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"Globalization and social justice: A decent work agenda"

Address at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

by Juan Somavia, Director-General of the International Labour Office

(Berlin, 29 September 2000)

I would like to start by thanking Wilhelm Staudacher, Secretary-General of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, for inviting me to be here. The Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, and the other major German foundations, have been important partners over the years for the ILO in promoting social justice and above all, in supporting those people in countries around the world who have been trying to make the world a better place. I also have a personal reason why I am happy to be here today, and that is because of the support which the Foundations gave to all of us who worked towards the recovery of democracy in my country, Chile, in the 1980s. I have to begin by thanking you for that.

To tackle the social consequences of globalization, we need to construct solutions that improve the lives of ordinary people and their families. Policy proposals that simply continue present trends, or take a top-down one-size-fits-all approach, are no longer viable. We need solutions that factor in ~~embrace~~ human need and societal values. Solutions that embody human rights principles and embrace a development agenda. To begin with, we need solutions that allow people to realize the most ordinary of human aspirations: opportunities for decent work.

I would like to tell you something about what the ILO is doing to tackle these issues. We believe that achieving decent work for everyone would take us a very long way towards meeting the goals of people and families. That is an agenda which combines the historic mandate of the ILO in terms of labour standards and social protection with a mandate for employment creation and enterprise growth.

As part of this agenda, we have to find ways of making workers' rights real, and I will talk about some of the things we can do and are doing. And I will talk about partnerships, because the ILO cannot do it all alone - these are tasks for the multilateral system as a whole. But I think that the multilateral system has been underperforming in delivering the social pillar of the global economy.

First, I would like to tell you something about the ILO. Its quite an old organization - over 80 years old - and that makes some people view it as a bit old-fashioned. But in reality it is an organization which is right at the heart of the issues which concern people, the ones on which governments are elected and fall: work and family, security and rights, organization and dialogue, market and society. And it is the only international organization in which the enterprise is present in the heart of decision-making - workers, employers and governments meet and ~~dialogue over~~ <sup>discuss</sup> social goals and policies. That doesn't mean that there is no need for modernization. Since I took up my post of Director-General last year, I have started a thorough process of modernization, focusing the work of the organization on four strategic objectives: employment, fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. This is not about changing the values of the



organization, but reorganizing and responding to the changing social and economic environment so as to continue to promote those values effectively.

The challenge we all face is to make markets work better for more people. Today, over 3,000 people die every day because of work-related accidents and diseases; 90 per cent of the working age population doesn't have adequate social protection; and half the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day.

Inequalities are growing. Insecurity too has grown. The root of many people's fears and problems stems from poverty and social exclusion. It is about not earning enough to survive, about falling behind or losing in the highly competitive race of today because of lack of access, lack of opportunity, lack of skills, lack of voice, lack of security, lack of rights.

Yet, we know well that in the era of globalization, insecurity does not only concern the poor and the excluded. It has penetrated the middle-class too. Parents fear for the future of their children, even when they are equipped with a good education. A fifty year-old with a good job fears losing it, because he or she knows that it will be hard to get a stable, good job again. A lot of managers are uncertain about the future of their businesses. Many people also feel a growing dislocation from those in power and from the decisions and processes that fundamentally affect their lives. They often feel the distance and disconnect of governments, large corporations and international organizations with their most urgent needs and inner fears.

I believe that one of the most important things people are asking for is decent work. To achieve that the ILO is bringing together four strategic goals: to promote and realize fundamental principles and rights at work; to create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income; to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; and to strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.