

World of Work

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WORLD PARLIAMENT OF LABOUR TURNS 100



Cover Story

1919–2011: ILO Conferences in changing times

Working conditions: Setting the trend

From its earliest days the International Labour Organization developed a mandate that was quite distinct from the rest of the League of Nations, the forerunner of the United Nations founded in 1919. While the League was established with considerable difficulty, the ILO was in full swing early in its existence. Its first years were marked by its exceptional first Director, Albert Thomas, a Secretariat engaged in interactive dialogue with labour ministers and an International Labour Conference overflowing with energy. Between 1919 and 1920 alone, nine Conventions and ten Recommendations were adopted that changed the face of the world of work.



The first Director of the ILO, Albert Thomas from France

Promoting international labour standards: Establishment of ILO supervisory procedures

International labour standards are backed by a supervisory system that is unique at the international level and that helps to ensure that countries implement the Conventions they ratify. The ILO regularly examines the application of standards in

member States and points out areas where they could be better applied. If there are any problems in the application of standards, the ILO seeks to assist countries through social dialogue and technical assistance.



The ILO has played a role at key historical junctures – the Great Depression, decolonization, the creation of Solidarność in Poland, the victory over apartheid in South Africa – and today in the building of an ethical and productive framework for a fair globalization. The 100th Session of the International Labour Conference in

June 2011 is an occasion to look back at some of its landmark sessions since 1919. It remains the only international conference where governments share national representation with employer and worker delegates – a basic feature of its work down the years which has enabled the ILO to stay attuned to social and economic priorities.

The first ILO Convention dealt with the regulation of working time, one of the oldest concerns of labour legislation. The dangers to workers' health and to their families of working excessive hours had already been recognized in the 19th century. The Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1) established the famous eight-hour day and the 48-hour week. Hours of work remained on the ILO agenda throughout

the 1920s and 1930s and the Organization was the principal forum for international debate and the adoption of international labour standards on the issue. Today, ILO standards on working time provide the framework for regulated hours of work, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual holidays. These instruments ensure high productivity while safeguarding workers' physical and mental health.



The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations was set up in 1926 to examine the growing number of government reports on ratified Conventions. Today it is composed of 20 eminent jurists appointed by the ILO Governing Body for three-year terms. The Committee's role is to provide an impartial and technical evaluation of the state of application of international labour standards. The reports of the Committee of Experts and the Conference

Committee on the Application of Standards are available on the Internet to millions of users. Governments and the social partners thus have an even greater incentive to solve problems in the application of standards in order to avoid critical comments by these bodies. Upon request by member States, the ILO provides substantial technical assistance in drafting and revising national legislation to ensure its conformity with international labour standards.



The ILO Committee on the Application of Standards meeting at the 1939 and 2010 Sessions of the International Labour Conference



▶ The Great Depression: Promoting a “new deal” for the world economy

In the early 1930s, the Organization’s work was directly linked to proposing solutions for the overriding problem of the time – the Great Depression. This global economic crisis had begun in 1929 and led swiftly to mass unemployment in many countries. But the unprecedented rise in unemployment overwhelmed the capacity of the then known mechanisms of coping with unemployment, namely

unemployment insurance. There was clearly a dire need for additional instruments of policy to counteract the widespread social distress that had been generated by the economic collapse.

The ILO responded well to this challenge. It was in the forefront of the advocacy of a coordinated international effort to bring about a recovery of the global economy. Following a



Declaration of Philadelphia: Securing basic human and economic rights

The ILO’s work was severely hampered by the Second World War. The League of Nations, with which the ILO was associated, was defunct and the ILO was evacuated from Europe to Montreal. If the ILO survived and was soon in full swing again, this was largely due to adoption of the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944. The Declaration



Freedom of association: Consolidating the foundations of the ILO

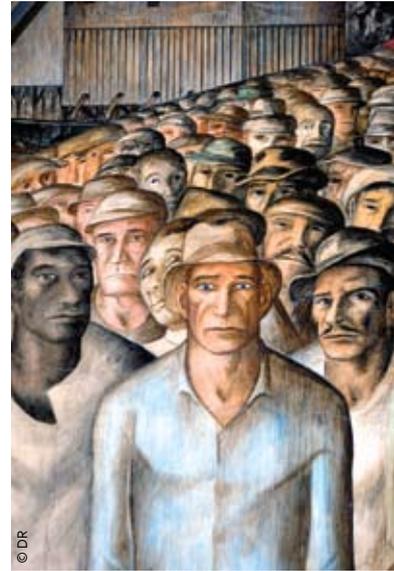
The Declaration of Philadelphia also opened the door for new ILO standards on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. In 1948, the International Labour Conference adopted the Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87). The right to organize and form employers’ and workers’ organizations is the prerequisite for sound collective bargaining and social dialogue between the social partners – protected by the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining



number of articles in the ILO's *International Labour Review* and a major report in 1931, the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution in 1932 calling for a comprehensive programme of concerted international action on monetary, trade and public works policies as a means of overcoming the Great Depression.

The focus on public works in the 1930s was in tune with

contemporary progressive thought on economic and social policy. In the United States, the orthodox monetary and fiscal policies which had led to the Great Depression were replaced by President Roosevelt's New Deal. In 1934, the ILC adopted the Unemployment Provision Convention (No. 44), later revised in 1988 by the Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention (No. 168).



states that labour is not a commodity and sets out basic human and economic rights under the principle that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere".

The Declaration of Philadelphia provided the basis for a broader mandate in the world that emerged from the war. With its adoption, and its incorporation into the ILO Constitution in 1946, a new phase of standard-

setting activities was launched. The instruments adopted in the decade following the Second World War laid down the intellectual foundation of much of the subsequent human rights standard-setting in the United Nations. These standards have exercised a major influence in setting a floor under workplace policies, and human rights more generally, in the emerging post-colonial world.



US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and ILO Director-General Edward Phelan signing the Declaration

Convention, 1949 (No. 98) adopted by the Conference one year later.

The right to organize is deeply rooted in political democracy, which cannot function fully unless freedom of association is recognized. Trade union leaders are often in the front line of political change in favour of greater democracy, and in many cases are assassinated, imprisoned or exiled for their beliefs and their actions.

In the following decades, the ILO's successful engagement in Poland,



Lech Walesa with ILO Director-General Francis Blanchard

where an electrician named Lech Walesa led a strike that launched the first independent, self-governing trade union in the then Eastern bloc, and later became President of that country, was not unique. Following the

coup d'état in Chile in 1973, the ILO was the only international organization allowed into the country to investigate a human rights complaint: the worst of the restrictions of freedom of association were removed in 1979, though the restoration of democracy took much longer. A limited but important number of cases before ILO supervisory bodies have also defended employers' rights vigorously.

Gender equality: Promoting more and better jobs for women

With growing numbers of women entering the workforce during and after the Second World War, the ILO began to reformulate the “women’s concerns”, along with others, as one of human rights and a demand for equality. The way was now open for the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), which was adopted in 1951 and went well beyond the “equal pay for equal work” provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted three years earlier.

Today the four key ILO gender equality Conventions are the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156); and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183).

Convention No. 111 broadened the field by including sex as a prohibited ground of discrimination, and ILO Conventions

Adoption of the Declaration on Apartheid

The fight against apartheid in South Africa marked the first major test of ILO policies in favour of equality. In 1964 the International Labour Conference unanimously approved the Declaration concerning the Policy of Apartheid of the Republic of South Africa and the ILO programme for the elimination of apartheid in the field of labour. The Declaration reasserted the principle of equal opportunity, condemned the South African Government’s racial policy and demanded that South Africa renounce its policy of apartheid.

In order to avoid being officially excluded, the Republic of South Africa withdrew from the

ILO of its own accord, notifying its departure on 11 March 1964. The 1964 Declaration requested the Director-General to submit a special report every year to the Conference,



The fight against child labour: Accelerating action

Child labour has preoccupied the ILO since its early days, when the First Session of the International Labour Conference adopted the Minimum Age (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 5), fixing the minimum age for employment of children in industry at 14 years. The ratification rate of the early ILO Conventions on child labour, however, was slow throughout the long period up to 1973 when a new ILO Convention covering the entire economy was adopted, the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Convention (No. 138).



Nos. 100 and 111 were the first ratifiable international instruments with the specific aim of promoting equality and elimination of discrimination. Convention No. 183 provides for 14 weeks of maternity leave to women living in ratifying countries.



which was put before a special committee until 1994. These reports demonstrate how international pressure against apartheid evolved over more than 25 years, ending with boycott and isolation of apartheid South Africa and coupled with increased material support for the national liberation movements and trade unions fighting apartheid.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela, then Vice-President of the African National Congress (ANC), attended the 77th Session of the ILC, where he paid tribute to the ILO for its struggle against apartheid. South Africa rejoined the Organization on 26 May 1994, three years after the official abrogation of the apartheid laws and ten days after the election of Nelson Mandela as President of the Republic.

In June 2007, the ILO awarded its first annual Decent Work Research Prize jointly to Nelson Mandela and Professor Carmelo Mesa-Lago, in recognition of their unique personal contribution to improving the lives of people around the world.



Nelson Mandela at the International Labour Conference (1990)



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It was only with the adoption of Convention No. 138 and the creation of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1992 that the movement picked up steam. Against the background of the growing concern that certain forms of child labour are so grave and

inhumane that they can no longer be tolerated, the 87th Session of the Conference unanimously adopted another instrument, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Some 95 per cent of the ILO's member States have now ratified it, while some 85 per cent have ratified Convention No. 138.

➤ Promoting responsible business through the MNE Declaration

In the 1960s and 1970s, the activities of multinational enterprises (MNEs) provoked intense discussions that resulted in efforts to draw up international instruments for regulating their conduct and defining the terms of their relations with host countries, mostly in the developing world.

Labour-related and social policy issues were among the concerns to which the activities of MNEs gave rise, and were the subject of hot debate during the 1970s, especially at the World Employment Conference in 1976. The ILO's search for international guidelines in its sphere of competence resulted, in 1977, in the adoption by the ILO Governing Body of the Tripartite Declaration of



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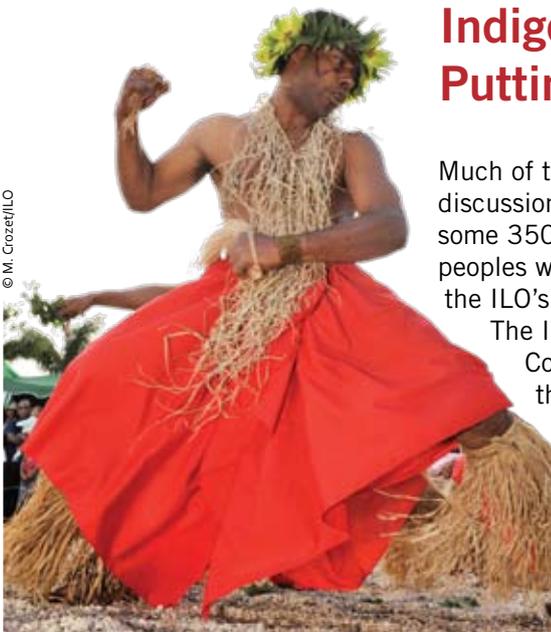
Promoting safety and health at the workplace

According to the ILO, about 80 per cent of occupational deaths and accidents could be prevented if all ILO member States would use the best accident prevention strategies and practices that are already in place and easily available. Almost half of the 188 Conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference since 1919 have a bearing on health and safety issues.

In 1981, the Conference adopted the Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155), which remains a cornerstone in the system of ILO standards on occupational safety and health (OSH) covering a wide



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Indigenous and tribal peoples: Putting rights into practice

Much of the contemporary discussion about the rights of some 350 million indigenous peoples worldwide is based on the ILO's work on this issue.

The International Labour Conference has adopted the only two international Conventions dealing with indigenous and tribal peoples: the Indigenous and Tribal Populations

Convention, 1957 (No. 107) and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).

Convention No. 169, which revised Convention No. 107, provides for the consultation and participation of indigenous and tribal peoples with regard to policies and programmes that may affect them. It provides for enjoyment of fundamental rights and establishes general policies

Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration). In 1979, the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution concerning follow-up to the World Employment Conference, urging full utilization of its follow-up procedures including a reporting system on the effect given to the MNE Declaration in the member States of the ILO.

The principles laid down in the MNE Declaration offer guidelines to MNEs, governments, and employers' and workers' organizations in such areas as employment, training, conditions of work and life, and industrial relations. Its provisions are reinforced by certain international labour Conventions and Recommendations which the

social partners are urged to bear in mind and apply, to the greatest extent possible.

The MNE Declaration has since been joined by other international instruments, including the UN's Global Compact introduced in 1999, as well as by other international initiatives. Encouragingly, today there is much greater recognition in the business community of the importance of corporate social responsibility than there was in 1977. Nevertheless, the ILO Declaration remains unique in having been produced by the ILO's tripartite process of social dialogue – a global agreement negotiated by representatives of both employers and workers, with a positive message at its core. It is a valuable tool in the global journey towards socially responsible labour practices.



range of sectors and generic hazards. Prevention is at the heart of these standards and is embedded in the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 197), which seek to promote a preventative safety and health culture, together with management systems for safety and health through national policies, systems and programmes.

regarding customs and traditions, land rights, the use of natural resources found on traditional lands, vocational training for employment, handicrafts and rural industries, social security and health, education, and cross-border contacts and communication.

Over the years, many countries have adopted or amended legislation putting Convention No. 169 into practice. A number of Latin American countries, including Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, have recognized in their constitutions the multi-ethnic character of their respective populations. In 1995, the Government of Guatemala

and four insurgent groups signed the Agreement on the Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the basis for the peace process in the country. In 1987, for its part, Norway set up a parliament for the Sami people with consultative and limited administrative authority. Denmark has set up Greenland Home Rule authorities so that many local matters may be governed by and for the Inuit peoples of Greenland.



➤ Building a social floor for all: ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

On 18 June 1998, the ILC was poised to adopt the Organization's first explicit and comprehensive statement of a commitment to human rights since the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944. Although the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work now enjoys universal support, it was a matter of considerable controversy at the time as many developing countries were afraid that it would undermine their ability to take advantage of low-cost labour to maintain their export markets.

The principles and rights the Declaration refers to include the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining and the elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination linked to employment. The key feature of this instrument was its universality – it laid down principles and rights that all countries were to respect by virtue of their membership of the ILO, irrespective of whether they had ratified the standards concerned.

Decent jobs for all: Launch of the Decent Work Agenda



The Dignity of Labour by Maurice Denis in the former ILO Building

Extending social security to all

In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose Article 22 recognized that "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security". In 1952, the ILO adopted the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102), and in 2001 it decided to launch a Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for all.

The Global Campaign consists of two dimensions. The first "horizontal" dimension comprises the extension of basic income security and access to health care, even if at a modest level, to the whole population. The second "vertical" dimension would seek to provide higher levels of income security and access to higher quality health care at a level that protects the standard of living of people

It thus could be seen as a first step towards building a social floor to the global economy. It also included a follow-up to assist countries in realizing these principles, and regular reporting on progress towards them. Opinion on the Declaration was not unanimous, but in practice, the outcome has been an increase in the rate of ratification of the eight core labour Conventions concerned, and all have now been ratified by more than 80 per cent of ILO member States.



Final vote on the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

Initiated in 1999 by ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, the Decent Work Agenda promotes a development strategy that recognizes the central role of work in everyone's life. The ILO provides support in the form of integrated decent work programmes developed at country level with its constituents.

These programmes set priorities and targets within national development frameworks and aim to tackle major decent work shortcomings through effective programmes that meet each of the ILO's four strategic objectives:

to promote and implement the standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; to enhance opportunities for men and women to obtain decent employment and wages; to expand the scope and heighten the effectiveness of social protection for all; and to strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

In his report to the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference, the Director-General recalled the issues inherent in the concept of decent work: "The ILO is concerned with decent work. The goal is not just the creation

of jobs, but the creation of jobs of acceptable quality. The quantity of employment cannot be divorced from its quality. All societies have a notion of decent work, but the quality of employment can mean many things. It could relate to different forms of work, and also to different conditions of work, as well as feelings of value and satisfaction. The need today is to devise social and economic systems which ensure basic security and employment while remaining capable of adaptation to rapidly changing circumstances in a highly competitive global market."



even when faced with fundamental life contingencies such as unemployment, ill health, invalidity, old age or loss of a breadwinner.

Meanwhile, the UN's High Level Committee on Programmes is developing a common "One UN" concept for its Social Protection Floor Initiative. Together with the World Health Organization (WHO) and a number of other agencies, the ILO is leading the task.

➤ A bill of rights for seafarers

From its first days, the member States of the ILO realized that in the world of work, seafarers and shipowners were different. Not land-based but working on the seas, they not only moved huge amounts of world trade even 90 years ago, but represented the most fluid and wide-ranging workforce on the planet. In 1920, the ILO held its 2nd International Labour Conference in Genoa, Italy, devoted to seafarers. In all, ten Maritime Sessions of the International Labour Conference have adopted 68 Maritime Conventions and Recommendations, covering all aspects of working conditions at sea.

But times change, and so has the volume of trade carried by sea. Eventually, it became

Second (Maritime) Session of the International Labour Conference in Genoa, Italy (1920)



Promoting social justice in times of uncertainty: ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization

Amid widespread uncertainty in the world of work, ranging from financial turmoil and economic downturn to growing unemployment, informality and insufficient social protection, the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference adopted a landmark Declaration designed to strengthen the ILO's capacity to promote its Decent Work Agenda and forge an effective response to the growing challenges of globalization.

Through the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, governments, employers and workers from all member States call for a new strategy to sustain open economies and open societies based on social justice, full and productive employment, sustainable enterprises and social cohesion. The Declaration acknowledges the benefits of globalization

Tracing a path out of the global crisis: The Global Jobs Pact

Faced with the prospect of prolonged unemployment, poverty and inequality and the continuing collapse of enterprises, the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2009 adopted a Global Jobs Pact designed to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery, generating jobs and providing protection to working people and their families.

The Global Jobs Pact was adopted following strong support voiced during a three-day ILO

Global Jobs Summit by heads of state and government, vice-presidents and ministers of labour, worker and employer representatives and other leaders. At the same time, the summit also provided strong support for an enhanced involvement of the ILO in the G20.

The Pact urges measures to retain persons in employment, to sustain enterprises and to accelerate employment creation and jobs recovery combined with social protection systems, in particular for the most vulnerable,

clear that the seafarers working on the “supertankers” and other ships needed a “super-Convention” that not only covered their needs but addressed the need of the shipowners and governments for fair competition as well. Thus, the most recent ILO Convention was born. The 94th International Labour Conference adopted the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, in February, providing a comprehensive labour standard and setting the tone for future Conventions that will regulate not only a sector but address the issues posed by globalization. The new standard is not only a landmark of the seas but a pioneering contribution to making globalization fair.

Adoption of the ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006



but calls for renewed efforts to implement decent work policies as the means to achieve improved and fair outcomes for all.

The Declaration marks the most important renewal of the Organization since adoption of the historic Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944. In addition, it is a significant step forward in respecting, promoting and realizing the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted by the ILO in 1998.

Maat, the old Egyptian goddess of truth and justice... The word “maat” can be translated as “justice”, “truth” and “world order”

integrating gender concerns in all measures. It also calls for the construction of a “stronger, more globally consistent supervisory and regulatory framework for the financial sector, so that it serves the real economy, promotes sustainable enterprises and decent work and better protects the savings and pensions of people”.



In September 2009, world leaders of the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh welcomed the ILO Global Jobs Pact and committed to “putting quality jobs at the heart of the recovery”