let down the very businesses and workers who have suffered and therefore need help most in all our countries. It is not about having a document or a resolution. It is about reality and implementation. There are many lessons we can all learn from this process. First, it is possible to reach consensus when all parties are open to dialogue and willing to understand each other's perspectives. Informal consultations on the draft by Geneva-based staff can help but will never be able to replace full tripartite plenary discussions. Future Office logistical arrangements should take this into account. And third, the Office has a key professional role to provide technical guidance and impartial, fact-based advice in efforts to have the three constituents reach a conclusion and a consensus acceptable to all. We hope these lessons can be taken on board for our discussions on skills and inequalities which will take place in the second part of the year when this session of the International Labour Conference will resume.

I hope that readers in future, 50 years from now or maybe 100 years from now, can look back on our resolution and understand fully the meaning behind the words we agreed today and agree that our intentions were honest and pure, and that we had set sail in the right direction. I hope that by then things will be better. I hope that by then they will be better prepared. I hope that by then they will look back and see in this text a starting point for a fruitful development of the ILO in the second century of its existence.

On behalf of our group, I hope to see a better 2022 in all aspects, and especially that we can meet in person at the next session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva.

Ms Passchier

Worker Vice-Chairperson of the COVID Response Committee

At the outset, I want to put on the record on behalf of the Workers' group in the ILO our deepest condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in this pandemic, and to pay tribute to the health, care and other frontline workers who are at the forefront of the global pandemic response. I also want to assure all those whose lives and livelihoods have been very negatively affected by the pandemic of our solidarity and collective determination to bring this pandemic under control, and not to go back to business as usual – which for many was not very nice – but really to build forward better.

This session of the International Labour Conference has been unique in two ways. Firstly, because of its virtual format, and, secondly, because of the gravity of the issues in the world of work arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is giving rise to enormous challenges and I am pleased to say that, with the negotiation of this resolution by the tripartite constituents, the ILO is taking an important step to rise to those challenges. The text before us provides the basis for overcoming the impacts of the pandemic on people, on communities and on the world of work. It rightly recognizes as one of the highest priorities the need for urgent and coordinated action to ensure that all people have timely, equitable, affordable and global access to quality, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and preventive measures.

The figures are stark. With Europe and North America having by now vaccinated around 50 per cent of their populations, Africa has a vaccination rate of only 2 per cent. If we do nothing to address that vaccination gap with urgency, the recovery will be most speedy in the developed world, increasing the already existing inequalities between countries and regions. To paraphrase the Philadelphia Declaration, poverty and lack of access to vaccines anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity and health everywhere.

The pandemic shows once more the increasing and interlinked dependencies in the current globalized world of work, and provides a road map strongly founded on the Centenary Declaration to address the challenges before us. This resolution highlights the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on various groups of people, and in particular the most vulnerable and those who face discrimination. It carries forward the Centenary Declaration's commitment to a transformative agenda for gender equality, and it recognizes the severe consequences for young people, in particular in terms of employment and education. We cannot allow there to be a lost generation of young people. By recognizing the need to address not only the formalization of informal work, but also insecure forms of work in the formal economy, it sets the stage for the protection of those who, through no fault of their own, live in precarity, wondering from day to day how they will be able to pay their rent, or even where their next meal is coming from, and – very relevant in these times of pandemic – if and how they will be protected against serious health risks. I welcome the fact that, after many years of debate, we have now found a term that is accepted by all constituents to address the scourge of the twenty-first century labour markets, and emphasize that this must now be tackled with the utmost urgency.

With this resolution, which gives the strong and clear message that all workers must be protected, the Office is receiving once more a clear mandate to build on previous important documents adopted by this house, such as the conclusions of the meeting of experts on what was then called “non-standard forms of employment”, and the

conclusions of the 104th Session (2015) of the International Labour Conference on labour protection. They address the increasing precarity and insecurity of workers in the formal economy, including fixed-term contracts, other forms of temporary work, bogus or dependent self-employment and small part-time jobs, including zero-hours contracts. These insecure forms of work – with limited, if any, protection, often unpredictable working hours and a high risk of low pay and difficulty in exercising the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining – have been mushrooming during the pandemic. This now must be addressed with urgency by implementing the promise of the Centenary Declaration of a floor of protection for all workers, regardless of the nature of their employment arrangements. Realizing this promise will make the ILO even more relevant to working people everywhere. And the Workers' group will continue to push for the other promise of the Centenary Declaration, which is to ensure that next year's session of the Conference formally recognizes occupational safety and health as a fundamental right at work. The strong emphasis on universal social protection, including floors, to ensure income security and health protection is a vital foundation for all this, and is not only elaborated in this resolution but also in the important work currently being done by the Committee on the recurrent discussion on social security.

The resolution provides an important framework for national action to address the impacts of the pandemic based on social dialogue. Please be assured that trade unions everywhere will be following through on this at the national level. At the same time, it effectively identifies global solidarity, including through effective resource mobilization, as essential, given that no country can handle this pandemic and the challenges of providing for adequate and sustainable systems of social and health protection alone. Of particular note is the commitment to promote fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies that aim at achieving inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic growth, as well as full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work, including by improving the understanding of the potential beneficial macroeconomic effects of the human-centred approach set out in the Centenary Declaration.

There are clear responsibilities for governments and multilateral institutions, and at the same time there are clear responsibilities for multinational companies in their supply chains, taking into account their central role in the provision of goods and services in the current globalized world, as has been exposed by the pandemic. I welcome the fact that we were able to address the key issue of fostering and ensuring resilient supply chains that provide for decent work, environmental sustainability and the sustainability of enterprises along the supply chain, recognizing that this has to be firmly grounded on the protection of and respect for human rights, in line with the UN Guiding Principles and the ILO's Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. This provides a solid mandate for the ILO to further develop its important agenda on decent work in global supply chains.

In his excellent report to this session of the Conference, the Director-General correctly pointed to the public sentiment that the existing social contract has lapsed, or has been broken, and that a new one is urgently needed. The foundations for this new social contract, with the four elements of the floor of labour protection for all workers, along with universal social protection, were laid down in the Centenary Declaration.

Now, with the pandemic upon us, this resolution gives a major boost to the impetus behind the full implementation of that Declaration. It also recognizes that this has to take into account three major shifts that are under way in the world. The first is, of course, the pandemic itself and its impact, including on the world of work. The second is the existential challenge of climate change and the vital need for climate-friendly job

creation with a just transition. And the third is the acceleration of technological change and digitalization, which is also an area where appropriate regulation, social dialogue and collective bargaining are essential, as this resolution points out, as ways to ensure just digital transitions, maximize opportunities and minimize risks. In this context, the Workers' group is pleased to see the reference to platform work, which in many instances today is undermining decent work and increasing precarity and insecurity.

One outstanding feature of this resolution is certainly the place that it affords to the ILO and its leadership role in the multilateral system, with its strong emphasis on its unique normative mandate and tripartite structure. This must deliver a world in which globalization is working for the many rather than the few, and which provides the billions of workers who are currently stuck in informal work or in precarious and insecure jobs with the prospect of a better future. The resolution concludes with a commitment to convene a high-level policy forum to mobilize a strong and coherent response with human-centred recovery strategies that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The Workers' group looks forward to the Governing Body discussions to give shape to that forum, and we will engage in it actively.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the work of the Government groups in our Committee, which provided solid support and guidance to all of us throughout the process, and to the Employers' group for recognizing the need for real social dialogue in bringing about tripartite agreement. It was a complex discussion, as nothing is easy these days, and it took somewhat longer than the Secretariat and some of us were hoping for. But we got there in the end, with a result that hopefully will be recognized by our colleagues on the ground, and the outside world, as relevant and impactful for the enormous challenges currently before us. I want to thank especially the Committee Chairperson, Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman, who skilfully steered the Committee through difficult discussions, and the Secretariat staff, including the IT staff, translators and interpreters, for their dedication, expertise and integrity. Last but not least, I want to thank my own dedicated staff, Raquel González, Maité Llanos, Tim Noonan, and the colleagues from the Bureau for Workers' Activities, and also the members of my group everywhere in the world – who are participating in the context of realities in their countries and regions that are sometimes dire – for their solidarity, commitment and understanding. Thank you sincerely for your support.

We have before us an excellent resolution developed through the seasoned and effective tradition of tripartite social dialogue and negotiation, and I am pleased to recommend its adoption by the International Labour Conference.

Mr Rahman

Chairperson of the COVID Response Committee

I stand before you today as Chairperson of the Conference's COVID Response Committee to commend to you the adoption of the call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. I firmly believe that the Committee has delivered a document we can all be proud of, and I wholeheartedly recommend this call to action to you for adoption.

My regular work is to represent Bangladesh, a country that continues to feel the health, economic and social impact of the pandemic in ways that are illustrative of what the United Nations family has been reminding us of since its outbreak: the virus does not discriminate, but its impacts do. Our exports of ready-made garments have been disrupted, threatening the work and income of millions of people. Our migrant workers, who essentially provide the economic stability of our country, are also facing hardship in

host countries due to the pandemic. Many of them returned home, losing their jobs. All countries are affected, but the resource-poor ones suffered the most. Although the situation is getting better in some advanced countries due to robust vaccination drives, the shortage of vaccines in other parts is letting the virus and its variants circulate, endangering the health of everyone. The foremost challenges are posed to those populous countries, like mine, where physical distancing is not an option.

The Reporter has already hailed the passion, commitment, expertise and hard work of all the delegates in the Committee, and the amazing ability of their spokespersons to find common ground among the priorities in building forward better. I can only echo that sentiment, reserving a special word of appreciation for the two Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Renate Hornung-Draus for the Employers, and Ms Catelene Passchier for the Workers. That it took the committee ten sessions instead of the three originally scheduled to agree on this call to action was due to their ambition to infuse it with the highest order of relevance and meaning. Their work is testimony that each and every one of the commitments, which I hope you will approve, matter in the real world, and demand urgent and real determined action from all of us. Only then will this call to action make a difference for real people from all walks of life and all corners of the planet, and make an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery from this pandemic a reality.

I thank the Reporter for presenting the wealth of commitments set out in the call to action. What makes the call to action special? It accelerates the implementation of the Centenary Declaration now, when the world needs it more than ever. It demonstrates that the ILO's work, built around tripartism and international labour standards, is more relevant than ever in times of COVID. And it is evidence of strong political will around the world that it is necessary to build forward better. But most of all, it is its human-centred approach to the COVID-19 challenge, an approach in which we do not merely react in ways we have done before, but in which all of us, together, shape a future of work that leaves no one behind.

Bengal, the greater area where my mother tongue is spoken, is also home to Rabindranath Tagore, the Bard of Bengal, who was born 160 years ago. Tagore was the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. A towering figure, driven by the same remarkable humanism that marks our Organization. This call to action mobilizes all of us to set out on a journey, not to a destiny but to a human space: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high. Where knowledge is free. Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls. Where words come out from the depth of truth. Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection. Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit. Where the mind is led forward into ever-widening thought and action." This is a quote from Tagore's poem in Gitanjali, which earned him the Nobel Prize, and I could not find any better way to symbolize this call to action that we are hopefully going to adopt.

I must confess to you that I did not expect the negotiations to be so intense and complex, but I am elated to report to you that the entire document was finalized without a single vote. No matter how divergent the views and interests expressed, no matter how challenging the task of the regional spokespersons in doing justice to the legitimate views of the 180 governments accredited to this Conference, no matter the constraints of time and technology inherent in virtual discussions, consensus to serve humanity prevailed. Social dialogue once again proved to be an effective and indispensable instrument to preserve what is so valuable to all of us: democratic decision-making. For making all of this possible, I must express my deep gratitude to the members of the

Secretariat for their valuable support, under the able leadership of Mr Greg Vines, representative of the Secretary-General, and his deputy, Mr Rick Samans.

It is now for you to adopt a road map that highlights all the ILO values and messages, puts them in a context that matters, and above all blows fresh wind in the ILO's sails at precisely the moment when the world needs it. I wish you every success in following this guidance.

The President

I now open the floor for the discussion of the proposed resolution. May I remind you that, according to the special arrangements and procedures approved for this session of the Conference, we shall grant five minutes to each regional group statement and two minutes to statements delivered by individual delegates.

Mr Adewo

Government (Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the Africa group

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Africa group. As I am taking the floor for the first time, let me start, on behalf of my group, by congratulating the President on his election to preside over this unique virtual session of the International Labour Conference. The same also goes to the Vice-Presidents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the tragic loss of lives of millions worldwide and become an unprecedented threat to public health. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic has also been devastating. It has disproportionately affected the disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of the world's population. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in increased poverty, widened inequalities within and among countries, losses in income, an increase in informality and insecurity, especially in developing countries, and enterprise closures and bankruptcies, particularly in the hardest hit sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global human crisis requiring a global response. That is to say that there is an urgent need for global cooperation and solidarity to advance a human-centred recovery by stimulating inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment, promoting workers' rights, achieving universal access to social protection and promoting social dialogue to build forward better. Promoting international cooperation and solidarity mechanisms towards ensuring COVID-19 vaccine equity and non-discriminatory COVID-related certification is also a concern that needs to be properly addressed.

To this effect, we strongly believe that the ILO, with its unique tripartite structure and mandate, is best suited to play a leadership role in the international system towards advancing a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient through accelerated implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, while contributing to the expedited delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ILO should also strengthen its assistance to Member States' recovery efforts by leveraging the support of multinational organizations and international institutions.

It was in this spirit that the tripartite COVID Response Committee, among others, was constituted by the Conference to further review the draft COVID-19 response outcome document and submit its conclusions to the Conference for consideration and possible adoption. I should point out from the outset that rich and constructive informal tripartite consultations on the draft COVID-19 response outcome document before the

Conference had provided good insights for the Committee to discuss and to move forward in giving shape to the present proposed resolution.

Arriving at the final text was not an easy journey. The discussions were sometimes fractious and long, on both substance and form. Broad consensus would not have been arrived at without the great sense of purpose expressed by the members of the Committee. This would be a good example of the saying “Where there is a will, there is a way”.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the Committee. The discussion was sometimes stretched to the extreme end, with the feeling of the possibility of not having consensus. However, it was through our collective efforts and determination that we managed to reach consensus on such an important occasion. With that said, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Chairperson of the COVID Response Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman, for his able and rich experience in mediating multiple difficult positions with endless patience and understanding. Please allow me to also thank the Worker and Employer Vice-Chairpersons for their constructive and rich contributions to the discussion. Our thanks and appreciation also go to the spokespersons of the regional Government groups for their far-sighted and constructive engagement in the discussion. It would be remiss of me to conclude without thanking the members of the Secretariat for their invaluable support, and Mr Greg Vines and his deputy, Mr Rick Samans, for their professional advice and support towards the success of the Committee. Let me take this opportunity to thank our Africa group for the rich and invaluable support towards producing a quality report in such a unique and challenging virtual arena.

With this remark, the Africa group agrees to adopt the proposed resolution.

Mr Kamruzzaman

Government (Bangladesh), speaking on behalf of the Asia and Pacific group

At the outset, let me congratulate the President and Vice-Presidents on their election and for the responsibility and trust placed in them. It is indeed a great honour for my country of Bangladesh and for me as well to represent the Asia and Pacific region in this very important plenary sitting on the adoption of the 2021 Conference outcome document on COVID-19. The title of the document, “A global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient” speaks to the very spirit and the way out that the world is looking for. I take this opportunity to thank the Secretariat for its hard work and the delegates of the Asia and Pacific group (ASPAG) for their whole-hearted support to Bangladesh to play its role in the capacity of regional spokesperson. It deserves a specific mention that the Asia and Pacific region has been able to illustrate its motto of “United despite diversity” to respond to the call in a time of need. We hope we will be able to uphold this spirit in the future as well.

A grim picture emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic is before our eyes. The economies of countries have been devastated, irrespective of their socio-economic strength and profile. A record number of people are jobless. Neo-normalcy in the world of work is very common. Hence, ASPAG constructively engaged during the entire negotiation in the spirit of solidarity and unity for a common cause, despite being located in a difficult time zone.

It is worth mentioning that the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on the Member States and societies across the globe is visible. So too are the growing inequality and inequity within and among societies. Hence, ASPAG focused on the differential needs of the people and Member States and attempted to incorporate such elements that might strengthen the ILO to assist the Member States in fulfilling their diverse needs and overcoming their challenges.

On the substance of the document, a few points deserve specific mention and the attention of the world: First, target groups. The document has captured people in various situations in a holistic manner. At the same time, the challenges of people in vulnerable or disadvantaged situations, such as youth, women and older persons, have been underlined to address their exigencies, including retaining their jobs and coping with the “new normal” work environment, among others. Second, issue-specific measures. One of the important aspects of this document is the prioritization of some specific sectors, such as travel and tourism and the public and private sectors, to support regional and country-specific needs. Third, issues of common concern. Pressing issues which are critically important, such as quality education, training, skill enhancement measures, gender-responsive actions, adjustment of fiscal and monetary policies and so on, have been well articulated in this global call to action. Fourth, vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines and health-related measures have been suitably incorporated to address the challenges of the world of work. Fifth, the ILO’s leadership role. While the document is built around the four basic pillars of the Centenary Declaration, the ILO’s leadership role has been highlighted to demonstrate its relevance during this difficult time of pandemic. Finally, international cooperation. The requisite space and flexibility have been created for the ILO to play its role in the international plane for garnering global support and mobilizing resources. In particular, the spirit of multilateralism cherished by the international community and highlighted by the document is indispensable to achieve concrete outcomes out of those goals.

We must continue our efforts to implement international labour standards for the much-cherished transformation to a world of decent work as enshrined in the Centenary Declaration. To conclude, we would like to express optimism that this global call to action will be a milestone document to guide the ILO’s actions and to build forward better, leaving no one behind. ASPAG supports the adoption of this resolution. Prior to ending, I would like to thank the Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Mustafizur Rahman for his leadership.

Ms Luna Camacho

Government (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC). We welcome the adoption by the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference of a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The document before us was jointly developed by governments, workers and employers, through a highly consultative process over several months, culminating in the Committee’s agreement we are adopting today.

At the beginning of this process, GRULAC insisted on the need to recognize the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted two years ago, as the foundation for the recovery from the crisis. With its guidance, we are agreeing today on concrete actions to address the profound effects of the pandemic and to achieve an inclusive, sustainable and resilient human-centred recovery. The four pillars of the response

encompass the policy actions needed to ensure inclusive economic growth and employment, the protection of workers, universal social protection and the promotion of social dialogue. The emphasis on the protection and non-discrimination of the most vulnerable groups – which have been the most affected by the crisis – is fundamental. For GRULAC, solidarity and global cooperation both play a central role in the recovery. In this context, we welcome the call to ensure global and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments and their fair distribution. We highlight the commitment included in the text to implement a transformative agenda for gender equality in order to address the disproportionate impact that the crisis has had on women.

(The speaker continues in Spanish.)

The document gives the ILO a clear mandate for leadership. The coordinated work at the multilateral level that it promotes must aim to support the recovery efforts and strategies of governments and the social partners on the basis of national circumstances and priorities. The active involvement of regional and country offices will be of paramount importance in this regard. International labour standards and social dialogue will play a key role.

GRULAC welcomes the inclusion in the document of priority areas such as the urgent recovery of the tourism sector, business continuity, and support for young entrepreneurs and the social and solidarity sector. We also welcome the inclusion of measures to facilitate the transition to formality, to ensure the protection of workers, particularly frontline workers, to retain jobs and to protect labour and trade union rights. Importantly, the document also includes emerging issues such as telework and new working arrangements and draws attention to disparities in digital access.

GRULAC underscores the importance of having had a transparent and inclusive negotiation process. We always stressed the need to ensure that all Government delegations endorsed the agreements through their full engagement in the negotiation process. The outcome achieved, despite the limitations of the virtual format, shows that such inclusion works.

My group would like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman from Bangladesh for his leadership in steering the complex discussions of the Committee. GRULAC would also like to thank the Employer Vice-Chairperson, Ms Renate Hornung-Draus, and the Worker Vice-Chairperson, Ms Catelene Passchier, and their groups for their commitment and cooperation in reaching substantive agreements. Our thanks also go to the Secretariat of the Committee for its hard work and constant support at all times. Our special thanks go to the regional Government groups for their substantive contributions to this process, and in particular their spokespersons for their extraordinary work in the negotiations. Lastly, I would like to take a moment, in my national capacity, to thank each and every member of my regional group. It was a privilege to be the spokesperson for GRULAC. I thank them for the trust, commitment, dedication and patience they showed in the long – very long – working sessions and their great flexibility in building a firm, coherent and consistent position. The group ought to be satisfied because its voice was heard and is reflected in the document. GRULAC demonstrated once again the region's great commitment to the mandate of the ILO, with genuine tripartism and international solidarity in these highly challenging times.

Ms Barrett**Government (United States of America), speaking on behalf of the group of industrialized market economy countries**

I am speaking on behalf of the group of industrialized market economy countries (IMEC). As the devastating effects of the pandemic unfolded, IMEC advocated strong ILO leadership in response to the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. We called for this International Labour Conference to adopt an outcome document to give visibility to that leadership role and help provide guidance on how to achieve a successful recovery. The resolution we adopt today highlights the unique and critical mandate, experience and expertise that the ILO brings to this effort and the positive role of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work as a foundation for achieving a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. It is the result of untold hours of thoughtful consideration, sometimes impassioned sharing of views, diligent drafting and redrafting, and not always easy – but ultimately successful – tripartite social dialogue.

IMEC is pleased to have been part of this important effort and appreciates the significant effort, dedication and collaboration by all involved that helped achieve this outcome. It is our strong hope that this resolution will strengthen and reaffirm for the international community the essential role of the ILO and its Decent Work Agenda in COVID-19 response, and make a real contribution to efforts in all of our countries to build forward better from the pandemic.

Mr Macieira**Government (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States. The candidate countries Turkey, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement. We align ourselves with the IMEC statement.

We would like to express our satisfaction with the call to action resulting from our discussion in the COVID Response Committee. We thank the Chairperson, the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons and the spokespersons for the regional groups for the constructive spirit that prevailed in the Committee and enabled us, with the support of the Office, to complete our work with this positive outcome.

The global call to action that we have elaborated together is a substantial proof of the commitment of all ILO constituents to a human-centred, inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery. Beyond the urgency, it constitutes a call upon all constituents to intensify their efforts to address urgent challenges and, at the same time, work together towards achieving a better world of work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is also a call for policy coherence and international cooperation to tackle inequalities further induced by the crisis and realize the ILO's mandate of social justice.

We are at the start of the recovery process. The EU and its Member States welcome the fact that this Conference outcome document on COVID-19 strongly supports the ILO's crucial role in fostering a human-centred, inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery, a recovery that strengthens social cohesion through social dialogue and social

protection and places us all on a trajectory of sustainable development, in all its dimensions – economic, social and environmental.

We welcome the fact that this outcome document now gives the attention needed to women and youth, who have been particularly hit by the pandemic. Having seen the importance of safe and healthy working conditions during the pandemic, we are particularly glad that the outcome document recognizes that occupational safety and health is fundamental and are looking forward to our discussion at the next Governing Body to work towards the recognition of safe and healthy working conditions as a fundamental principle and right at work. The EU and its Member States are also very happy to see that the outcome document gives attention to supply chains, considering that the disruption of global supply chains has had serious consequences for workers' rights and led to a dramatic increase in child labour. We also welcome the measures contained in the outcome document with regard to social protection. Providing universal access to social protection is of particular importance in these times of crisis to strengthen resilience. The importance of social dialogue is also indisputable in supporting the delivery of the outcomes set out in this call to action. Finally, we welcome the fact that the outcome document does not lose sight of environmental challenges and the need for a just transition, bearing in mind that this is one of the major pressing issues of our century.

The EU and its Member States strongly support this call to action based on the accelerated and focused implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. It is a call addressed to governments, workers, employers and the ILO itself, but also to the broader multilateral sphere and the world. The EU and its Member States support the adoption by the Conference of this global call to action for a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. To conclude, the call that we are adopting will need to turn into action. We call on everyone to engage in this essential task for the future of our societies.

Ms Karvar
Government (France)
(Original French)

France supports the statement made on behalf of the European Union and its Member States and approves the adoption of the report of the COVID Response Committee.

We would like to commend the work undertaken by the members of the Committee and welcome the call to action that is before us today.

At a time when millions of people have had their lives turned upside down by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, the tripartite constituents of the ILO have succeeded in proposing specific solutions to address the crisis in order to build forward better and sustainably. Such tripartite discussion places international labour standards at the heart of the protections we owe to all workers, and provides us with a floor of commonly agreed rules, using freedom of association and social dialogue as indispensable instruments for taking fair and appropriate decisions, thus strengthening the economic and social cohesion of our societies.

The call to action before us today is based on the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and offers all workers the protection they need and to which they are entitled: respect for fundamental rights; universal, adequate and sustainable social

protection; an adequate minimum wage; and, lastly, a safe and healthy working environment.

It goes without saying that, every day, the pandemic is demonstrating the importance of occupational safety and health. France will spare no efforts in the process that has begun to incorporate occupational safety and health standards into the fundamental principles and rights of the ILO.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both laid bare and exacerbated the inequalities developing within and among our societies. With this call to action, the ILO is sending a clear message to the world on the means to reduce these inequalities. It is now up to the ILO and its tripartite constituents to implement it and to take action.

Ms Muñoz Espinosa
Government (Colombia)
(Original Spanish)

We would like to congratulate the President and the Officers on their excellent work. We also thank all members of the Committee for the rich discussions which were the basis for the establishment of the resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. We align ourselves with the GRULAC statement.

The exceptional circumstances brought about by COVID-19 is a clear example of how the world of work is changing radically. The agreement reached in this house today is therefore critical for all States.

Colombia has taken various measures which, as established in the call to action, have been human-centred. I would like to mention some key examples.

We have put in place relief measures for employers through the Support Programme for Formal Employment, which provides for subsidies for workers' pay; more than US\$1,860 million has been invested, directed at 142,000 employers, and more than 4 million workers have benefited. As part of the Support Programme for the Payment of the Service Allowance, more than US\$78 million has been invested, directed at 94,809 employers, benefiting more than 1 million workers. We have also put in place relief measures for workers who have been laid off or whose contract has been suspended, with a view to ensuring effective protection of workers and their immediate family members, with an investment of more than US\$68.5 million.

With respect to remote working as a means of protecting jobs and in particular of protecting public health, we facilitated the option of making exceptional arrangements and alternatives such as working from home, governed by Act No. 2088 of 12 May 2021.

Lastly, we supported frontline workers by classifying COVID-19 as a direct occupational disease for 670,000 healthcare workers.

Our Government reiterates its commitment to taking the necessary post-pandemic action to ensure dignified and decent work for Colombians, in particular for women, young people and unskilled workers, taking into account the proposals adopted today.

Ms Ruiz Malec
Government (Argentina)
(Original Spanish)

In my capacity as technical adviser of the delegation of Argentina, I would like to speak about the document prepared by the COVID Response Committee at this session of the Conference.

This document is the fruit of intense tripartite debate among representatives of workers, employers and regional groups of ILO Member States. I would like to emphasize the hard-won consensus that we reached.

From the outset in its Preamble, the document sets out a road map for addressing the damage the pandemic has caused in the world of work. And just as the founders of the ILO understood in 1919 that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice, the road to recovery in the post-pandemic period is underpinned by this necessary coordination between the social partners and between the international community and governments. I would like to add that, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have made enormous efforts to save lives and minimize the effects on employment.

As the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work proposed, each and every future policy, measure and action must be human-centred, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children and migrants.

I would like to highlight some milestones we achieved in connection with this document: the objective of full, decent employment and the fact that adapting work to new arrangements for remote working is expressly contemplated alongside the fundamental rights of workers; the need for the recovery to be gender-responsive and without violence, taking into account gender equality in the world of work and in care duties; the importance of ensuring that everyone has equitable – and, we would insist, free – access to vaccines and medical treatment in connection with the pandemic; collective bargaining and social dialogue; universal social protection and access to medical attention; support of the international community to States facing an external debt crisis, which impacts on their sustainable growth; and lastly, the development of a broad programme of action at the global level by the ILO, which will play a key role in the system of international relations.

This document provides us with a range of solutions to combat the effects of the pandemic. It is consistent with the founding principles of the ILO, which were renewed in the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. It is a statement in accordance with the principles that have guided this session of the Conference, geared towards promoting a human-centred recovery from an unprecedented crisis.

Mr Iuchi
Government (Japan)

I am speaking on behalf of the Government of Japan. The Government of Japan aligns itself with the statement by ASPAG and IMEC. First, we thank the Office and our tripartite colleagues for the considerable collaborative effort that has brought us to this moment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting every aspect of the world of work today and will continue to do so for many years. In such a crisis, we would like to recall the importance of this document and express our strong support for it. As stated in this

document, for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, we need to accelerate the implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration, while strengthening international cooperation.

The Government of Japan is confident that the ILO's leadership, support and mandate are essential for building back better from the crisis, and would like to play an active role in collaboration with the ILO to this end. In this regard, we have doubled our contribution to the ILO's projects compared to last year.

As the UN Secretary-General has put it, "the pandemic has had the effect of making all people around the world feel vulnerable at the same time, creating a strong sense of inter-connectedness". We strongly hope to overcome the current crisis and build back better by responding to this call to action and taking deliberate steps, together with all the constituents. The Government of Japan will not hesitate to make as significant a contribution as possible to bring this about.

Mr Jordan

Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations (Barbados)

Barbados aligns itself with the statement made by GRULAC. Barbados welcomes the COVID Response Committee's resolution and commends all who have worked tirelessly to bring us to the culmination of this process.

The effects of the pandemic have been felt by all, but it is recognized that the impact has been disproportionate for some. We now have a comprehensive response plan to address the priority issues of the groups represented here. The collaborative effort on the document, which sets out actions to achieve an inclusive, sustainable and resilient human-centred recovery that leaves no one behind, makes it all the more significant.

For small island developing States, issues such as the recovery of the tourism sector, equitable access to vaccines, protection of our workers and jobs and access to technology are of paramount importance. These issues, if not addressed, have the ability to significantly hinder the rate of our social and economic recovery.

In recognizing that global cooperation in recovery is essential, Barbados encourages Member States to commit in earnest to the actions required to advance a human-centred recovery based on the implementation of the Centenary Declaration and looks forward to the continued strong leadership of the ILO in facilitating interventions that bolster our efforts.

Resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient: Adoption

The President

Let us now move on to the adoption of the proposed resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, the text of which is contained in *Record of Proceedings* No. 5A.

If there are no objections, may I take it that the Conference adopts the proposed resolution as a whole?

(The resolution is adopted.)

As many speakers have pointed out, the discussions in the Committee were very active and engaging; and, at times, they were difficult. But they resulted in the clear road map that we have just adopted together. For this, I would like to take a moment to thank the members of the Committee, the Chairperson of the Committee and the Secretariat for their contributions to the drafting of this document and for the hours spent since the beginning of the year preparing for this moment. Thank you again, to all of you, and congratulations to the members of the Committee and to the ILO for this important outcome, which will pave the way for concrete results in the weeks and months ahead.

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)