



PRESS RELEASE

RETHINKING LABOUR AND THE FUTURE OF WORK – AN INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

ILO Premises, Geneva, 25 February 2019

On 25 February 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, the Permanent Delegation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, the World Council of Churches, the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation, and the Project “The future of work, labour after *Laudato Si*” organized a Special Event in the context of the commemoration of the Centenary of the ILO on the following theme: **“Rethinking Labour and the Future of Work - An Interreligious Perspective”**.

On that occasion, copies of the publication “Rethinking Labour – Ethical Reflections on the Future of Work” prepared by the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation and launched last November at the United Nations in Geneva were also distributed to all participants. Following the conference, all participants were invited to a reception organized by the Permanent Mission of the Holy See, the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation and the Project “The future of work, labour after *Laudato Si*”.

The Special Event was divided into two panels: the first panel, entitled **“High-level section on interfaith perspectives, visions and convictions”**, was moderated by **His Excellency Archbishop Ivan JURKOVIČ, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva**. The second panel on **“Interfaith collaborations on the ground for the promotion of decent work in the context of the future of work”** was moderated by **Rev. Dr. Martin ROBRA, Programme Executive for Ecumenical Continuing Formation, World Council of Churches**.

A large number of Delegations, among others Kenya, United States, Cameroon, Mongolia, Chile, Greece, San Marino, Portugal, Barbados, Guinea, UN Agencies, staff of the ILO and NGOs attended the meeting.

The introductory remarks were delivered by **Mr. Guy RYDER, Director-General of the ILO**, who welcomed all participants to the first interreligious event ever held at the ILO. He highlighted that his organization was committed to bringing together representatives of different faiths while striving for its historic mandate of decent work for all. The recent production of a handbook entitled “Convergences: Decent work and social justice in religious traditions” stressed the ILO’s fundamental nature of being a “value-based organization”, embedded in the idea that universal and lasting peace would only be established if based on social justice. In view of the changes (technological, demographic or environmental) the world of work is undergoing, the Director-General outlined that the point of departure of the launch of a Global Commission of the Future of Work, rested on the individual and the human meaning of work and that the recently published report called for investing in three main pillars: people, labour institutions and areas that support decent and sustainable jobs.

His Excellency Archbishop Paul Richard GALLAGHER, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See shared an overview of the Church’s engagement during the social and economic transformations occurred over the last centuries. All the teaching on labour expounded by the Catholic Church came from the principle that the human person should always be at the centre of every political, economic, social, and individual decision. Recognizing the centrality of the human person means restoring dignity to work and production

processes. Human dignity, far from being an abstract concept, should always be at the core of the political agendas, enabling everyone to realize and fulfil his or her aspirations and talents. Archbishop Gallagher outlined the historic and close relationship between the ILO and the Catholic Church and the common priorities of upholding human dignity, solidarity and social justice. By quoting Pope Francis' inspiring words on "building bridges instead of walls", he pointed out three current situations of concern: (i) the intergenerational gap in the labour market, causing increasing difficulties to the new generations in entering the labour market; (ii) the qualification gap, with thousands of young people forcibly adapting to underqualified jobs. The education system is indeed the cornerstone of any development strategy and it should be broadened to include life-long learning, vocational training, coaching, tutoring, access to self-employment and entrepreneurship; and (iii) environmental consequences. The future of work must be understood in the context of sustainable development and of environmental responsibility. He finally recalled the 'unique role' of the ILO in the development of a 'human-centred economic agenda'. Social justice, which is one of the pillars of the ILO, must be the guiding principle to this end.

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse TVEIT, General Secretary, World Council of Churches, highlighted the importance of labour in the Church's vision, where it is conceived as an essential expression of the human being. Rev. Tveit presented a project that the WCC together with the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt and the Great Imam of Al Azhar carried out in underdeveloped villages in Egypt to train young people and create small enterprises aiming at facilitating the access to the labour market. According to him, this joint project exemplifies the opportunities for interfaith cooperation and dialogue in fostering reconciliation and peace, as well as in overcoming prejudice and violence.

Her Excellency Ms. Nassima BAGHLI, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, outlined the importance of labour in the Islamic faith, where work is considered as a noble value and an act of worship. Certainly, work brings dignity to people and a sense of self-esteem, as well as an element of cohesion for families and societies. On this basis, setting guidelines and actions to guarantee decent and sustainable work conditions must be a paramount priority.

Mr. Eric ACKERMANN, Cantor at the Grand Beth Yaacov Synagogue Geneva and President of the Platform for Interreligious Dialogue in Geneva, highlighted the intrinsic value of labour in the Jewish faith. He stressed the importance of serving the community, intended as the meeting point of individual strengths. In this way, individuals and communities are complementary and human beings need to work at the service of ethics and moral values for the community.

Mr. Michel AGUILAR, Former Representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) in the Council of Europe addressed the long-standing issues of automation and robotization and their impacts on jobs and employment. He emphasized the good aspects of these transformations, namely that new tools and new practices can constitute a unique opportunity for workers to build a model of local citizenship in a previously unheard of technological context. As keys in this transition, he highlighted the role of education, discernment, individual and collective responsibility, which are all principles shared by the Buddhist faith.

In the second panel, entitled "Interfaith collaborations on the ground for the promotion of decent work in the context of the future of work", **Mrs. Toure DIABATE TENIN, Sociologist, Professor at the University of Cocody in Abidjan**, presented some national actions implemented in her native country, Ivory Coast. The country is currently engaging in several labour market policies and programmes, such as the National Action Plan of Development for the four-year period 2016-2020 aimed at promoting social well-being and human capital development. Her concluding words were dedicated to migration-related issues. Despite ongoing discussions over the stereotypical beliefs that some associate with migration, such as taking jobs and shrinking wages, according to Mrs. Tenin, migrants play a crucial role in the global labour market in terms of innovation, growth and reinforcement of the working-age population.

Mr. Paul H. DEMBINSKI, University of Fribourg, Observatoire de la Finance, shared some important reflections on the future of work and labour market perspectives resulting from decades of personal experience in the field. He stressed that decent work means to live a decent life. On this basis, it is of crucial relevance to

be very careful and precise in the definition of 'employment'. According to a poll carried out by the Project "The future of work, labour after *Laudato Si'*", only a small portion of work is carried out in the so-called formal sector. The majority of the world's employed population is actually in the informal economy, such as housework, online work, etc. According to Mr. Dembinski, work had also to be viewed in its moral dimension. Finally, he briefly outlined another project he is currently leading, namely "*la Plateforme Dignité et Développement*" which focuses on the cooperation between protestant and catholic traditions and also proposes online training.

Ms. Silvana CAPPuccio, European and International Policies, Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) acknowledged the interreligious dialogue as a necessary instrument to build peace, universal social justice and to pursue sustainable development for all, and the ILO as the most appropriate place to discuss about these issues. Ms. Cappuccio outlined the crucial challenges we are facing, such as unemployment at record levels, migration flows, growing discrimination against women in terms of pay gap and exploitation, child labour, increasing insecurity and fragmentation of the labour market. In this regard, the current political efforts, both at national and international level, are not enough. By quoting Pope Francis' words from *Laudato Si'* ("We know that things can change"), she called for effective, timely and coordinated international responses.

Dr. Hildegard HAGEMANN, German Commission for Justice and Peace and Representative of Kolping International Association at ILO, reported her personal experiences in Uganda, Chile, India and Uruguay, where individual capacity building on personal convictions represents a precondition to interreligious dialogue. According to Dr. Hagemann, the struggle for decent work should be jointly addressed; to this end, interreligious dialogue is of crucial importance at the national, regional and international level. As a matter of fact, religions have the primary role of facilitators for constructive dialogue.

Ms. Nelida ANCORA, UNIAPAC delegate to the Ecumenical and Interreligious dialogue, highlighted the role of business and religious leaders as significant players in the new sustainable model response to the current changes. Ms. Ancora briefly outlined the work UNIAPAC is carrying out in this regard; she referred to a meeting organized in Rome by His Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson with a group of CEOs of the international mining companies to discuss on how to improve the social and environmental impact of mining. She also mentioned a think-tank co-organized with St. Mary's University in London, aimed at promoting the dialogue between Church and business stakeholders in order to reflect on how business can be a promoter of social justice and partner of sustainable development. According to her, these experiences represent concrete examples of how decent work could be put at the center of social policies and business agendas for the future of work.