

Closing Statement

Sachiko Yamamoto, ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific

Vice Chairperson of the 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting,
Mr Greg Vines, Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body,
Honourable Ministers,
Dear tripartite delegates,
Dear friends,

The 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting is coming to a close. On behalf of the Director General, I wish to thank you all for your hard work and contributions to making the meeting so successful and forward-looking.

I am very pleased that we had active participation of delegations from the Pacific Islands countries. They form a valued and important part of our diverse region, and they face different and unique challenges often resulting from their geographic isolation and climate change.

During the meeting, constructive dialogue led to a call for a sustainable development path based on the values of decent work and social justice. This will help Asia and the Pacific become even more dynamic while helping to address the challenges that the region faces.

Prime Minister Noda reminded us of the importance of coordinated policies, and the need for quality job creation, broader social protection and investments in people. In other words, using decent work to build a society in which social participation and the fruits of economic growth are available to all.

Deputy Prime Minister Guterres stressed the role of workers' and employers' organizations, and effective social dialogue, and shared with us his vision of safe and secure societies built on decent work.

Director-General Mohammed Luqman of the Arab Labour Organization emphasized the need to focus on youth and the promotion of social justice, the right to work, fair wages and social protection.

Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary General of ASEAN, highlighted that decent work, with its focus on the quality of life, employment opportunities, social protection and the participation of people, is a practical and adaptable concept that has broadly been accepted by Asian countries.

Our meeting confirmed that the quality of growth matters as much as growth itself, with more equity, better social protection, and respect for labour standards – based on social dialogue and cooperation at the core.

You have recognized that decent work and full employment need to be at the heart of policies for strong, sustainable and balanced growth and inclusive development.

The meeting also reaffirmed our collective resolve to meeting the priorities of the Asia and the Pacific Decent Work Decade and the need for monitoring and reporting on progress made.

As we reviewed the achievements of the past five years, it was clear we have come a long way in realizing the vision set out at the last Asian Regional Meeting in Busan. But there is still more to do.

So, let me outline some of the most common themes that you have identified for moving toward a more sustainable future in Asia.

First, promoting decent employment opportunities for our young women and men

You have all noted the immense contribution youth can, and do, make to our societies, and the dynamism they can bring to our economies. Yet too often they have become frustrated at their lack of voice and opportunities, as seen in the recent popular uprisings in the Arab States region.

We need to nurture their talents, if they are to flourish and progress. You have shared your best experiences and recognised the need to work not *for* young people, but *with* them. To achieve this we need to allow young people a greater say in the policy making process. I encourage your participation in upcoming national and regional youth forums which will lead into the global discussions on youth at the International Labour Conference next June.

Second, coherent economic, employment and social protection policies

You have shown how, since the 14th Regional Meeting in 2006, more and more countries have put employment creation and decent work at the heart of their economic and social policies. Many of you said that this approach has helped your economies recover faster from the global crisis.

You indicated that coherence between economic, employment and social policies was particularly important given today's fragile global environment and the vulnerability of the Asia-Pacific region.

You also agreed that building and strengthening social protection floors in line with national circumstances will be an ever more important priority – noting that even in the poorest countries, a minimum level of protection is both desirable and affordable.

This is perhaps why the United Nation's Social Protection Floor initiative has received so much attention among policymakers. It is seen as a key guarantor of human rights and social justice, as well as an important tool to combat poverty and inequality.

Each country needs to find its own model and path toward an effective and affordable social protection floor. More investment will be required, but it is an investment in a more secure future.

Third, promoting productive employment, sustainable enterprises and skills development

Based on the different socio-economic context of your countries, you have provided rich insights and innovative solutions to the challenges of productive employment and enterprise development.

You have emphasized that we need to unlock the potential of all enterprises. SMEs in particular need an enabling environment and fair access to finance, markets and business support services if they are to provide jobs.

Another common theme was the concern in regard to widespread informal employment. Much needs to be done to enable enterprises to create decent jobs and to reduce job-related informality.

You also stressed the need to invest in skills development. You noted too that enterprises should play a larger role in shaping the national skills development programmes to ensure that skills lead to productive employment.

You have shared your experiences and insights into the ever-more important challenge of climate change. You have looked at ways green jobs policies can be used to build an

employment-rich and low-carbon economy, allowing workers and employers to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.

Fourth, promoting rights at work and social dialogue

Your discussions have revealed a common belief in the need for more inclusive and fairer labour markets, which uphold international labour standards and rights at work, with social dialogue and gender equality at the core.

You have recognised the need to intensify efforts to ratify and implement core labour as well as respect fundamental principles and rights at work. Similarly, there is a pressing need across the region for institutions and procedures for preventing and resolving disputes.

Employers and workers are in agreement that labour inspection is a crucial tool for ensuring enforcement of laws and improving occupational safety.

And of course you have renewed your commitment to enhancing the capacity of workers' and employers' organizations to represent and service their members and build effective mechanisms for social dialogue and collective bargaining at different levels.

Fifth, supporting regional cooperation and integration

Reflecting the region's own deepening integration, you have stressed the importance of stronger regional cooperation. You have also tasked the Office to work closely with regional organizations to promote policy coherence. I see collaboration in the years ahead, in particular:

- Sharing lessons learned on the promotion of green jobs;
- Responding effectively to natural disasters, particularly through employment-focused rebuilding and recovery measures; and

- Improving the governance of labour migration, including through better dialogue and protection of migrants' rights.

We have also seen how there are growing opportunities for regional partnerships which tap the expertise and experience of our middle and high-income member States to address the needs of the lesser-developed ones through the Decent Work Agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me take this last opportunity to thank all of you for your tremendous work in achieving the excellent outcomes of our 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting. Let me also express my deep gratitude again to the Government of Japan for their gracious hospitality and unwavering support for our meeting.

As we leave Kyoto, we all recognize the immense challenges ahead. I am confident that as you have led the global economy through recent tough times with stewardship and conviction, you will lead the way in realizing decent work for all in Asia and the Pacific.

Thank you.