



Governing Body

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High-level Section

HL

Minutes of the High-Level Section

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Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization

1. Proposals aimed at promoting greater coherence within the multilateral system

(The consideration of this item is deferred to the 341st Session (March 2021).)

Strategic Policy Segment

2. COVID-19 and the world of work (GB.340/HL/2)

1. **The Director-General** urged the Governing Body to agree to launch a major initiative for human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which would include the adoption of an outcome document by the 109th Session (2021) of the International Labour Conference. The world was calling on the ILO to act in response to the devastating economic and social impact of the pandemic and the appalling hardship in the world of work, and the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work was a valuable instrument on which to base its action. The proposed initiative for human-centred recovery would give the Organization the means to accelerate and scale up its action. It would be a unifying, rallying idea to catalyse action, mobilize resources and political will, promote cooperation, increase the visibility of the key issues identified, and enable the tripartite constituency to play its role effectively. With the overall direction of the substantive work already set, the next step was to proceed with strategic implementation, at scale, with urgency and on the basis of the platform already established. The UN General Assembly had decided the previous day to convene a COVID-19 Response Summit in early December, and it was to be hoped that the ILO could report to the Secretary-General that it had decided on an initiative to play its unique role in bringing employers' and workers' organizations together alongside governments to ensure that international labour standards were central to the process.
2. The Governing Body had decided by correspondence on the agenda for the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference, and the Report of the Director-General would be devoted to the impact of the crisis. That Report would provide one option for submitting a draft outcome document to the Conference. Further consideration would need to be given to those arrangements and, in line with the draft decision proposed to the Governing Body, to the alternative options. The Office would organize consultations on the substance as well as the process of the outcome document in advance of the next session of the Governing Body in order to achieve as much convergence as possible on what would be submitted to the Conference.
3. **The Chairperson** proposed to suspend the provision of the Standing Orders under which Governments that were not members of the Governing Body could not take the floor, to which the Governing Body agreed.
4. **The Employer spokesperson** said that there was general agreement that the world was dealing with a crisis of enormous proportions with far-reaching consequences, regardless of borders, levels of development, race or gender. However, the disruption brought an opportunity for the ILO and its tripartite constituents to bring some certainty, to demonstrate the value of tripartism and multilateralism, and to consolidate the ILO as the multilateral leader in the COVID-19 response on labour and social issues. It was more urgent than ever to work together to minimize the health, economic, social and employment impacts of the crisis. The effectiveness of the response would largely

depend on coherence between the plans and the actions implemented, and the coordination among the constituents and within the Office itself. Every plan must be guided by the Centenary Declaration and be coherent with the strategic plan of the ILO, the Conference discussions and the programme and budget. Effective public-private partnerships had never been more necessary, as companies, governments and civil society could not afford to work in silos. Cooperation and coordination among international organizations, multilateral actors and the business community remained vital.

5. Building back stronger required a focus on five pillars derived from the Centenary Declaration. However, the proposals in the Office document did not take fully into account the urgent need to foster productive employment through efficient policies. It was unclear what was meant by “establish a limited number of platforms that combine the various tools in the ILO toolbox”; that was insufficient for the ILO to remain relevant, and coherence should already exist. Furthermore, the ILO did not need to position itself as the leader in labour policy guidance, as it already had that role. The contribution of the tripartite constituents in implementing such policies should also not be overlooked. The ILO had to identify critical action on the basis of the real needs of constituents at the local level. It would be useful to know how the ILO regional offices could provide better, localized support at the country level and how the UN reform and the role of the UN resident coordinators could be leveraged in a coherent manner with ILO activities.
6. The Employers’ group supported the statement that the ILO should discuss and identify action to assure financial sustainability of social protection systems. The ILO should adopt a rigorous approach based on practical experience and precise demographic and financial projections, which integrated relevant work of other national and international institutions. The role of development banks and central banks had been crucial for sustainability during the pandemic. In the context of a human-centred approach to the multilateral system, the ILO had to effectively communicate its added value and position itself better.
7. The Employers’ group expressed disappointment that the document did not add anything on skills development, in line with outcome 5 of the programme and budget preview, as it was critical to employability, productivity, adaptation to labour market demands and lifting people out of poverty. There was also little mention of productivity, which was at odds with the message in the information document on decent work and productivity.¹ The ILO urgently required a proper strategy to enhance productivity growth. It should also strive to harness the full potential of technological progress and embrace the future in the framework of fundamental principles and rights at work. Greater importance should be attached to addressing the growing informality resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, and the corresponding lack of social protection. That required the development of a deeper and more practical understanding of informality, the adoption of intelligent policies to prevent enterprises from turning to the informal economy, further efforts to boost the creation and expansion of business in the formal economy, and the adoption of innovative policy approaches to progressively provide social protection coverage.
8. The ILO should foster the development of comprehensive, efficient and flexible policies for job creation. As sustained economic recovery would be largely led by the private sector, it was vital for governments to support business resilience, sustainability,

¹ GB.340/POL/3.

entrepreneurship and employability. Inclusive access to labour markets, the internet, entrepreneurship and financing remained key to enhancing economic growth. A human-centred response required a focus on investing in young people and women, entrepreneurship, building back greener, protecting occupational health and safety, and promoting social dialogue.

9. While the Employers' group supported discussing the COVID-19 crisis at the International Labour Conference, it emphasized that there was no need for any new initiative. The group therefore proposed amending subparagraph (a) of the draft decision to replace the reference to a possible initiative with "an accelerated implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration" and to add, at the end of the subparagraph, "through full, productive and freely-chosen employment". On that basis the group insisted on the pertinence of developing a specific outcome on the COVID-19 response for adoption at the Conference.
10. **The Worker spokesperson** said that there was general agreement that urgently implementing the agenda laid down in the Centenary Declaration was central to addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and moving towards a socially just and economically sustainable recovery. In many sectors and workplaces, the COVID-19 health crisis had also become a health and safety crisis, which confirmed once again the need to ensure that the human right to life and health and safety was also recognized as a fundamental right in the ILO.
11. As cuts in public healthcare spending and privatization of public services had undermined countries' capacity to tackle the crisis, there could be no return to "business as usual" in the recovery. Pre-crisis inequalities and the growth of insecurity and precarity in both the formal and informal economies had been exacerbated by the pandemic, leaving many workers unprotected and in dire poverty. It was therefore crucial to provide for universal social protection and labour protection floors immediately. Women had been disproportionately affected, despite often being categorized as essential workers. So too had people from ethnic minorities, migrant workers and refugees. A transformative agenda for gender equality, and more generally for addressing discrimination and racism, must therefore be part of any recovery package. With closures of schools and a lack of digital access, many young people worldwide had been deprived of their prospects for a better future; without appropriate action, that would lead to dire employment prospects.
12. During the crisis, social dialogue had been undermined in many countries and regions, and violations of trade union rights had increased. Therefore, social dialogue, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, both as fundamental rights and enabling rights, must be at the centre of any ILO action.
13. The Workers' group supported a strong leading role for the ILO in the recovery and in building resilience. Universal social protection, decent work with a floor of rights for all workers, recognition of health and safety as a fundamental right, a transformative agenda for gender equality, a just transition for climate and technological change, social dialogue, reinvestment in vital public services and a sustainable and rights-based approach to multilateral reform were all key elements of the Centenary Declaration, and they were preconditions for a sustainable recovery, building resilience and advancing the renewal of the social contract. Yet those elements did not feature prominently enough in the document. There could be no human-centred approach to recovery without a rights-based approach.

14. Part I of the Office document began with a reference to “building back better”; instead of going backwards, the focus should be on moving forwards towards a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable growth model. The document regarded standards and social dialogue as tools and placed them at the same level as research and technical cooperation. The Workers’ group strongly disagreed with that approach. Standards and social dialogue were two pillars of the Decent Work Agenda and needed to be placed at the core of any implementation strategy related to recovery and resilience-building, alongside employment and social protection. This was fully in line with the Centenary Declaration that reconfirmed the importance for the ILO to act based on its mandate for social justice and its normative framework. The growing precarity, insecurity and inequalities in the world of work, exacerbated by the pandemic, should be put into the context of the increasing erosion of the employment relationship and labour rights across the world. Various editions of the *ILO Monitor on COVID-19 and the world of work* had shown that workers who were not adequately protected suffered the most from the economic and social crisis.
15. The Workers’ group agreed that quality employment creation had to be a priority. That required political commitment to put in place policies that promoted an inclusive and sustainable growth model which generated decent work. The document should therefore have emphasized the central role played by international labour standards and labour market institutions such as collective bargaining, as well as the need for macroeconomic and industrial policies that prioritized the creation of decent work. The majority of workers in developing countries were still engaged in informal work, and the crisis was exacerbating the situation by shortening global supply chains. The issue of ensuring decent work in global supply chains must therefore be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Workers’ group insisted on the need to improve responsible business conduct in times of crisis, bringing the principles of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) into the ILO’s work on responding to the pandemic. Macroeconomic and industrial policies should therefore be more focused on decent work, and not only include investment in infrastructure and sustainable enterprises but also encompass the care economy, agriculture and other key sectors. ILO work on sustainable enterprises continued to lack a focus on decent working conditions and could thus not create a virtuous circle of inclusive and sustainable growth. Supply-side measures such as skills development could not alone create employment.
16. With regard to Part II of the document, the Workers’ group noted with concern the lack of concrete proposals to address the fundamental challenges to effective social dialogue, including collective bargaining. Workers’ organizations were hardly mentioned in the document, and the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining must be addressed much more explicitly. With regard to the proposed “special vehicles of global social dialogue”, there was a risk that that approach might dilute the role of the social partners in decision-making. It was regrettable that the suggested networked approach was geared towards corporations and made no mention of workers, nor of the crucial role that the public sector and quality public services had to play in recovery and building resilience.
17. In the section on financing and economic policy, a much larger area of work should be devoted to tackling the deterioration of tax bases and public finances, particularly in developing countries. Measures to counter growing tax evasion and foster tax justice, as well as taxes that addressed negative externalities, digital taxes and wealth taxes, should be the main instruments for financing the recovery and delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The positive impact of blended finance operations on

development had been disputed, notably its supposed positive effects on development, and the ILO should consider not only the opportunities but the challenges it presented. The ILO should not only assist governments in assessing the employment effect of different investments in economic sectors but also focus on the quality dimension of employment, including environmental sustainability and the potential offered by job creation in the public sector. With respect to sustainable enterprise, the ILO should also consider the quality of the employment created and environmental sustainability. On universal social protection, the primary challenge was to review public finances to ensure that those systems were adequate and extend social protection for all.

18. The Workers' group supported a more central role for the ILO in international policy coordination and development cooperation, and welcomed the proposal to forge a new consensus with other international economic organizations on a human-centred growth and development path, framed by the Centenary Declaration and SDG 8. However, international labour standards should be a key aspect of the interaction with and coherence between organizations. Lastly, the Workers' group requested clarification of what the Office was suggesting with regard to development cooperation and how the proposed initiative would provide the organizing framework for the ILO's activities as agreed in the programme and budget.
19. **Speaking on behalf of the Africa group**, a Government representative of Namibia noted that the pre-COVID-19 positive growth paths of many African countries and their trajectories for structural transformation had been dramatically impeded by the multifaceted impact of the pandemic. In addition to the effects of the crisis listed in the document, she mentioned its devastating impact on the business continuity of enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises; and the loss of members of employers' organizations and trade unions, which threatened both their viability and effective social dialogue.
20. The response to the pandemic advocated by the ILO through four elements set out in the document should be vigorously pursued in Africa. She called on other Member States to provide support to African countries in generating real-time labour market statistics and on the ILO to intensify the campaign for the ratification and implementation of international labour standards and good practices, including strengthening of occupational safety and health (OSH). Further details should be provided of the relationship between the COVID-19 initiative and Decent Work Country Programmes.
21. African countries were determined to seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 and to build forward. At the level of the African Union, a priority was the accelerated implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. The ILO could help Member States to achieve their national development priorities in the aftermath of COVID-19 by, for example, elucidating the economic significance of expanded social protection; illustrating the importance of the care economy; sharing best practices on the role of labour inspection to minimize the spread and impact of COVID-19; and strengthening social dialogue as the most effective means to achieve sustainable social and economic development.
22. The initiative would facilitate the successful implementation of the Centenary Declaration and give renewed impetus for achieving SDG 8 and other related SDGs. The group supported the draft decision as set out in the document, but was open to discussing possible amendments; for example, it could support the amendment proposed by the Employers' group, with the exception of the words "through full productive and freely-chosen employment".

- 23. Speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC)**, a Government representative of Barbados said that the agenda set out by the Centenary Declaration was more relevant than ever. In the programme and budget and the ILO's Strategic Plan for 2022–25, a framework was already in place to implement the Declaration's forward-looking mandate. The Governing Body should strive to enrich that framework in a coherent manner, avoiding duplications or distractions from the priorities that had been collectively identified. GRULAC did not, therefore, see the value added in launching a new initiative for recovery as proposed in the document.
- 24.** The document included some of the topics covered by the ILO's COVID-19 response, such as the need to enhance social protection, strengthen social dialogue and adapt work arrangements. However, it did not address certain elements of the Centenary Declaration, such as the importance of skills and lifelong learning, the impact of digitalization, the need for an ambitious gender perspective, and the challenge of informality. He cautioned against reopening negotiations that might upset the delicate balance of the Declaration achieved just one year earlier. Without a dedicated committee to address the initiative during the International Labour Conference in June 2021, it would be difficult to ensure a full, inclusive and transparent negotiation process. Referring to the proposal to hold a substantive discussion on the item at the 341st Session, he recalled that the Governing Body already had a full agenda for that session and might face real constraints as a result of such a decision.
- 25.** As a way forward, GRULAC proposed including in the programme and budget the four main responses to the COVID-19 crisis that the Office had advocated. Other elements set out in the document could be taken into account. GRULAC supported the amendment to the draft decision presented by the Employers' group.
- 26. Speaking on behalf of the Asia and Pacific group (ASPAG)**, a Government representative of Indonesia said that greater solidarity and more coordinated efforts were needed to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented a major challenge to the implementation of the Centenary Declaration and the achievement of SDG 8. ASPAG therefore supported the Office's efforts to develop an initiative for human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis aligned with the Centenary Declaration. Any such initiative should be as inclusive as possible and cognizant of national contexts and needs. The three-track human-centred approach should include recommendations for the development of policies on employment promotion, skills development, lifelong learning and social protection, and promote decent work for all workers, especially those in sectors most affected by the pandemic and those in marginalized groups. It should also be divided into short-, medium- and long-term strategies.
- 27.** The promotion of a human-centred agenda at the international level would require a robust multilateral approach. Inequalities between and within countries were deepening; the Office should therefore strengthen its institutional capacity to work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that governments and enterprises would have the resources they needed to invest in their people. She called on the Office to engage with and support regional organizations, which were well-placed to foster multilateralism, to address the pandemic's impact on labour and employment.
- 28.** The proposal to establish networks of relevant actors to catalyse action and alignment on the implementation of the Centenary Declaration had merit, provided that the expertise and experiences to be shared in any such networks would be balanced in terms of geographical representation and gender so as to remain relevant to constituents. The

Office should also avoid replicating the efforts of other platforms to minimize unnecessary expenditure.

29. The Office should furnish constituents with further details of the proposals and hold tripartite consultations prior to the 341st Session of the Governing Body and, as necessary, following the Office's submission of proposals at that session. Those consultations should focus on the measures to be endorsed, the discussion to be held at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference, ways to fund the initiative during an economic downturn and ways to organize the Office's work. She therefore suggested amending the draft decision in paragraph 44 to add the wording "and to conduct intersessional tripartite consultations prior to the 341st Session" to the end of paragraph 44(b). She expressed support for the amendment to be proposed by the group of industrialized market economy countries (IMEC) and said that her group was open to holding further discussions on the amendment proposed by the Employers' group.
30. **Speaking on behalf of the group of industrialized market economy countries (IMEC)**, a Government representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland welcomed the Office document and agreed that the Centenary Declaration was more relevant than ever. Noting that the ILO had a responsibility to take a leadership role in the socio-economic recovery from the crisis, she commended the Office's pandemic response thus far. However, it should now formulate a specific plan of action on its response and incorporate that plan into its broader work, its implementation of the Centenary Declaration and the proposed Programme and Budget for 2022–23. The Office should leverage its mandate, the Decent Work Agenda, its expertise and lessons learned to formulate concrete measures, policies and actions that promoted recovery, addressed the needs of vulnerable groups and those hardest hit by the pandemic and reflected the different needs of ILO constituents.
31. Her group broadly supported ASPAG's proposed amendment to the draft decision. The aim of the intersessional tripartite consultations called for therein should be to identify a path to consensus at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference while maintaining the work of the committees on inequalities in the world of work, social protection, and skills and lifelong learning. However, she suggested that paragraph 44(b) should be further amended to read "to organize tripartite consultations to identify possible alternatives for consideration by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (June 2021), and with a view to presenting appropriate proposals in this regard to the Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021);".
32. **Speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States**, a Government representative of Germany said that North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Norway aligned themselves with her statement. She welcomed the Office's proposals for a possible initiative for human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which should operationalize the Centenary Declaration and translate the recent lessons learned into action. In addition, she called on the ILO to play a leading role in the socio-economic response to the pandemic and leverage its unique capacity to work with the social partners and relevant stakeholders to provide the basis for a coordinated, transparent and evidence-based response to the crisis.
33. A fair recovery from the crisis would be contingent on the promotion of inclusive labour markets and quality jobs with the aim of reducing growing inequalities. Well-functioning social dialogue was key to that endeavour. The crisis had also underscored the need to prioritize OSH and integrate the right to safe and healthy working conditions within the ILO framework on fundamental principles and rights at work. The Office should

incorporate a stronger rights-based approach into the initiative, given the threats posed by the crisis to labour rights, and factor global supply chains into its response, since some of the most vulnerable workers were being disadvantaged further as a result of disruption caused by the pandemic.

34. The human-centred approach to financing and economic policy discussed in the document was encouraging and should receive further attention. Given the importance of robust and sustainable social protection schemes to a strong and inclusive economic recovery, the initiative should promote the ILO's mandate in fostering access to social protection for all, including through appropriate partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and should include concrete measures aimed at mobilizing the necessary financial resources to that end, and to support just transitions to green and digital economies.
35. The Office should remain alert to the risks involved in private sector financing of innovative solutions for sustainable infrastructure to avoid contributing to inequalities stemming from the unfair distribution of gains. Public services should also be appropriately resourced. Since building back better would demand the systematic integration of environmental, social and governance considerations into corporate governance, the Office should provide concrete proposals on how to overcome challenges in that area. The ILO should also seek to increase interaction and coherence with other international organizations in line with the ongoing UN reform.
36. The Office's proposals should be rooted in the Centenary Declaration and include a plan of action and guidance setting out a menu of measures, tools, policies and actions to underpin its work and that of constituents and international stakeholders. She supported the draft decision as amended by ASPAG and IMEC.
37. **Speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)**, a Government representative of Finland expressed support for the EU statement, and welcomed the Office document. She said that the COVID-19 pandemic was threatening social cohesion and social justice by accentuating inequalities already present in the world of work. Multilateral cooperation would be key to success in the global pandemic response, and the ILO should continue to be at the forefront of that response. She described efforts made by governments in her region to tackle the pandemic, noting that the social partners shared responsibility for supporting workers and employers and that well-functioning social dialogue and social protection systems were key. The Nordic countries recognized that ensuring safety in workplaces was essential and supported efforts to integrate the right to safe and healthy working conditions into the ILO framework on fundamental principles and rights at work. It was important to adapt to new ways of working and help people who had lost their jobs to obtain new skills that matched demands in sectors with labour shortages. The gender dimension should be taken into account in all COVID-19 response measures in the light of the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women.
38. **A Government representative of the Russian Federation** said that the principles in the Centenary Declaration had proved helpful and relevant to resolving the effects of the pandemic on employment, thanked the Office for providing invaluable information during the crisis and outlined some of the measures his Government had adopted to protect its citizens and limit the spread of the infection. A new programme of cooperation for 2021–24 between the ILO and the Russian Federation was being developed, which would be founded upon a human-centred approach to employment, the strengthening of social dialogue, and occupational safety and health.

39. **A Government representative of Lesotho** highlighted the plight of migrant workers affected by the closure of businesses and borders. The implementation of the Centenary Declaration would be key to mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the world of work and should be accelerated by the Office. Member States should build resilient health and social protection systems, invest in digital transformation to facilitate remote work and work together to implement recovery initiatives coherently. She thanked the Office for helping her Government to develop communication tools and OSH guidelines on COVID-19 in the workplace.
40. **A Government representative of Bangladesh** said that the ILO had to play an active role in economic and social recovery to ensure full, productive and decent employment. The Government of Bangladesh had allocated funding to support businesses and pay salaries and had provided COVID-19 telemedicine services. The ILO had supported the Government's adoption of standard guidelines to ensure occupational health and safety during the pandemic. Tripartite social dialogue continued to play a key role. The ILO should: call on buyers not to cancel their orders and to continue to fulfil existing contractual obligations; ensure the retention of jobs of migrant workers; and promote priority market access for weaker economies. All constituents must work together to realize the Centenary Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, despite the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She reaffirmed her Government's commitment to ensuring labour rights and building a world free of COVID-19.
41. **A Government representative of Ecuador** underscored the importance of a human-centred and integrated approach, as the pandemic had affected all areas of life, including employment. COVID-19 was another challenge to add to those included in the Centenary Declaration, which particularly affected women, young people, persons with a disability, and those working in the informal economy. The Government of Ecuador had passed legislation to provide tax relief to small businesses, promote entrepreneurship and innovation, and encourage foreign investment, to reduce the economic impact of the pandemic. Several contract types were in use to preserve jobs, including by reducing the working day, targeting short-term employment to meet employers' needs, introducing new contractual arrangements, and enabling young people to undertake additional training. The wider introduction of teleworking had reduced costs and improved mobility and productivity, and was a step towards an inclusive working environment that guaranteed compliance with rights and obligations. However, more needed to be done, particularly concerning gender equality, youth employment and the transition to formality. Amending standards alone was not enough to develop a long-term national action plan to bring about structural change. The Ministry of Labour had begun a national dialogue for the future of work in Ecuador and recognized the need for participation of representatives of all forms of work, alongside international experts. When creating decent jobs, social dialogue was essential, as highlighted in the Centenary Declaration. The future of work was the responsibility of all constituents. He supported the amendment to the draft decision proposed by the Employer spokesperson.
42. **A Government representative of Ethiopia** said that the proposed initiative would fully harness the potential of the Centenary Declaration. In collaboration with stakeholders, social partners and the international community, the Government of Ethiopia had established a tripartite COVID-19 taskforce and workplace protocol to ensure employment retention and business continuity, launched a regional initiative to provide medical equipment across the continent, and called for financial support and debt relief for African countries. National measures had been adopted to provide tax relief to

affected businesses, establish food banks, support returning migrant workers and protect the garment industry. The Government was also working with the UN to develop a priority framework for socio-economic response and recovery and was starting to implement the global Call to Action to protect garment workers' livelihoods and sustainability. However, countries like hers still faced significant challenges in resource mobilization and institutional capacity. She called on the ILO to step up its efforts to collaborate with other UN agencies in that regard, and to provide technical and financial support to its constituents.

- 43. A Government representative of Japan** emphasized that the knowledge and expertise shared by the ILO had proven useful during the response phase of the pandemic and supported the Office's proposal to deepen discussion on human-centred recovery from COVID-19. Mindful of the need for an equitable geographical and gender balance, he believed that intersessional tripartite consultations were necessary to develop concrete measures for the possible initiative. There should then be an opportunity for its meaningful discussion at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference. The arrangements for that session would need to take into account the unpredictable global context of COVID-19. He asked how the Office intended to mobilize resources to implement the proposal. The ILO's leadership role in COVID-19 recovery was welcome, and he proposed appointing a liaison in each department to promote Office-wide collaboration in each policy area. The Government of Japan was considering how it could contribute to the global recovery through ILO technical cooperation programmes. Measures had been taken in his country to protect employment, including strengthening retention subsidies for employers. Sharing best practice was essential when developing the recovery initiative, and the ILO should continue to update the COVID-19 information hub.
- 44. A Government representative of Eswatini** commended the social partners for partnering with governments to support difficult resource reallocation decisions during the pandemic. The proposed initiative highlighted the implications of the pandemic on the ILO and how the ILO could lead the recovery process. He commended the Office's support to constituents as they sought to promote social justice during the pandemic. The data and guidance obtained from the ILO's knowledge products had assisted in the development of national employment contingency measures and response programmes. He welcomed the support provided to his and other governments as they sought to transition to long-term and sustainable livelihood programmes and pandemic security schemes. With the support of the ILO, his Government was developing a national unemployment insurance scheme and had strengthened its occupational safety and health response to COVID-19. Constituents required further assistance to obtain information technology equipment and support in order to develop teleworking, which would facilitate employment and social dialogue. The ILO should also promote efforts to stimulate the economy, support enterprises, create employment, prevent job losses, strengthen social dialogue institutions, and provide universal social protection floors. COVID-19 affected the well-being of every individual, and a human-centred approach was therefore required in response, as embodied in the Centenary Declaration.
- 45. A Government representative of Barbados** commended the ILO for highlighting the need for a human-centred approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and for its abiding support for multilateralism. The ILO must retain its leadership role and ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable were heard, including small island developing States. However, GDP should not be the only measure of vulnerability. Social justice and social protection should be at the centre of national growth and development strategies, and social protection should include the work of civil society alongside formal social security

mechanisms. Civil society representatives should therefore also be included in social dialogue on that subject. In Barbados, a national tripartite committee had been established to manage the pandemic response, and social partners worked with the Government to guide decision-making. He outlined the range of measures taken to support workers and businesses, including financial support, reallocation of land, expediting tax refunds and travel exemptions for civil society organizations supporting vulnerable people. The Government had enacted legislation to prevent workplace discrimination and raise awareness of violence and harassment in the world of work, and was developing more detailed guidance to expand on occupational safety and health legislation. The labour inspectorate had partnered with the Government's COVID-19 Monitoring Unit. He supported the four elements of the social and economic response to the crisis proposed by the ILO.

46. **A Government representative of the Republic of Korea** thanked the Office for hosting the timely and meaningful ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work in July 2020. Future ILO strategies should be aligned with the Centenary Declaration and a human-centred approach. He outlined his Government's initiatives to prepare for the post-COVID-19 world of work, including the "Korean New Deal Initiative" and the establishment of a universal social protection system. He emphasized that, to effectively respond to the global COVID-19 challenge, cooperation between ILO Member States must be strengthened and the Office must assume a more central role in facilitating global social dialogue and international cooperation. His Government supported the amendment and subamendment to the draft decision made by ASPAG and IMEC respectively.
47. **A Government representative of the United States of America** emphasized that the ILO had a responsibility to provide leadership in response to the pandemic. To that end, her Government would strongly support a specific pandemic response outcome from the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2021, which should set out measures, policies and actions to help ILO constituents to formulate and carry out their responses.
48. **A Government representative of Germany** said that a collective response to the crisis based on the Centenary Declaration must be finalized at the 109th Session of the Conference in 2021. His Government would support an ambitious initiative. The response must address how to successfully confront the effects of the pandemic and how to strengthen the resilience of the world of work in order to achieve strong social protection systems, human-centred jobs, fair wages and resilient supply chains that observed core labour standards. It was the ILO's task to translate the provision of adequate protection for the life and health of workers in all occupations, as stated in the Declaration of Philadelphia, into legislation.
49. **A Government representative of Thailand** outlined some measures that his Government had taken to minimize the impact of the pandemic on employment and the national economy. Those measures included enhanced social protection and support for affected enterprises, young people and the unemployed, new graduates and migrant workers. Implementation of the Thailand Decent Work Country Programme 2019–2021 continued and he expressed thanks to the Office for its collaboration with the Thai Government and the social partners to that end. ILO initiatives for recovery from the impact of COVID-19 were very welcome.
50. **A Government representative of France** said that an appropriate balance must be found between accelerating the implementation of the Centenary Declaration and fully mobilizing the ILO to respond to the current crisis. Individual rights and international

labour standards must be upheld. She welcomed the universal ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), which demonstrated the positive impact the ILO and its constituents were capable of making. In particular, Alliance 8.7 was an example of a platform that could bring together governments, employers, workers, civil society and multilateral partners. To address the current crisis, the ILO must focus on economic and fiscal policies that protected not only human rights at work, but also jobs and the expertise necessary for sustainable business activities. In that regard, she took note with great interest of the actions undertaken by the ILO Regional Office for Africa. She called for a global response to the pandemic that focused on universal access to social protection.

- 51. A Government representative of India** said that her Government had provided financial support to those most affected by the pandemic in India, including women, migrant workers, small enterprises and farmers. She welcomed the focus in the Office's human-centred proposal on sustainable social protection systems, infrastructure and enterprise but stressed that focus should also be given to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the cooperative sector. The Office should conduct relevant research in order to analyse the impact of the quality of public health and social security systems on nations' resilience to the pandemic and their economic growth, and also to understand the impact of infrastructure and industrial financing options on employment in the context of implementing the SDGs. The Office should create a knowledge-sharing centre for best practices on ensuring decent work and social protection in the care and digital sectors and the informal economy, and should promote greater coherence in the multilateral system in addressing economic, social and environmental challenges.
- 52. A Government representative of Switzerland** endorsed the Office's proposal as it was based on the Centenary Declaration, focused on relevant issues, would allow the Office to target its research and data, and contained a human-centred financial approach, which should be developed in the months to follow. In addition, it offered an opportunity to strengthen international coherence. The title of the proposal should be further discussed by tripartite constituents. Her Government suggested that the Global Jobs Pact adopted in 2009 could be used as a foundation. Her Government supported the amendment and subamendment to the draft decision made by ASPAG and IMEC respectively.
- 53. A Government representative of Australia** strongly agreed that the ILO must develop a targeted response to the global pandemic during the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2021. It would be important to hold tripartite consultations prior to the 341st Session of the Governing Body in March 2021 in order to ensure all views were taken into consideration in the formulation of a response. She recalled the Declaration of Philadelphia, which underscored the need for continuous and concerted international effort with the participation of the social partners. The ILO must deploy its unique features of tripartism, social dialogue and international labour standards to lead a response, and be seen to be responding, to the profound changes brought about by the crisis.
- 54. A Government representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that the ILO must play a leading role in providing effective solutions to the crisis, based on the Centenary Declaration and with due consideration of lessons learned. It was extremely important to adopt guidance and a plan of action at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2021 that set out practical measures, policies and actions that constituents, the Office and the international community could draw on to promote recovery and decent work. The Office should

present appropriate proposals at the 341st Session of the Governing Body in March 2021, guided by prior tripartite consultations in that respect, with a view to reaching consensus at the International Labour Conference and demonstrating the ILO's leadership on the global response to and recovery from the pandemic.

- 55. A Government representative of Brazil** outlined some of the measures his Government had adopted to alleviate the effects of the pandemic on workers and their families. The ILO could play an important role in supporting national efforts to recover from the effects of the pandemic and should do so within the mandate and instruments already available. Having heard the Director-General's reassurances, he nonetheless reemphasized his Government's concern that the creation of new platforms to contribute to a human-centred recovery risked diverting human and financial resources from existing activities while having only a limited effect on efforts to recover from the crisis, and also risked giving the undesirable impression that the ILO was abandoning or downplaying the Centenary Declaration in favour of more fashionable measures. He encouraged the Governing Body to deepen tripartite discussions in order to jointly identify the best way forward.
- 56. A Government representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran** said that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a serious threat to society. Workable initiatives must be devised based on existing documents to address the extensive implications and assist States in devising recovery plans. The human-centred approach of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work provided a solid basis for navigating the crisis, although it must be adapted to the evolving situation and specific national circumstances. Member States must share experiences and best practices in mitigating the social and economic impact of the pandemic, and the ILO should establish an inventory of those practices and lessons learned. The obstacles to recovery must be identified, including unilateral economic and banking sanctions and embargos that stripped many individuals of their basic right to decent work and contributed to inequality. All Member States should enjoy equal access to international recovery initiatives. The digital divide, whether it owed to a lack of access to tools, services and technology or to the deliberate denial of access to virtual initiatives for political reasons, must be eradicated. The COVID-19 pandemic, while a reminder of the fragility of human life, also demonstrated human resilience.
- 57. A Government representative of Belgium** said that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated inequality, thereby threatening social peace. Only those countries with the appropriate financial resources and social policies would be able to adopt measures to support employment, economies and health sectors. Even prior to the pandemic, his country had emphasized the need for a profound change to working methods, an objective embraced by the document. The ILO must spearhead the recovery, and its constitutional mandate provided a framework for ensuring that the post-pandemic world was inclusive. The Centenary Declaration would constitute the backbone of the initiative, which must produce practical and concrete measures to promote decent work. There should be coherence and inclusivity among the various actors, all of whom, including those in the digital economy, must unite to implement the ILO's conclusions.
- 58. A Government representative of Argentina** said that there was a need to re-evaluate international relations. The pandemic's effects were most keenly felt by the vulnerable, and the consequences of poverty in developing countries had been worsened, affecting social peace and bringing to mind the Preamble of the ILO's Constitution. The social contract must be re-evaluated, and the ILO's leadership strengthened so as to build partnerships to develop policies for sustained growth, the proceeds of which must be distributed appropriately and at an equal pace so as to ensure a just social order. In

response to the pandemic, his Government had implemented a range of person-centred measures consistent with the principles set forth in the Centenary Declaration.

- 59. A Government representative of Portugal** said that the pandemic had not affected regions, countries, social groups and economic sectors equally. Regional and global guidance was needed, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, along with a strengthened multilateral system and a stronger leading global role for the ILO. Occupational safety and health, human rights and decent work in global supply chains, and universal social protection must be prioritized, and his Government reaffirmed its commitment to those matters, particularly to the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work and the Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All. There was a need for sectoral tripartite guidance on the future of work in the most affected sectors, particularly tourism and leisure, and the next International Labour Conference must provide tripartite guidance on the implementation of the principles and priorities of the Centenary Declaration in the face of the crisis.
- 60. A Government representative of Qatar** said that the Organization played an important role in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic, whose effects on the world of work would last for many years. Commending the ILO's technical assistance to the constituents and research into the effects of the pandemic, he noted that economic growth would return only through a coherent national and international response that took a multilateral approach based on the Centenary Declaration.
- 61. The Worker spokesperson** said that her group welcomed the Director-General's confirmation that the initiative would be firmly rooted in the Centenary Declaration and would not replace existing texts or commitments. It agreed that the ILO's ability to unite actors, accelerate action and promote tripartite efforts must be leveraged. While urgent action was certainly required, there remained a need for further discussion between the constituents and the Office on how to accelerate the implementation of the Centenary Declaration while seeking an appropriate format for a high-visibility, high-impact outcome of the International Labour Conference.
- 62.** Turning to the draft decision, her group supported the amendment submitted by ASPAG and the subamendments by IMEC, but did not support the amendment proposed by the Employers' group; recovery actions should not be limited to employment. Tripartite consensus might be reached by including references to accelerating the implementation of the Centenary Declaration and intensifying concerted tripartite action.
- 63. The Employer spokesperson** said that the debate had revealed a strong demand for follow-up by the Office and a need to agree on a concrete, immediate response to the pandemic. That need was strongly linked to the programme and budget, through which the Centenary Declaration was implemented. His group agreed that a specific, high-visibility, high-impact response by the International Labour Conference was required, along with guidance for a sustainable recovery framed by the Centenary Declaration. Constituents' interventions had suggested the need for a communication strategy based on the Centenary Declaration; his group would support such action. However, it objected to the development of an initiative. It was not sufficient to "build back better"; all actors must aim to build back stronger, in an intelligent manner that would increase their resilience and enable them to adapt to evolving circumstances.
- 64. Speaking on behalf of ASPAG**, a Government representative of Japan said that it was important to consider all strategic documents as a whole and engage in broad consultation in order to reach consensus in the Governing Body.

- 65. The Director-General**, summarizing the debate so far, said that the Governing Body seemed to be in agreement on the magnitude of the crisis, the need for action to respond to it and the need for the ILO to take the lead not only at the international level, but also at the regional and national levels. The current discussion related to equipping the Organization with the tools to take on such leadership. Constituents were unanimous that any action must be rooted in the Centenary Declaration, which no party had proposed renegotiating. Similarly, participants concurred on the need to reach an outcome at the next International Labour Conference that could show the way forward. The document was intended to stimulate the debate and inform meaningful consultation. A specific initiative was required because it was not sufficient for the Organization merely to continue to administer its programmes and activities; the world expected it to assume the mantle of leadership. Consensus on the way forward was vital.
- 66.** There appeared to be general acceptance of the amendments and subamendments to subparagraph (b) of the draft decision proposed by ASPAG and IMEC. Subparagraph (a) posed different issues. Although there was general agreement on the need to refer to the Centenary Declaration and its implementation, it had been argued that a specific reference to employment, as proposed by the Employers' group, would narrow the scope of the initiative. He urged the Governing Body to retain the reference to the initiative, or a similar document with an equivalent name, because a tangible outcome was required that would enable the Organization to engage at the highest level, mobilizing not just political but also financial resources. Such ambition was required in light of the high level of engagement shown by the Heads of State and Government and other leaders who had addressed the ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work in July 2020.
- 67. The Chairperson**, noting the five broad areas of agreement highlighted by the Director-General, observed that the differences between the proposed amendments and subamendments were slight and expressed confidence that consensus would be reached.

(The Governing Body resumed consideration of the item after the Office circulated a revised draft decision following consultations).

- 68. The Employer spokesperson** reiterated that the ILO should show strong leadership and that an appropriate and swift response that led to a specific and effective outcome at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference was necessary. The recognition that the recovery should be resilient and sustainable was welcome. The issues facing the world of work that had been exacerbated by the pandemic could not be addressed with short-term policies. He reiterated that any decision taken on the item under consideration should be mirrored in the discussions on the Programme and Budget for 2022–23 at the 341st Session of the Governing Body, as the discussions were wholly interconnected. The Centenary Declaration must be the only focus in terms of strategy, while the programme and budget was a key operational and implementation tool. He reiterated that it was unnecessary to have a parallel agenda reinterpreting what had already been agreed. Taking into account the points raised during the consultations, his group supported the revised version of the draft decision, but suggested that a further slight adjustment could be made to subparagraph (a), so that reference was made to “a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is sustainable and resilient”.
- 69. The Worker spokesperson** said that she supported the current wording of the draft decision, but that the words “sustainable and resilient” should be interpreted in the broadest sense to include environmental and social dimensions in addition to economic factors in order to ensure that the recovery would be just and equitable. She expressed concern at the tendency of the Employers' group to give productivity precedence over

decent work, which was the cornerstone of the ILO's work. The discussion to be held at the 341st Session of the Governing Body would be an opportunity to explore how to capitalize on the linkages between productivity and decent work to strengthen both facets and enhance OSH, social protection and social dialogue. A discussion of such linkages would mirror the work done by constituents during the development of the ILO Centenary Declaration to make connections between issues such as full, productive and freely chosen employment, sustainable business models and the sharing of gains arising from productivity and technological advances.

70. The COVID-19 crisis had shone a spotlight on the erosion of stable employment relations between workers and employers, which had adversely affected productivity, and the importance of extending adequate labour protection floors to all workers. As stable employment was also a factor in productivity levels, the need to ensure stability and security among businesses and workers alike should be highlighted in discussions on productivity and decent work in a post-COVID-19 world. She wished the Office well in its endeavours to develop proposals that would inspire the Governing Body at its 341st Session and lead to an outcome to be proud of at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.
71. **Speaking on behalf of the Africa group**, a Government representative of Namibia said that her group would have liked a decision that asked the Director-General in a balanced manner to prepare substantive proposals to be discussed at the 341st Session, and that, despite its support for strategies aiming at a "sustainable and resilient" recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, her group would have preferred not to include that particular wording in the draft decision since those objectives had been covered in the Centenary Declaration and there were many other ways to describe the desired recovery. In the spirit of social dialogue, her group would accept the compromise reflected in the Office's proposed text but remained open to the consideration of any alternative proposals that may be submitted in advance of the 341st Session of the Governing Body. She thanked the members of the Governing Body for the spirit of openness and goodwill that had characterized the consultations and the Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform for his professionalism in helping constituents to reach a consensus on the matter. Her group looked forward to the forthcoming consultations on the Office's response to achieve an equitable, inclusive and just recovery rooted in the Centenary Declaration.
72. **Speaking on behalf of ASPAG**, a Government representative of Indonesia welcomed the progress of the discussion and expressed appreciation for the flexibility demonstrated by all parties. The Governing Body's engagement on the ILO's response to the COVID-19 crisis would lay the foundation for future constructive tripartite dialogue on the subject. She thanked the Office for revising the draft decision and for giving the Governing Body the opportunity to take into account the connection between the draft Strategic Plan for 2022–25, the Programme and Budget proposals for 2022–23 and the Office's proposals on its response to the COVID-19 crisis. Her group supported the revised draft decision, which should be endorsed promptly to allow constituents time before the 341st Session of the Governing Body to hold tripartite consultations furnished with details from the Office on the organization, format, measures and resources required for the discussion and implementation of the ILO's crisis recovery response.
73. **Speaking on behalf of IMEC**, a Government representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland supported the revised version of the draft decision. Her group would look forward to further constructive discussions aiming at a successful outcome on the matter at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.

- 74. Speaking on behalf of the EU and its Member States**, a Government representative of Germany said that North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Norway aligned themselves with her statement. Thanking the Office for facilitating the discussion, she reiterated that the ILO should focus on a human-centred, sustainable and resilient recovery. To that end, the ILO's response should emphasize its standard-setting role, the promotion of decent work in global supply chains, OSH, social protection for all, gender equality and a just transition towards green economies; stimulate the economy and employment by promoting sustainable enterprises in job-rich sectors with positive environmental and social impacts; and support enterprises, jobs and incomes through lifelong learning and active labour market policies and practices underpinned by universal social protection.
- 75.** The pandemic had demonstrated the importance of OSH. Workers should be protected through the strengthening of labour inspection and the implementation of international labour standards. Given the primordial importance of well-functioning social dialogue, the ILO could leverage its tripartite structure to provide a basis for a coordinated, transparent and evidence-based global response. Her group supported the revised version of the draft decision.
- 76. The Employer spokesperson** said that it would take time for attitudes to change in the light of the changes in the world of work. He acknowledged the concerns expressed by other groups regarding the problematic nature of historical discussions on productivity; however, it would be illogical to demand that the fruits of productivity should be shared without first agreeing to stimulate that productivity and productive employment, which would in turn create more decent work opportunities and reduce unemployment.
- 77. The Worker spokesperson** said that it was in the interest of all constituents to understand the symbiotic relationship between productivity and decent work and the importance of job stability and security to both of those goals. She strongly disagreed with the notion that increased productivity was a precursor to improvements in labour rights through some form of "trickle-down economics", noting that constituents had recognized since the early days of the ILO that decent working conditions increased productivity.

Decision

- 78. The Governing Body requested the Director-General:**
- (a) **to develop proposals, taking into account the guidance provided by the Governing Body for a global response for human-centred recovery that is sustainable and resilient from the COVID-19 crisis, through the accelerated and focused implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration; and**
 - (b) **to organize tripartite consultations to identify possible alternatives for consideration by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (June 2021), and with a view to presenting to the Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021) appropriate proposals on the content and format of such response, as well as on the process to reach a tripartite agreement.**
- (GB.340/HL/2, paragraph 44, as amended by the Governing Body)
- 79. Speaking on behalf of GRULAC**, a Government representative of Barbados said that the Centenary Declaration should be central to the ILO's work, including its response to the COVID-19 crisis. His group's initial concerns that the Office's proposals for its response to the crisis would add to – or worse, distract from – the implementation of the Centenary

Declaration had been assuaged by the Director-General's strong message of coherence and his assurance that the Centenary Declaration would underpin all future ILO actions.

- 80.** His group welcomed the agreement that had been reached on the Office's COVID-19 response and the spirit of dialogue demonstrated by all groups towards its achievement. His group also welcomed the revised version of the draft Strategic Plan for 2022–25 since the addition of the section describing the ILO's vision for 2025 reflected GRULAC's perspectives; the decisions adopted in that regard and in respect of the programme and budget proposals left the ILO well placed to effectively implement the Centenary Declaration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its response to the COVID-19 crisis. That package of proposals had also created a solid foundation for the ILO's efforts to meet the new challenges facing the world. He welcomed the commitment shown by all constituents to ensure the smooth running of the virtual session of the Governing Body, which had demonstrated the ILO's capacity to adapt its work to continue throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.