

**Welcoming Speech by ILO Representative for Malawi, Mozambique & Zambia, Mr Gerry Finnegan, at combined “ILO at Celebrations”, along with “World Day for Safety and Health at Work”, 28 April 2009 – Venue: Lusaka Musuem**

PROTOCOLS

MLSS

Other Ministries

UNRC

ZFE and all employers

ZCTU, FFTUZ and all workers

Cooperating Partners

Representatives of CSOs

Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I truly regret that I am unable to be with you here in person today. As you will know, the ILO Lusaka Office is the ILO office covering MALAWI, MOZAMBIQUE and ZAMBIA, and it has not been possible to split myself in three, and be in all three places at the same time today. I have accepted the invitation to be with our brothers and sisters in Malawi on this auspicious occasion – 28 April 2009, which marks the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ILO, as well as World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

Ninety years ago, on 28 April 1919, the Versailles Peace Conference finalized the Constitution of the ILO. This tripartite Organization comprising representatives of governments, employers and workers, was founded on the presumption that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.” In a world where conditions of labour involved “injustice, hardship and privation” that could produce “unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled” the ILO was charged with the mission of promoting social justice in and through the world of work.

The driving forces for ILO's creation arose from security, humanitarian, political and economic considerations. There was keen appreciation of the importance of social justice in securing peace, against a background of exploitation of workers in the industrializing nations of that time. There was also increasing understanding of the world's economic interdependence and the need for cooperation to obtain similarity of

working conditions in countries competing for markets. If that was the thinking in 1919, imagine just how relevant that is today!

Then, as today, the call to protect workers against sickness, disease and injury arising out of employment has been at the heart of the ILO's agenda, and it has been a major focus of standard-setting and other means of action.

The ILO became a specialized agency of the UN in 1946 and is unique among the other agencies owing to its tripartite composition involving governments, employers' and workers' representatives. In Zambia, the ILO's tripartite partners are Government in the form of Ministry of Labour and Social Security, employers through the Zambia Federation of Employers (ZFE), and workers, under the umbrella organization of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

As a Specialized Agency of the UN System, both in Zambia as well as globally, the ILO is proud to work in close cooperation with the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN Country Team, and in partnership with several of the UN agencies in contributing to the national development objectives on ZAMBIA. I wish to acknowledge the support of the UNRC for the ILO's efforts, and particularly on this important occasion.

Since 1999 when the current Director General, Mr. Juan Somavia, took over, the ILO has reorganized its work and focus towards the achievement of the **Decent Work Agenda**. The Office emphasizes the importance of making decent work a strategic international goal, and as a means of promoting a fair globalization, as well as contributing to poverty alleviation (the first of the MDG goals).

The ILO carries out its work through three major areas: **standards setting, technical cooperation and policy advice/ technical assistance**. Through its Tripartite General Assembly, the International Labour Conference which meets annually in Geneva in June, the ILO sets International Labour Standards in the form of Conventions and Recommendations (which are helpful in providing practical guidance for implementing the Conventions). The **Conventions** are subject to

voluntary ratification by member states, but legally binding once that have been adopted and ratified. The ILO has traditionally provided assistance in the form of **technical cooperation** projects to member States in order to address specific issues either arising from or in preparation for the ratification of the International Labour Standards, or any other needs that are identified. Finally, the ILO provides technical assistance in the form of policy advice, research or training through conferences and workshops, and increasingly this advice and guidance is aligned to the priorities of Sector Advisory Groups (SAGs) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Zambia.

### ***ILO's Work: The Decent Work Agenda***

Since 1999, the ILO's work has been reorganized and refocused around a conceptual framework termed as the **Decent Work Agenda**. It is summed up in the Director General's statement of purpose for the ILO which is "**to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity**". It comprises four strategic objectives:

- The promotion and realization of **fundamental principles and rights at work**;
- The promotion and realization of freely chosen **productive and gainful employment and income opportunities for men and women**;
- The promotion and extension of **social protection and social security to all**; and
- Strengthening **tripartism and social dialogue**.

The Decent Work Agenda is operationalized in member states through the development and implementation of the **Decent Work Country Programmes**.

The Decent Work Agenda was affirmed by the ILO member states in Africa at the **Ouagadougou Summit of 2004** which adopted a Declaration, Plan of Action and Follow-up Mechanism on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa. The Decent Work Agenda was

reaffirmed in Africa at the **11<sup>th</sup> ILO Africa Regional Meeting in Addis Ababa in 2007**, and committed the ILO and its national tripartite constituents to a series of targets for developing Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), and increasing collaboration with partner agencies to accelerate progress towards the agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The ARM called on the ILO to work with its constituents for all member states in Africa to have Decent Work Country Programmes by the end of 2009. Already, Zambia has had its DWCP in place since December 2007.

The pillars of the Zambia Decent Work Country Programme are (I) Job Creation; (II) tackling HIV & AIDS as work place issues, and (III) elimination of Child Labour.

In **2008**, the ILO member states adopted a **Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization** which commits the ILO and its constituents to a series of actions and coordination mechanisms and partnerships in line with the Decent Work Agenda.

I continue with some of the words of the ILO Director General, Mr Juan Somavia, in this World Day.

As this year we celebrate the 90th anniversary of the International Labour Organization, it is also fitting to recall the ILO's founding mission as it observes the World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

Occupational safety and health is a human right and an integral part of a people-centred agenda for development. Unsafe work is a human tragedy – a daily anxiety; deepening poverty if ill health or injury reduces or takes away the capacity to work and mechanisms for support are absent; lives cut short. Much of this tragedy involving millions of workers each year plays out unseen and unheard, never making the headlines. Yet so much of this tragedy and hardship can be prevented.

Everyone stands to gain from safe and healthy workplaces. Workers and their families; governments; enterprises; societies, and economies have a stake in reducing work-related accidents, injury and illness.

Safe work underpins sustainable enterprises which benefit from improved productivity, quality and workforce motivation. And a healthy

workforce and safe and productive enterprises are part of successful and sustainable development strategies.

The ILO is observing its 90th anniversary and this World Day at a time of global crisis – a financial crisis, an economic crisis and a jobs crisis. The ILO must be particularly vigilant to ensure that strategies for adjustment and economic recovery do not follow a “low road” which devalues human life and safety in the workplace. The words of the ILO’s Constitution, also written at a time of turmoil resonate today – “Labour is not a commodity.” This is why the ILO insists on the goal of decent work covering work itself, social protection including occupational safety and health, rights at work and social dialogue.

With this in mind, it is important for all of the key partners – governments, employers, workers and their organizations, community-based organizations and local authorities, the multilateral system, and funding agencies, among others – to do their part to make occupational safety and health a global message and a global commitment backed by national action.

From a starting point of respect for the dignity of human life at work, the ILO can bring together normative instruments (Conventions and Recommendations), tools, knowledge and experience to promote a culture of prevention. It is essential to go beyond workplaces to create increased awareness of occupational safety and health as an economic and social issue, and to secure a broad-based mobilization around the goal of safe work. We cannot forget that the health and safety of workers in the informal economy – who form the majority of workers in Zambia – matters greatly. We have a responsibility to find effective ways of helping them to work in safety.

On this World Day, together we can make a common stand for the dignity of human life at work. Work must be life giving, not life taking. Decent work is also safe work.

I thank you all for your attention.