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Forum on Decent Work and Social Justice in Times of Crisis

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Tripartite partners, comrades in the trade union movement, friends, guests and to all others, good morning.

Ninety years of unrelenting efforts to avoid a third world war, revolutions and other armed conflicts by promoting social justice and internationally-recognized labor and human rights, through the unique means of tripartism, is indeed basis for congratulations to all concerned!

We have a small footnote, though. If after nine decades, we are still “Working for Social Justice”, and if that will still be the ILO’s mandate for the future (hopefully not for the next 90 years), then such tripartite efforts have not been sufficient indeed.

It would seem that the efforts of governments and employers for the benefit of their own respective sectors’ specific and overlapping interests were far greater, than those directed towards what would favor the tripartite sectors equally.

To continue to work for social justice, is recognition of the reality that social injustice persists today and the foreseeable future.

To make social justice possible, those responsible for social injustice, those accountable for social crimes, must be confronted and duly penalized. In the same manner that those guilty of genocide, mass murder, widespread destruction or even terrorism were made to account.

Now more than ever, social injustices have been perpetrated thru economic and financial crimes. Those responsible for the current global financial crisis, causing millions worldwide to lose their jobs, homes, and life savings, and denying them and their children a brighter future than the one facing them now.

Those advocating neo-liberal globalization, free trade and financial liberalization hard-core ideologues, especially economists who have never been held accountable for the damage they have inflicted the world over, in many national economies and workplaces.

All of them should be meted commensurate suffering in the same way or amount that they have directly or indirectly inflicted or caused to happen. The erosion of job security and the increasing prevalence of precarious work, the deterioration of working and living conditions, even the further weakening of the trade union movement, and many more, must be acknowledged to have been worsened by their greed.

This ILO forum may not be the best venue to raise these issues, but these need to be expressed within the ILO as well. In other fora, such as the World Trade Organization, labor and trade unions are considered “negative” terms and we are not welcome there. Anyway, I hope that the ILO’s Member States will also take the necessary steps so that the appropriate international court of justice would be set up as designated eventually to try such social crimes.

Here in the Philippines, I hope that our partner Government, specifically the present executive branch invites an ILO High-Level delegation to investigate at least the killings of trade unionists and others; that the legislature amends the Martial law Labor Code to remove the shackles forced on workers, and that the Supreme Court continues to uphold the Constitutional rights to job security, self-organization, collective bargaining and concerted action.

As regards our partner Filipino employers, I can only urge them to honor their ILO commitments and actually afford workers job security and free exercise of basic trade union rights.

To our fellow trade unionists, we’d like to express our continuing willingness to work with you, especially under the banner of the ILO, towards our common goal of decent work and social justice.

In closing, once more happy 90th birthday to the International Labor Organization (ILO)!