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8E

International Labour Conference – 109th Session, 2021

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Plenary sitting

Closing of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference

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Saturday, 11 December 2021, 12.30 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Opening of the resumed part of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference

The President

It is my great honour to declare open the resumed part of the first ever virtual session of the International Labour Conference, and its thirteenth and final plenary sitting. Thanks to your great dedication, we have been able to complete in full the agenda of this most unusual session.

As you may be aware, we have a busy agenda today, which includes the submission and noting or approval of the reports of the Credentials Committee and the Finance Committee, which are contained in *Record of Proceedings No. 3F* and *Record of Proceedings No. 4D* respectively, along with the adoption of the resolutions proposed by the two Working Parties convened during this second part of the session, including the conclusions contained therein. These can be found in *Record of Proceedings No. 9C* and *Record of Proceedings No. 10C* respectively. Once we have accomplished these tasks, we shall hold the closing ceremony of the 109th Session of the Conference.

So, without further ado, let us begin our work for the afternoon.

Announcement of a decision by the Workers' electoral college

The President

I would first like to announce a decision made by the Workers' electoral college to fill a vacancy that occurred within its group since the elections to the Governing Body of the International Labour Office for the period 2021–24, held during the first part of the 109th Session of the Conference, in June 2021.

The Workers' electoral college confirmed the appointment of Ms Lily Chang from Canada as regular member, as a replacement for Ms Marie Clarke Walker, also from Canada. The decision has been published in *Record of Proceedings No. 1A(Add.1)*.

(The Conference takes note of the decision.)

(The Conference continues its work in plenary.)

Saturday, 11 December 2021, 3.05 p.m.

President: Mr Zniber

Closing statements

The President

The Conference has now concluded its business and achieved its goals, and the time has come for our closing ceremony. I shall call on each of my fellow Officers to make their concluding remarks to our assembly.

Ms Goldberg

Employer Vice-President of the Conference

Throughout its long history, the International Labour Conference has held sessions in times of peril and in times of hardship. But at this session, in the time of COVID, it has faced unprecedented challenges. Still, despite formidable obstacles, here we are, with a substantial body of work behind us, an ambitious agenda going forward, and a renewed and strengthened appreciation of both the value and the limitations of the technology that has enabled this session to take place.

Before turning to substance, and on behalf of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the entire Employers' group, I want to offer our appreciation to all the Office staff, to the interpreters and particularly to the superb technical team that so successfully undertook the immensely complex task of connecting every corner of the world. Our appreciation too to all of you, the hundreds of Government, Worker and Employer colleagues who have persisted in working through unsocial hours and countless inconveniences to find workable, balanced and realistic solutions to complex topics. We all share a commitment to finding realistic paths forward for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19, even if we do not always agree on every detail of the direction that those paths should take.

This brings me to the substance of the Conference outcomes. On credentials, I would like to highlight two issues. The Higher Council for Private Enterprise (COSEP), the most representative employers' federation in Nicaragua, was denied its right to nominate Employer delegates to this session of the Conference. For reasons explained in the report of the Credentials Committee, our group declined to present an objection. We nevertheless repudiate the acts of violence and harassment perpetrated by Nicaraguan authorities against the leaders of COSEP, its staff and its members, and we will be paying close attention to developments ahead of the 110th Session of the Conference, in 2022. Regarding Myanmar, we wholeheartedly support the recent adoption by the Conference of the resolution for a return to democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Myanmar, and the decision of the Credentials Committee not to accredit delegates from Myanmar for this session, pending a decision on accreditation from the United Nations (UN). However, we urge the UN to come to a timely decision on this matter.

Once again, the deliberations in the Committee on the Application of Standards took place in a constructive spirit. The discussions on the list of individual cases were dealt with, not without difficulties, but successfully, although Employers would have preferred to review fewer cases, in more depth. This year, the most important message from the Employers in the Committee on the Application of Standards was that the needs of sustainable enterprises

should become more visible in ILO standards supervision, as reflected in the approach agreed upon in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.

In the recurrent discussion on social protection, we were pleased that, after intense negotiations, ILO constituents agreed on concrete guidance to support the sustainability of social protection systems as an underlying condition to realize universal social protection. We particularly welcome the clear guidance placed on securing sustainable financing strategies. Such guidance is extremely important for social protection discussions at the national level.

On skills and lifelong learning, it is clear that skills development enables jobs, wealth and prosperity and is at the heart of productivity and competitiveness. The right skills policy approach will offer individuals pathways to full, productive and freely chosen employment. Thus, we welcome the consensus reached in this discussion on the goal of making the ILO a global leader on skills. The achievement of this goal requires the devotion of the necessary financial and human resources; policy discussions alone are not sufficient. Many Member States and social partners will require ILO guidance and technical assistance, and the agreed linkages to the ILO programme and budget will be crucial to satisfying this demand.

On the COVID-19 response, the Employers are pleased that the resolution adopted in June 2021 concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient reiterated the important role of the private sector in achieving a job-rich recovery, and consequently the need for the ILO to support an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprises. Also, the resolution identified skills and productivity growth as priorities for the ILO, together with strategies to address informality. We expect the ILO to integrate these priorities into its future work programmes.

Finally, I come to the general discussion on inequalities and the world of work. A complex subject that engendered difficult and divisive negotiations. Here, I would like to echo my colleague Blaise Matthey who stressed the importance of the discussion and the readiness and commitment of the Employers to address inequalities in the world of work. At the same time, Mr Matthey clearly expressed the ongoing and important concerns that the Employers have with several points of the conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work. These concerns do not prevent us from recognizing how much there is to support here. The conclusions make clear that employment is key to tackling inequality, and they recognize the need to create conducive frameworks for job creation and decent work, economic growth, productivity and innovation. They also cite the importance of high quality education and training to move our agenda forward.

In conclusion, I would again like to acknowledge all those who worked tirelessly to make this virtual session of the Conference possible. Those you have seen on the screen, as well as those behind the scenes, and including of course the interpreters, without whom our work would be impossible. And finally, I speak for all my Employer colleagues in expressing gratitude to the IOE and to the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and their teams for their inestimable support during both parts of the session. If we have learned nothing else from our virtual adventures here, we have learned the importance of face-to-face engagement in our discussions and negotiations. Thus, we hope to see you all in person in Geneva next June. Meanwhile, the Employers send their best wishes to all for the happiest of holiday seasons and a safe, healthy, peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Ms Chipeleme

Worker Vice-President of the Conference

It has been an honour for me to be elected as the Vice-President of the International Labour Conference, and I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Workers' delegates for the trust they place in me. I also want to thank the Conference Officers for their excellent cooperation and the ILO staff for their dedicated support towards this work. We have just heard the reports of the General Discussion Working Party: Skills and lifelong learning and the General Discussion Working Party: Inequalities and the world of work and I want to congratulate them on the good results achieved.

In June, the Committee on the Application of Standards examined the application of standards in 19 countries. The Committee discussed four double-footnoted cases: Ghana on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182); Turkmenistan on the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105); Belarus on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87); and Tajikistan on the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81).

In the discussion on the impact of the pandemic on the application of standards, Workers expressed concern at the violations of international labour standards in several countries. They stressed that the recovery from COVID-19 had to be rights-based. Workers regretted that a number of countries with serious violations of fundamental rights were not examined by the Committee, namely Myanmar, Guatemala, India, Brazil, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Philippines, Sudan and Algeria. Special paragraphs were adopted for Belarus on Convention No. 87, El Salvador on the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), and Zimbabwe on Convention No. 105. The conclusions also included direct contact missions to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cambodia, Honduras and Kazakhstan, a high-level tripartite mission to El Salvador and a high-level mission to Turkmenistan.

Concerning the conclusions on social protection (social security), we welcome the reaffirmation of the need to extend social protection to all workers, and the importance of securing a solid and fair financing base. The ILO should also engage in discussions on proposals for a new international financial mechanism for social protection. We support the focus on ensuring gender-responsive social protection systems and a commitment to promote the ratification and implementation of ILO social security standards, including through a ratification campaign for the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). The conclusions also confirm the need for the ILO to reassert its leadership role on social protection in the multilateral system, based on its rights-based mandate.

The global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient provides a road map to address the challenges caused by the pandemic through strategies based on tripartism and standards. The call commits to place the aim of full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work alongside the needs of the most vulnerable and the hardest hit by the pandemic at the heart of recovery. All workers must be protected, including by addressing the increasing insecurity of precarious work in the formal economy and by formalizing the informal economy.

We welcome the commitment to leverage opportunities for just digital and environmental transitions to advance decent work, and the need to implement a transformative agenda for gender equality and ensure resilient supply chains that provide decent work. The leadership role of the ILO in the multilateral system is recognized, with an emphasis on its unique normative mandate and tripartite structure. Urgent action is also recommended to ensure that

all people have access to quality, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and preventive measures.

Let me also welcome the adoption of two issues that arose. One on the principle of equality among ILO Member States and fair representation of all regions in the ILO's tripartite governance and the second on the return to democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Myanmar. On the latter, our group reiterates the need to restore democratic order and cease attacks, threats and intimidation against workers and the population. Finally, we welcome the adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2022–23.

In conclusion, this Conference was truly unique; for the first time, we had to order our debates in an innovative format and split the session into two parts. This certainly did not go without challenges. The nature of our work requires in-person meetings and interactions. I very much hope that the next time we meet, we should be able to be together in Geneva.

At a time when COVID-19 cases are surging again in many countries, I can only reiterate the urgent need to ensure universal access to vaccines by suspending patents on COVID-19 vaccines, tests, treatments and public health rules.

Mr Blackman Government Vice-President of the Conference

It certainly has been an honour to have served as Government Vice-President of this 109th Session of the Conference. This would not have been possible without the support provided by the Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations, the Honourable Colin Jordan, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement. As you will have observed, Minister Jordan has been active throughout the entire session. I also reiterate my thanks to the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC) for nominating me for the position of Government Vice-President and for providing me with the opportunity, as a representative of a small island developing State, to assume the duties of this important position. I am humbled by the confidence of the group and the wider Conference as well. It also has been a pleasure working with the Officers of the Conference. I recognize the leadership of the President, his Excellency Mr Omar Zniber, and the steadfast commitment of the Employer Vice-President, Ms Ronnie Goldberg, and the Worker Vice-President, Ms Annette Chipeleme, in pursuing the principles of the ILO. I also want to recognize the earnest efforts of the Officers of the Committees.

Throughout the first part of the session in June and the resumed part now, together, working as committees, working parties and drafting groups, we were able to deliver a successful virtual session of the Conference. And I really want to take a pause here and say that one of the things that we certainly learned over the last two years is that, in extraordinary circumstances, we have to draw on extraordinary creativity, and certainly this session, in my mind, is a true reflection of that. The Secretary-General and I were talking before about the fact that, last year, the idea of holding the session of the Conference both remotely and in person was not even being considered. But, given the circumstances, we have been able to rise to that challenge and I think that that is a testament to the strong leadership of the ILO by the Secretary-General, the strong leadership by the President and all of you who have taken part thus far, and you must be commended in that regard. I also want to highlight that, of course, we had to wrestle with the question of the arrangements for the session given the unprecedented context, and we were able to do so in a way that is certainly stellar.

During the first part of the session in June, we successfully deliberated on issues concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the ongoing pandemic

and the surrounding crisis that is, firstly, inclusive, secondly, sustainable, and thirdly and importantly, one that is resilient. The Committee on the Application of Standards was also able to review its cases and provide recommendations to governments with a view to remedying perceived problems and strengthening national frameworks. These are but a few of the achievements of the June part of the session.

Now, in this resumed part of the 109th Session, the focus has been on the two Working Parties established to deal with the fourth item of the agenda on inequalities in the world of work and the sixth item on skills and lifelong learning. Today, we adopted the relevant reports containing the conclusions of those two Working Parties. I observe that, while participants at this session often contended with issues arising from differing perspectives, there was always a commitment to reaching the best possible agreement. That is really a testament to the spirit of collaboration and the uniqueness of our tripartite institution, and long may it live. I therefore recognize the contribution of all the participants in this regard. And once again, I offer thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr Guy Ryder, for his leadership and the support of his team and his Office. This was not an easy session to organize, nor to facilitate, let us not fool ourselves; but their combined support and technical guidance allowed us all, despite the sometimes stormy discussions that often threatened to capsize the boat of consensus, to eventually reach safe harbour. The issues that we are called on to confront in the current global circumstances will require our collective attention. However, and it is a big however, we can be confident of the continuing role and importance of the ILO as a premier institution promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights as we confront these challenges together. I therefore look forward to working with all of you in the weeks and months ahead in the important work of this great institution.

Mr Ryder

Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference

I suspect it is probably with feelings of satisfaction mixed with relief that we come now to the end of this 109th Session of the International Labour Conference: a session, we can safely say, unlike any other in the long history of the ILO.

Let us not forget that the session was originally scheduled to take place last year and, for reasons that we all know, it had to be postponed to this year. Nor that it opened as long ago as 20 May and met for one month before being reconvened in these last weeks to enable us to conclude its agenda with the reports which have been adopted today.

It has been, quite literally, an extraordinary experience, and I think that we would be well advised to reflect very carefully upon it. And if we do so, the first thing that becomes apparent, and others have already commented on this, is just how much we have learned and how remarkably we have adapted to the circumstances imposed on us by COVID-19. What we all saw as impossible when the pandemic first broke last year – a virtual session of the Conference – has become a reality today, and you, the ILO's constituents, insisted that we should tackle a full agenda, and I will confess that I was a bit worried that that would prove overambitious, but you have provided proof to the contrary. And that is because, in addition to learning and adapting, delegates to this Conference have shown levels of commitment, even endurance, beyond any reasonable expectation. From those predawn starts in the Americas to the nocturnal closures in Asia and the Pacific, this determination simply to get the job done merits recognition and, more importantly, sincere gratitude.

Over 4,500 participants registered for this session of the Conference, which I think is remarkable. Of these, 39 per cent were women, which is cause for reflection. The fact that only 25 per cent of speakers in the plenary were women, I think is cause for regret.

In any case, the efforts of us all have enabled us to achieve two things: firstly, to ensure the ILO's institutional integrity and continuity. The interruption brought about by the cancellation of the Conference session in 2020 was, honestly, damaging, and the danger was that if it were repeated in 2021, this year, then that damage could have lasting consequences. But we have not allowed that to happen and, together with the experience of the virtual Governing Body sessions that we have held – four of them now – this demonstrates that whatever the pandemic throws at us and however long it lasts, the ILO has the means and, more importantly, the determination to come through it.

Now, all of this does not mean that this state of affairs is without problems. It imposes real constraints. The resumed session these last two and a half weeks has, I think, highlighted them. So here again, the learning process must go on as we prepare for the 2022 sessions of the Conference and of the Governing Body with one very clear thought in mind, and it has already been said: we all want to get back to physical meetings as soon as the circumstances allow it.

Secondly, we have, through the diligence, commitment and sheer hard work of which I have spoken, produced very substantive results at this session. Casting our minds back to June, the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient stands both as a political clarion call and as a road map for the ILO and its constituents alike. It is not a reprise of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work of 2019, but rather an application and an operationalization of that Declaration to meet the unprecedented world of work crisis which COVID-19 has provoked. And last month, the Governing Body decided on concrete follow-up to it, tracking and monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on labour markets, holding national tripartite dialogues on recovery strategies, financing human centred recovery and multilateral action. One immediate and, I believe, crucial consequence will be the convening of a major multilateral policy forum early next year, which will offer real strategic opportunity to boost the coherence of the international system's action for the recovery that we very much want and that we badly need.

Similarly, the Governing Body has already agreed the plan of action to give effect to the conclusions of the recurrent discussion on social protection. That exercise, coming fortuitously, perhaps, at a time when the true human costs of existing inadequacies in social protection systems have been so brutally laid bare by the pandemic, has shown just how valuable the recurrent discussion process can be if we use it well. Here again, I think that we are learning by doing. It is particularly encouraging that our work and our advocacy at the ILO on social protection is gaining real traction across the multilateral system, for example in the United Nations Secretary-General's report "Our Common Agenda" and in his launching of the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection.

I think that one element, more than any other, that made it imperative for the Conference to meet this year were the very particular dangers that would have resulted from a continued interruption of the work of its Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS), standing, as it does, at the heart of the ILO's supervisory system. There is not only immense political importance and technical substance in the way that system works, but it also has a rhythm which places a premium on continuity, and that is illustrated by the coincidence – and it is a coincidence – that today, as this session of the Conference closes, the Committee of Experts

on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations is also concluding its annual meeting from which will come the report that it will present to the Conference next year.

The fact that the CAS completed its work this June is, therefore, of fundamental importance, and in the Office we will continue to face up creatively to the challenge – and it is real – of following up on its recommendations with the Member States concerned, even though it has been difficult in recent months to field missions in the normal way. We will also have to return, in the Governing Body and potentially at the next Conference session, to the implementation of the resolution adopted this year for a return to democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Myanmar.

I think we should not forget, either, that in June our Conference adopted a programme and budget which takes the ILO into its next biennium both with the resources and the clear policy direction which can enable it to meet the challenges, the opportunities and the responsibilities which, looked at today, seem as formidable as at any time in the history of our Organization.

It was therefore with a considerable capital of achievement already recorded that the Conference resumed its session last month with its focus on inequalities, and on skills and lifelong learning. You have just considered and commented upon the outcome of the deliberations of the two Working Parties which examined these issues, and you have adopted their reports, and so it is not for me now, I think, to revisit the substance of these matters, except to underline the very evident importance that they hold for the mandate and the activities of the ILO, and follow-up to the relevant conclusions will be on the agenda of our Governing Body next March.

I think it would be fair, and, I think, necessary to note that the work of the two Working Parties was not easy. Many of you have commented on this. The results were obtained today only through exceptional effort and perseverance, for which we owe thanks. But at the right time we need to reflect on why this was the case, why these difficulties were there: the constraints inherent in virtual negotiations? The sensitivities and complexities of the subject matter? Maybe the volatility of group dynamics? Whatever the causes, let us, again, learn together so as to do everything that we can to continue to make tripartism work and our Conference relevant and productive.

In conclusion, I want to thank and to congratulate all of those who made it possible for this session of the Conference to take place and for it to succeed. They are numerous. And I hope you will allow me first to express, as many of you have done so generously, my appreciation for my own colleagues who have prepared, supported and serviced our proceedings, including the technical staff and the interpreters, who have performed their respective types of magic to enable us to connect and then understand each other; it is they who have made the seemingly impossible, in fact, possible.

But all of this would not have served for very much without the stamina and the commitment of participants around the globe, and most particularly those who have provided the political leadership and guidance that this complex and demanding Conference requires. And I want to recognize particularly the contribution of the three Vice-Presidents of the Conference, Ambassador Blackman for the Governments, Ronnie Goldberg for the Employers and Annette Chipeleme for the Workers, from whom we have just heard and whose long-standing support and friendship for the ILO are so very highly valued.

Lastly, I am sure I speak for absolutely everybody when I express real gratitude to the President, for the skill and the authority with which he has conducted our business. His role in

this exceptional session has been unlike that of any of his predecessors, just as this virtual tripartite global parliament of labour has been unique; and so I want to thank him.

This is normally the point at which I wish delegates a good journey back to their homes. This time, however, I will not do that; I will just wish you all a very safe and a very peaceful end to 2021 and beginning of 2022, a year in which I think we all share the hope that we will be able to meet again in person.

Mr Zniber

President of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (Original French)

Director-General, in your capacity as the head of the ILO, you embody the role and the work of the International Labour Organization, which is an organization with unique characteristics, firstly because of its longevity, and secondly because of its membership and its way of working based on tripartite dialogue. All this has been showcased at this session of the Conference, during which you and your teams have really risen to an exceptional challenge – as has just been mentioned this afternoon – and not only in terms of logistics and arrangements. The real challenge has been to have organized these discussions that are so important and so crucial for all the countries of the world and for the international community, at a time when we are going through the worst health crisis to have afflicted humanity for more than a century. All this will go down in the annals of the ILO's history, and despite the difficulties that we have faced and despite everything that we have been through, it will be clear to all what we have been able to achieve here, thanks to you and your teams.

Allow me now to make my closing statement. We have come to the end of this 109th Session of the International Labour Conference, a session that will go down in history because it has taken place amid an unprecedented health crisis and in an unprecedented social and economic context, blighted by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a great honour for my country, the Kingdom of Morocco, to preside over this session. Morocco has a strong commitment to international labour standards and to the values, principles and objectives of the ILO, and a strong commitment to tripartism. Chairing this annual assembly has been, for me personally, an extremely rewarding experience in many respects. First, because of the ILO's place within the international system, its noble objectives and the role it plays; second, because of the social dialogue and tripartism that are the distinguishing features of this Organization; and third, because of the importance of the topics discussed here.

It is widely recognized that the annual session of the International Labour Conference is a large-scale event – as demonstrated again this year by the high number of participants, despite the circumstances – that allows us to build on and further strengthen our conviction that tripartism and dialogue are the best means of reaching the mutual understanding that we all desire. We all therefore welcome the outcomes achieved thanks to your wholehearted commitment and the willingness of all constituents, which have enabled us to complete all of the items on the agenda of this session.

The ILO indeed provides us with a valuable institutional framework that allows tripartism to flourish and to occupy a central position, thanks to the commitment that I have witnessed and to the tireless social dialogue among our constituents. In many ways, our discussions have given us a palpable sense of where we stand and of the importance and the role of the ILO, especially in ensuring that the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is as swift as possible. A number of important resolutions were adopted at this session, and I would like to refer, in particular, to the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis

that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. We all recall how difficult the discussions on this subject were last June, but we nonetheless managed to map out a plan of action for the ILO in this regard. Urgent and coordinated action, including at the multilateral level, remains the cornerstone of the ILO's response to the fallout of the COVID-19 health crisis.

This session of the Conference has also allowed us to elect the new members of the Governing Body for the period 2021–24, in elections that were supposed to be held in 2020, but were deferred because of the pandemic. My country was one of those to be elected. We were also able to adopt the Programme and Budget for the biennium 2022–23, which is essential for the smooth operation of the ILO. The work at this historic session can be summed up with a few key words: successful mobilization and organization; a high level of participation; guaranteed continuity of the Organization's work; constructive and enriching debates; fruitful outcomes; strong commitment among the constituents; tripartism and social dialogue given tangible form; and, as already highlighted by the Director-General, the need to ensure that the gender dimension is fully mainstreamed, not just in the work of the International Labour Conference, but in all of the ILO's activities.

We could not have achieved these outcomes without everyone's contributions. Let me reiterate my sincere thanks to the Government group, the Workers' group and the Employers' group, for their trust and excellent support, for their unstinting commitment to our work and for their constructive contributions. I would also like to congratulate the members of all the committees and working parties and their respective officers for the outcomes of their deliberations. It is indeed thanks to them that the Conference has been able to achieve the objectives that it had set itself. Let me also pay a heartfelt tribute to all the ILO colleagues and departments for their immense contribution to the harmonious conduct of our work in this hybrid format. I am also grateful to the many people who have been working behind the scenes. They may not always be visible, but they all play a crucial role: the technical staff, the translators, the security teams, the cleaning staff, and all those who have contributed to the smooth running of our Conference. A heartfelt thank you also to my Vice-Presidents for their work: my dear friend, his Excellency Mr Chad Blackman, Government Vice-President; Ms Ronnie Goldberg, Employer Vice-President; and Ms Annette Chipeleme, Worker Vice-President. As we have seen throughout this session, they spared no time or effort to make the session a success.

As I presided over this session of the Conference also on behalf of the Africa group, representing a continent that is so full of wisdom, I would like to conclude by referring to an African proverb that conveys the belief that talking is the most powerful tool we have for engaging in dialogue. Let us hope that the tool of talking becomes embedded in the habits and customs of this Organization, which is indeed founded on dialogue. This is something of which we are very proud. Dialogue, which takes place day after day, has a special place at the ILO.

I wish a safe journey home to those of you who are with us, and my best wishes also go to those of you who have participated remotely and with whom we have worked closely to achieve these results, in spite of the distance.

Mr Ryder

Director-General of the International Labour Office and Secretary-General of the Conference

Yes indeed, President. You have now brought us to the completion of what has been an extraordinarily complex session of the Conference, with a very charged agenda.

But there is one small task that remains to be performed, one tradition that, at this very unusual and innovative session, we want to respect. It is the tradition of this house that, at the end of a session of the Conference, the Director-General presents the President with an engraved gavel to commemorate the presidency. It is a symbol of your authority, and also a token of our appreciation; I hope very much that it is something that you will keep as what I hope is a good memory of this demanding session of the Conference. We all know that this is the 109th Session. I suppose that this is the 109th engraved gavel that we have presented to presidents. But even though this gavel looks the same as all of the other ones, this session has been a bit different, and I think that it will stay in the memory of us all. We all believe, I think, that we have been very lucky to have you in charge of this extraordinary event. We have all been very subdued and polite today, but I think, as I present this gavel to the President, that we shall allow ourselves a vigorous round of applause.

The President

Thank you so much, dear Director-General. I have to say, it really is a pleasure to hold a gavel. But more than that, it is a pleasure to use it. So thank you very much, it really is a very nice souvenir of this 109th Session of the Conference.

I would also like to extend to you all my best wishes for a nice and restful holiday period. I look forward to seeing you again next year. Thank you again for all your support.

With that, I declare the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference closed.

(The Conference adjourned sine die at 3.55 p.m.)