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Priority theme 3(a): Promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement by
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Chairperson,

As has been said in the course of this debate, full employment under appropriate conditions is at the core of social development: it helps meet the material needs of individuals and families; it brings communities together; and it makes for healthy economies.

The IPU is working to create common ground among parliamentarians on this important issue. In the spring of last year, at our 117th Assembly in Indonesia, hundreds of MPs came together to debate a report on “job creation and employment security in the era of globalization.” Following that debate, the parliamentarians adopted a resolution that contains a number of recommendations, including some that mirror closely those issued by the Secretary General at this session of the Commission.

Let me elaborate on some of the most salient points of this resolution, the full text of which is available in the room.

First, the social partners, including labour and business organizations, must work together and in concert with government to ensure that job creation and decent work are placed at the center of national policy agendas. An important objective of those agendas should also aim at a more balanced development of both rural and urban areas.

Dialogue among the social partners presupposes that workers be granted universally the right to organize and bargain collectively. Social dialogue is essential to curb the harmful effects of labour market flexibility that is required in today’s highly competitive global economy. “Flexibility” should not equate with “precariousness”, however. To make flexibility work fairly for both workers and employers we must strengthen safety nets, as well as workers’ training and education. Education remains the key to future job creation, and satisfaction, in virtually every country. We need to invest more in it while also pay greater attention to curricula and programmes to ensure that they are better tailored to employers’ expectations.

For our members, ending discrimination in labour policy and practices is another important element of the decent work agenda. First and foremost, women must be given equal pay for equal work and must receive special attention in skills development programmes as they are more likely to be excluded from training and educational opportunities. Legislation should also universally guarantee property rights to women including the right to inherit land, capital and other assets. This will expand entrepreneurship among women, which has long been recognized as a driver of economic growth in many countries. Incidentally, this focus on women’s economic opportunities will be explored further at a parliamentary meeting on “the role of parliaments in financing for gender equality”, which will take place at the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The IPU resolution further calls for more pro-active legislation to enable men and women to balance work and family responsibilities, including extending the right of paternity leave to countries where it does not exist. It also encourages a special focus on the disabled, who are more likely to be excluded from work opportunities and more vulnerable to exploitation. In this regard, the IPU looks forward to the early entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which, among other things, advances important principles such as that of reasonable accommodation and affirmative action. To raise awareness of the Convention, the IPU has recently published a handbook for parliamentarians, as a tool in support of the Convention ratification and implementation process.

Finally, another point made in the resolution has to do with strengthening corporate social responsibility. In fact, given the increased power of large enterprises as a result of the current wave of globalization, it is more than ever important that they assume greater responsibility toward workers and the environment. Big business aside, more should be done to support and promote self-employment and the development of medium, small and micro enterprises in both urban and rural informal sectors. Microfinance should remain at the forefront of such efforts.

Chairperson,

The IPU will endeavour to actively support this comprehensive resolution with concrete action on the ground. In November of last year, IPU participated in the ILO Forum on Decent Work for a Fair Globalization, and convened on that occasion a meeting of legislators. One recommendation that emerged from that meeting is that the IPU should establish a parliamentary advisory group on employment and decent work. This group would develop and monitor the implementation of proposals for specific IPU activities, including facilitating networking between those parliamentarians who work on employment and social development issues, preparing working tools for them and others in parliament, running parliamentary campaigns on specific issues, and organizing regional and global meetings. The constitution of such a group is still in progress. It will be part of a larger cooperation effort with the ILO that will be further articulated in the course of the year.

Thank you.