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Tenth (special) sitting

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President: Mr. Wamalwa

ADDRESS BY HIS MAJESTY KING
ABDULLAH II BIN AL-HUSSEIN
OF THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

The PRESIDENT — It is a great honour for me to declare open this Tenth (special) sitting of the International Labour Conference and to welcome, on behalf of the Conference, Their Majesties King Abdullah II and Queen Rania of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I will now give the floor to the Secretary-General, Mr. Somavia, to welcome Their Majesties to the Conference.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL — I should like to extend to His Majesty, King Abdullah II and to Her Majesty Queen Rania, a very, very warm welcome amongst us. We are honoured today to receive a world leader with a twenty-first century mission and commitment to action. Your father, King Hussein, was here with us in 1997 and we thank you for maintaining the tradition.

King Abdullah is blending modernity with a cultural identity of the Arab and the Moslem world, leading a nation towards an open society in a technological age, meeting the difficult challenges of the social dimensions of globalization and building modern, efficient, responsive institutions; he is working for a progressive country based on pluralism and democratic principles with influence — as you know well, your Majesty — far beyond your borders.

Your Majesty, in every sphere of your leadership, one thing is clear — the commitment of a King to reach out to his people, to feel their pulse, to understand their everyday concerns and truly better their lives. You cut through and connect with your people in their homes, in their workplaces and in their schools. And then, naturally, you know well the difficulties and constraints of delivering development to people in today's global economy.

Together with Her Majesty, Queen Rania, you are promoting the full role of women in society and political life, fighting child labour and giving young people hope in the future and the opportunities they deserve.

Dear friends, just days ago, the eyes of the world were fixed on a small Jordanian city, and a big global dream. King Abdullah's words in Aqaba provide inspiration. The biggest casualty in the Middle East, he said, is a loss of hope. We have the opportunity, he continued, and an obligation, to reinstate faith in the process and to reinvigorate hope for a better tomorrow.

Later this afternoon, the International Labour Conference will take up our Report on the situation

of workers in the occupied Arab territories. Recent events have shown once again how difficult that road is — but as the leadership of our guest and his great nation has proved through time, we cannot give up.

We are honoured, Your Majesty, to welcome a leader rooted in a rich and proud Hashemite history, whose eyes are focused on a better tomorrow and decent work for all. Thank you so much for being with us today.

His Majesty King ABDULLAH II BIN AL-HUSSEIN — Thank you for your kind welcome. Rania and I are honoured to be here at this most important Conference, at the invitation of our good friend, the Director-General. His efforts to promote decent work, his dedication to human rights, his global vision — these have inspired respect around the world. And allow me to speak on behalf of all Jordanians in thanking him and thanking all the delegates here for everything they are doing to create a better future for humankind.

My friends, your Organization recognizes a fundamental truth about our world: work and working people are at the heart of global prosperity. In our twenty-first century, attention is often focused on technologies and markets, but let us remember that at best these are only tools — tools that have allowed the world's peoples to combine their energies and talents. Freeing that capability has unleashed tremendous creativity and productivity and unprecedented abundance. It has been estimated that, worldwide, the goods and services produced in the past 100 years, primarily in the last 50 years, exceeded all that humanity had produced since recorded history began. And our future potential is great.

Yet for too many people — far too many people — this abundance is a dream denied. One-third of humanity has been marginalized by unemployment and underemployment, and others are barely subsisting. They suffer the hardships and dislocations of globalization but they have yet to reap its benefits. Young people who desperately need opportunities and hope to see themselves and their societies being held back by poverty, health crises, illiteracy and more. So is it any surprise that these communities can become recruiting grounds for extremist ideologies? We cannot move forward, we cannot fulfil the twenty-first century's promise until we deal with these problems, nor can we delay.

The war against want, a war enshrined in the ILO's Declaration of Philadelphia, has a new name today — it is the war against terror. Only by defeating want can we heal the divisions and despair that feed global violence. This requires sustainable socio-economic

development, development that enables all people to live in dignity. Such development is an important tool in the battle against extremism, as in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine.

Opportunity is a powerful force giving people a stake in a peaceful future. It is up to us to create a global growth economy, one that will give people the jobs they need to support their families and improve their lives. There must be safety nets, national and international, that can combat the social and economic imbalances of globalization; real access to the education and technologies that open the doors to tomorrow; and, perhaps most important, justice to show people, especially young people, that ours is a world of fairness and hope.

Jordan has espoused the values that are embedded in the ILO charters and Conventions. We have embarked on a process of enhancing the productivity of our labour force by adopting bold educational reforms and giving the private sector the prominent role in the design of vocational training. We are convinced that our economy will not grow until the productivity of our labour force grows. This is the essence of our national social and economic agenda, and we have had positive results, as evident in our recent indicators.

And we also take our international responsibilities seriously. I am pleased that Her Majesty, Queen Rania, is one of a select group of Heads of State and First Ladies who have taken an active role in the ILO's efforts to combat child labour around the world. Jordanians are working hard to ensure that child labour is not a serious problem in our country and we continue to pioneer preventive measures.

Our strategy has had one goal — to improve the well-being and opportunities of our citizens — and Jordanians deserve no less. We also believe that social and economic reform cannot be sustained in the absence of democratic consent. This is why we have insisted on political reforms to ensure government transparency and accountability, and Jordan recently established a national centre for human rights as well as an independent higher council for media.

In these and other ways, Jordan has been working tirelessly to create an environment of justice, democracy, due process, equal opportunity and gender equality, and, as many of you know, parliamentary elections will be held next week.

It would be untrue to suggest that my country or any country can make it alone. Today, for developed and developing nations alike, progress on the national level demands progress on a global level as well. Achieving such progress will require a true partnership between developed and developing countries — a partnership based on common interests, our interdependence and our shared responsibilities. Only such a partnership can deliver the global justice that is required and encourage developing countries to embark upon needed political, economic and social reforms.

The new global partnership faces hard choices, for reshaping the national and global governance agenda, for an equal distribution of benefits.

Dialogue must be coupled with action from both sides. Across the board we need improved market access, the removal of trade barriers, and predictable trade policies. Developed countries must increase the level of direct assistance, encourage foreign direct

investment and technology transfer, and reduce the debt burden.

Developing countries must commit to sound economic policies, coupled with the right safety nets, good governance and the rule of law. In every region we must cooperate and act quickly to address key issues: political freedoms, improving the role of women, and bridging the knowledge gap.

Jordan will shortly host the Extraordinary Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum bringing leaders together to agree on a shared vision of global cooperation, and I hope that these initiatives will begin new and intensified efforts to restore confidence in our common future and enhance global governance.

My friends, we must also address the urgent need to rebuild and stabilize the Middle East region. Our region sits at a critical crossroads; the credibility not merely of our own countries, but of the international community is at stake. Now is the time to work together to put our full force behind the process that will lead to the handover of Iraq to a credible Iraqi Government representing all Iraqis. And now is the time to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Palestinians and Israelis have signed on to the peace road map, a road map that addresses the needs of both parties. To the Israelis this plan offers collective security, guaranteed by all Arabs, a peace treaty and normal relations with all Arab States, and an end to the conflict.

To the Palestinians, it offers an end to the occupation, a viable State, and the promise to live as a free people. Last week in Aqaba, at the Summit, the parties pledged to make real efforts to move forward, and that process is beginning. But the friends of peace must now stay the course. At the end of the day we will need the full energies of regional and international leaders, working in real partnership, if we are to achieve a future of peace, security and coexistence. In this regard I wish to commend your Conference for what it will do this afternoon in attention to the worsening situation of workers in the occupied territories. Nothing demonstrates more urgency than the need to bring this occupation to an end.

My friends, centuries ago human beings thought the earth was flat; that view did not change until brave souls set out to test the boundaries of the known world. Today the echoes of the old flat-earth philosophy remain. We hear them in the complacent voices of those who are satisfied with a two-dimensional world, where the minority sit safely in the centre in prosperity, and billions are forced to live in poverty and violence out on the edge. Well, I believe that the flat earth is history, I believe the future belongs to those who see the world in its full dimension, an undivided sphere, whose every point is a centre, whose every person is entitled to prosper and succeed in peace and security. There is an old maxim: by the work one knows the workman. By our work, the future will know our generation. Were we really committed to peace, to equality, to justice? Well, it is in our hands to create what we know is right — together, in partnership, in mutual respect. I believe we can.

The PRESIDENT — Your Majesty, the standing ovation that has greeted your powerful address is a clear testimony of how well all of us in this assembly have received it.

Listening to your address, one cannot fail to note the abundant hope that your Majesty has in mankind

even in situations that appear hopeless. Your commitment to the ideals of the International Labour Organization and your practical pursuit of their fulfilment is well documented.

Your conviction that people need to be given the chance to pursue a better tomorrow for themselves, and future generations, has not only benefited the people of Jordan, but has also been a role model for many people worldwide. We know that your focus on human development has been the main driving force behind the Kingdom's social and economic development and this underscores the benefits that wise leadership can bestow upon a populace.

Your personal involvement in advancing civil liberties in your country has made Jordan one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East. The support you have given to the principles of human rights, and your appreciation of the importance of tripartism are well received by all of us in this conference hall, and will no doubt, be emulated.

Child labour, your Majesty, and especially its worst forms, is an evil that all people of the world must fight in totality. We understand her Majesty, Queen Rania, and yourself are very much engaged in its elimination. This is a source of great inspiration to all of us and in

particular to the ILO's efforts to combat child labour worldwide.

Your Majesty, your relentless commitment to the restoration of peace in the Middle East is well known, and will undoubtedly contribute to the establishment of a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We share Jordan's belief, as expressed during the Red Sea Summit, which you chaired, that the "road map" represents the best chance of achieving meaningful peace in the region.

Recent events in the region notwithstanding, your Majesty must not abandon further effort in the quest for peace in the region because sooner or later the protagonists will, like Tom and Jerry in the famous Walt Disney cartoon strip, ultimately realize that working together is more beneficial than fighting each other all the time.

Your Majesty has a background that straddles both Islam and Christianity and I am sure you can quickly find a verse in the Holy Koran that matches the Sermon on the Mount in the Holy Bible: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the Children of God".

(The Conference adjourned at 11.30 a.m.)

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