

Statement by Ms Corinne Vargha, representative of the Secretary-General

I. Introductory remarks

As the Representative of the Secretary-General to your Committee, it is my privilege and duty to supplement the information contained in the reports of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations by drawing your attention to new developments that are of interest for your discussion.¹ But first, I would like to welcome the presence of the Chairperson of the Committee of Experts, Judge Abdul Koroma, who will address you shortly, and I wish to greet him on behalf of the Secretary-General.

In the time available to me, I would like to address four points: (i) the constitutional mandate and the work of your Committee; (ii) a summary of the latest discussion by the Governing Body of the Standards Initiative; (iii) a brief overview of the measures taken by the secretariat to give effect to the recommendations made by your Committee last year; and, finally, (iv) the links between the work of your Committee and that of other committees at the present session of the International Labour Conference. I would like to take this opportunity of emphasizing the decisive contribution of your Committee to the activities of the ILO and the operation of its supervisory machinery, and describe in more detail the influence that the progress made within the Committee has had on the Organization and its various bodies, including the Governing Body, the International Labour Conference and the secretariat.

II. Mandate and work of the Conference Committee

In contrast with most other committees, your Committee is a standing Committee of the International Labour Conference. It has met each year since 1926 and its mandate, which is at the heart of the ILO's activities,² consists, among other functions, of examining and bringing to the attention of the Conference meeting in plenary session: (i) the measures taken by Members to give effect to the Conventions to which they are parties; and (ii) the

¹ Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Report III(Part 1A), ILC, 105th Session, Geneva, 2016; General Survey on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 187), and Recommendation (No. 197), 2006; Safety and Health in Construction Convention (No. 167), and Recommendation (No. 175), 1988; Safety and Health in Mines Convention (No. 176), and Recommendation (No. 183), 1995; and Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention (No. 184), and Recommendation (No. 192), 2001, Report III (Part 1B), ILC, 106th Session, Geneva, 2017.

² Article 23, paragraph 1, of the Constitution of the ILO, and article 7 of the Standing Orders of the Conference.

information and reports concerning Conventions and Recommendations communicated by Members in accordance with article 19 of the Constitution. Under the terms of this article, your Committee examines each year a General Survey on the law and practice of member States in a specific field.

The Chairperson of the Committee of Experts, Judge Koroma, will introduce your discussions by presenting the reports of the CEACR in a short time.

Now a few words on the work of your Committee. Document D.1 contains all the information necessary for you to carry out your work successfully. It also reports on the many improvements introduced in the working methods of your Committee following the informal tripartite consultations held on this subject since 2006.³

Following the latest informal tripartite consultations held in November 2016, it was agreed that the summary records (PVs) of the sittings would once again this year be issued in a trilingual “patchwork” version (English, French and Spanish). Each intervention will only be reported in the language in which it was delivered, or in the language chosen by the speaker when taking the floor. The main innovation this year will be the submission for adoption by the Conference plenary of the Committee’s final report, and particularly Part II on the examination of individual cases, in the same “patchwork” version. The fully translated versions of the report will be put online ten days after the end of the Conference.

All the Committee’s documents, including the draft summary records, will be put online on the Committee’s web page, which will be our way of sharing important documents, in conformity with the ILO’s paper free Office policy. Amendments to the summary records can be submitted either in writing or by electronic mail. The question of time management will be addressed later by the Chairperson of the Committee.

III. The Standards Initiative

I now turn to the second part of my introductory remarks, in which I will briefly review the progress made in the context of the Standards Centenary Initiative. As you know, the launching of this initiative by the Director-General is largely a result of the difficult but useful discussions on the ILO standards system within this Committee. The Standards Initiative has two components, which are both under the responsibility of the ILO Governing Body.

The first is the Standards Review Mechanism and its Tripartite Working Group, which has the mandate of ensuring that the body of standards is up to date and relevant to the world of work. Work is progressing in a constructive manner in this respect. I would like to draw your attention to the direct connection between your discussion on the General Survey on occupational safety and health, and particularly the four instruments on safety and health in construction and mines, and the future work of the Tripartite Working Group (TWG) of the Standards Review Mechanism. These four instruments are covered by the programme of work of the TWG.⁴ It is clear that your discussions on the General Survey and the conclusions that your committee will adopt on that matter will inform the work of the TWG.

³ Document D.1 can be consulted on the web site of the Committee as of 5 May 2017.

⁴ At its next meeting in September 2017, the Tripartite Working Group will examine the other instruments on occupational safety and health (general provisions and specific risks) with a view to making recommendations to the Governing Body on their status. This examination will not include

The second component of the Standards Initiative is intended to reinforce tripartite consensus on an authoritative supervisory system. At its session in March 2017, the Governing Body held an important discussion on the follow-up to the joint report by Mr Koroma and Mr van der Heijden, the Chairpersons of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations and of the Committee on Freedom of Association, respectively.⁵ The Governing Body approved the common principles that will form the basis of its work in this field. It was agreed that the supervisory system is incontrovertible and that it is for the tripartite constituents to further strengthen it. Improvements need to result in a robust, relevant and sustainable system, with effective and well-functioning supervisory procedures. Finally, the Governing Body emphasized that the supervisory system needs to be transparent, fair and rigorous, leading to consistent and impartial outcomes. On this basis, it then examined ten specific proposals on which the constituents could build in the tripartite process of strengthening the supervisory system.

I will only review the main points which illustrate the essential role that your Committee has played and will continue to play in the context of the Standards Initiative.

The Governing Body examined an important proposal intended to establish regular discussions between the supervisory bodies. This proposal is based on the dialogue that has been long established between your Committee and the Committee of Experts, and is intended to strengthen that dialogue. In this context, it is planned to invite the Chairperson of the Committee on Freedom of Association, to speak to your Committee alongside the Chairperson of the Committee of Experts at its next session.

The Governing Body also discussed the means of strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the supervisory system. It was agreed that the recommendations of the supervisory bodies need to be clear and provide practical guidance to member States. In this context, it made specific reference to the experience of your Committee in drafting conclusions and recommendations.

The Governing Body examined another important proposal intended to harmonize the follow-up to the comments of the supervisory bodies through technical assistance at the national level. Your Committee has shown the way in this respect. In this context, I also wish to provide you with information on the technical assistance provided by the Office at the request of your Committee with a view to facilitating the implementation of your recommendations, as I know the growing importance that you attach to this question.

IV. Technical assistance provided by the Office

Further to the latest informal tripartite consultations on the working methods of the Committee, information on the action taken by the Office to give effect to its recommendations has been put up on its dedicated web site and will be regularly updated. I am pleased to be able to report that, in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations adopted by your Committee last year, 13 countries have received direct contacts missions, high-level missions or have requested technical assistance from the Office over the past 12 months. The reports received from Governments that have benefited from

the sectoral instruments covered by the General Survey submitted to the 106th Session of the Conference.

⁵ GB.329/INS/5.

such assistance often show the extent to which the decisions and conclusions of your Committee can further the provision of targeted and very effective support by the Office.

In cases of serious failings by member States in their reporting obligations, further to the discussions held in your Committee in 2016, the Office sent out 60 letters to the countries concerned and proposed technical assistance specifically adapted to the needs to 11 of them.⁶ Several of these countries have since, at least in part, met their reporting obligations. Document D.2, which is before your Committee, and which it is planned to discuss on Wednesday next, contains more information on this subject.

Certain development cooperation projects, which are currently being implemented under the responsibility of the International Labour Standards Department with the support of donors, and particularly the European Commission, are intended to ensure the effective application of international labour standards, and particularly compliance with reporting obligations. Projects of this type are being carried out in nine countries. This is a promising form of collaboration, which we are actively endeavouring to develop and extend in future.

Finally, with the ILO International Training Centre in Turin, the Office is continuing to provide training at the national, subregional and regional levels on international labour standards. This year, we inaugurated the International Labour Standards Academy, in which some of you have participated. The Academy has the objective of disseminating knowledge and tools related to international labour standards to the ILO's tripartite constituents, judges, lawyers, law professors and media professionals.

All of these activities are carried out by the Office with a view to ensuring, through specific and effective action, that international labour standards are better known, better understood and therefore better implemented.

V. Other Committees on the agenda of the Conference

The last point that I would like to address is intended to place emphasis on the links between the work of your Committee and that of the other committees of the International Labour Conference.

I would first like to emphasize that the Committee for Labour Migration will examine the issue of governance in relation to migration trends based, among other sources, on the conclusions that your Committee adopted last year following its discussion of the General Survey concerning the migrant workers instruments. Another committee, the Committee for Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, will examine progress and challenges in the achievement of fundamental principles and rights at work at the global scale, and perspectives in this crucially important field for international labour standards in the context of this year's recurrent discussion under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008.

Finally, the Committee on Employment and Decent Work for the Transition to Peace will examine a new instrument to revise the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71), which will be adopted by the Conference at the end of its present session and will join the body of international labour standards, the application of which your Committee is responsible for examining.

⁶ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Croatia, Kiribati, Lebanon, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Sri Lanka, Swaziland and Tuvalu.

Finally, the Finance Committee will examine the draft Programme and Budget for 2018–19, of which Strategic Outcome 2 focuses on the ratification and application of international labour standards. In this respect, the programme and budget envisages the systematic provision of technical assistance by the Office to promote the ratification and implementation of international labour standards, as well as support to the supervisory bodies to ensure that they function well.

VI. Final remarks

From this perspective, and by way of conclusion, I would like to assure you that the Office is determined to support and consolidate the constructive participation of the tripartite constituents in a reliable supervisory system which benefits from their confidence and in which all parties feel that they are stakeholders. As the Director of the International Labour Standards Department, I express my commitment, not only on a personal level, but in my capacity as the head of a team that is open to change and proud to serve the cause of the supervisory system and the constituents. The International Labour Standards Department is therefore placing its full expertise at the disposal of your Committee so that you can fulfil your fundamental role under the ILO Constitution. And as the head of the secretariat of your Committee, it is my pleasure to work with the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons, Rapporteur and all the members of the Committee.

Thank you for your attention.