

Opening remarks delivered by Mr Francesco D'Ovidio,
Country Director for Indonesia and East Timor,
on behalf of Ms Tomoko Nishimoto,
ILO Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific (to be checked against actual delivered speech)

Seminar for Enhancing Social Protection in an Integrated ASEAN Community

25-26 November 2015

Jakarta, Indonesia

Dear Mr Guntur Witjaksono, Special Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Manpower of Indonesia,

Dear Ms Mega Irena, Assistant Director/Head of Social Welfare, Women, Labour and Migrant Workers Division, ASEAN Secretariat

Dear Dr Michael Chiam, Malaysian Employers Federation and Representative of ASEAN Confederation of Employers

Dear Mr Jovenal Lazaga, Workers Association of the Philippines (BWAP-TUCP) and Representative of the ASEAN Trade Unions Council

Dear Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific of the International Labour Organization, Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto, it is my great pleasure to be with you today, at this "Tripartite Seminar on enhancing social protection in an integrated ASEAN Community".

Today, we are at the dawn of the integration of the ASEAN Community. And the question that we are all asking at this historic moment, is, how will this affect the 600 million people who live in the region?

Today we are focusing on just one aspect of this integration; with an important new report on the "*State of Social Protection in ASEAN at the dawn of the integration*". The report warns us that without stronger social protection systems and more effectively-managed labour migration, the gains of ASEAN economic integration are unlikely to lead to inclusive growth and equal decent work opportunities for all.

It is worth noting that these conclusions echo those made a year ago by a joint ILO-ADB report, which looked at the consequences of integration more broadly.

Let's focus on why we are here today. In 2015, it is unacceptable that seventy-three per cent of the world's population do not have adequate social protection. Let's look at some of the specific, human consequences of this.

- Without social protection, sick people must finance the cost of health-care themselves, which can push them towards poverty and cause them to wait before they seek the services they need.
- Without social protection, children sometimes do not get enough to eat. This can lead to poor health, which in turn damages their long-term development. These children may have problems accessing education and are at greater risk of falling into child labour.
- Without social protection, workers have to cope alone with the financial and other consequences of unemployment, work-related injuries, sickness, or maternity. From the employers' perspective, this can also increase problems and costs related to absenteeism, productivity losses, and shortages of skilled labour.
- Without social protection, older women and men effectively have no right to retire, and are very vulnerable to falling into poverty.

Social protection is a human right, and we should no longer accept its absence. From the perspective of economic and social development, a lack of social protection also represents both a cost and a missed opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2013, when the ASEAN Member States adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection, they also reaffirmed their commitment to extend social protection to all, as a non-negotiable measure to ensure that no one is left behind in the process of integrating the ASEAN Community.

In many ways the ASEAN Declaration echoes the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation. This Recommendation was adopted a year earlier, in 2012, by the ILO's 183 member countries, including all the ASEAN member States.

In addressing this commitment to extend social protection to all we should also recognise that some groups are more at risk than others. Among these 'at risk' groups are migrant workers and their families. But, migrant workers are like any other worker contributing to building the economies of the ASEAN Member countries. They also need, and have the right, to be covered by social protection, in the same way as nationals.

The ASEAN Labour Ministers Work Plan for 2016-2020, which is currently being drafted, specifically cites Labour Migration and Social Protection as necessary areas for work. This is very encouraging because it confirms the importance the countries of ASEAN are giving to these issues.

Improving the implementation of social protection floors and systems, and protecting migrant workers, are issues that are also at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, which were adopted by the UN's members in New York in September. These SDGs will set the global development agenda for the next 15 years.

Colleagues, delegates, and friends,

The report that we are launching today sets out a series of benchmarks with which we can measure our progress in extending social protection. At the same time the report calls for some immediate actions to guarantee social protection to all in ASEAN. Among the things it says are;

- Universal health care should go being a political commitment and become a reality.
- Childcare is an essential part of child development, yet it is absent from the social protection debate.
- Social protection exists in many, diverse, forms in ASEAN. Only 'risk pooling' and social solidarity will ensure adequate protection for all. This means gradually moving away from employers' liability and individual savings accounts.
- Fewer than 1-in-3 older people in ASEAN currently get a pension. Poverty among the elderly should be eradicated.
- Only better coordination and social dialogue will guarantee the success of social protection policies.
- Resources are limited, so monitoring and evaluation of social protection interventions are needed, at both national and ASEAN levels.
- Finally, only solid political determination will shift the resources and create the fiscal space necessary to finance social protection floors. Let me reiterate - social protection floors, as stepping stones towards higher levels of social security, are affordable, feasible, and highly desirable for all countries in ASEAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope the report that we are handing to you today will be a useful guide towards making social protection a reality for everyone in ASEAN.

By being here today you can shape the new agenda for social protection. And you can rely on the ILO to support your efforts. This will be a major part of the work of our organization in the years to come. I would like to thank you again for your attendance today and your participation in the discussions in the coming two days.

I would also like to thank the Governments of Japan and Canada for making this workshop a reality, and extend my appreciation for their continued support for social protection and the rights of migrant workers in the ASEAN.

Let me wish you all a successful seminar