

111th Session of the International Labour Conference

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The Director General's report rightly sets the ground for the achievement of social justice through the four pillars of universal human rights and capabilities; equal access to opportunities; fair distribution and just transitions. These dimensions are critical at global level to the achievement of universal and lasting peace and establish core principles that move the ILO to promote social justice through an improvement in working conditions and the provision of decent work.

As a country with severely limited land resources and which is also densely populated, Maltese society needs to think strategically in order design a necessary economic transformation that strikes a sustainable balance between wealth generation and improving the quality of life in line with ESG principles and the UN's own Sustainable Development Goals.

It is evident that the country is doing reasonably well according to basic macroeconomic indicators, but this success is impinging on the environment in the widest sense of the word and thereby causing a deterioration in the morale and well-being of our workers which is crucial to long-term competitiveness. Clearly, the economy needs to be steered away from a dependence on increased imported manpower – with its negative impact on infrastructure, pollution, congestion and natural resources – to a more sustainable path based on higher value, less labour intensive activities.

Part of the solutions lies in opportunities provided by what is called the fourth industrial revolution. Emerging technologies offer scope for investment in high skilled areas with prospects for quality jobs. The Report of the Director General shines a beacon for Malta to follow where he states that: "The fourth industrial revolution which promises a radical transformation of production methods, the demographic upheavals, and the imperative need to decarbonize the economy are opportunities for a better future for us all".

The agenda for this year's conference resonates closely with this transition and has important implications for Malta. New forms of employment call for a framework which allows for a flexible labour market but which also requires safeguards for labour protection. Maltese employers recognise the need for such safeguards and our position is that decent working conditions and non-standard forms of work organisation are not mutually exclusive. The conclusions of the recurrent discussion committee on social protection state that: 'Sustainable enterprises, as generators of employment and promoters of innovation and decent work, contribute to labour protection, productivity increases and a well-functioning and productive economy. At the same time, labour protection, by levelling the

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playing field, contributes to sustainable enterprises, productivity gains and economic development.' we fully believe in a labour market that offers protection against informality and discrimination. In Malta this is particularly relevant given that 30% of our labour force is currently non-Maltese.

The concept of just transition is also very relevant to the Maltese context. Economic transformation implies the destruction of jobs and the creation of others. Promoting an environmentally sustainable economy creates various challenges in ensuring that all sectors of society benefit from such a transition that has to address inclusiveness and which is backed by a strategy to re-skill employees working in declining sectors to enable them to avail themselves of decent work opportunities in emerging economic activities. Such challenges can only be overcome with the participation of all social partners through a strengthening of tri-partite social dialogue.

The discussion on apprenticeship is also relevant in a society that wants to reduce the number of NEETs and guide them towards vocational training that lead towards productive jobs. Apprenticeships should be strengthened through closer collaboration between industry and the education authorities. Access to quality education plays a fundamental role in raising people out of poverty, and a pillar of social justice. It is shocking to read in the Director General's report that 244 million children in the world are out of school. In Malta we have well-established apprenticeship schemes which need finetuning to work in parallel with the demands of industry.

In conclusion I am positive that the outcome of the ILO general conference will filter down to improve the world of work in a tangible manner in many countries. The Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other global and national crises have affected and continue to hit both employers and workers as businesses struggle to remain profitable and sustainable, while employees expect a fair return for their labour. It is the role of social dialogue to bring about the required transformative change in the world of work that motivates ethical enterprise to improve the well-being of employees worldwide.