

OSCE CONFERENCE:
ALLIANCE AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
(Vienna, 20 June 2011)

Speech by

Guy Ryder
Executive Director
International Labour Office, Geneva

Good morning, and thank you to the organizers of this Conference for the opportunity given to the ILO to contribute to it. We are particularly encouraged by the focus chosen for this occasion – that of preventing trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation: decent work and social justice.

The founding text of the ILO – its 1919 Constitution declares that “labour is not a commodity”. Trafficking for labour exploitation is the exact negation of that fundamental principle. It reduces labour to a commodity. It dehumanizes it. It lays it open to the cruellest of abuse.

Ninety-one years later, the Special Representative, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, introducing her annual report for 2010 reminds us all – and indeed is obliged by current circumstances to remind us – “that a decent society cannot live with trafficking”. She is right. And so it is that today’s ILO decent work agenda gives a priority place to the elimination of forced labour and trafficking which stand as the antithesis of decent work.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the apparent historical continuity of the last century that “plus ça change plus c’est la même chose”. Because in reality,

forced labour and trafficking has evolved and mutated over time and takes on different forms in different parts of the world.

The process of globalization has of course conditioned that evolution, but the problems did not begin with it. What we have to contend with today are not just historic remnants of age-old injustices – although they are with us still and are not negligible in gravity or in scale – but phenomena which are very contemporary. They have been forged by today's conditions in the world of work and must be combated by actions which effectively address those conditions.

The ILO estimates that some 12.3 million people are involved in forced labour of whom 2.45 million have been trafficked, at least half of them in the OSCE area. Of these about 25% is for labour exploitation.

The magnitude of the economic interests at the origin of this mountain of human misery is staggering. The costs incurred by its victims – in terms of wages not paid, and illicit fees extorted – amounts to \$21 billion each year. And the profits from trafficking go as high as \$32 billion.

So we are not dealing with a marginal phenomenon, but one with deep roots in the contemporary global economy. And we need to work together to uproot and eradicate it as a matter of urgency and of priority.

So what needs to be done, and how does the ILO fit in?

Well, firstly, and this is the very logic of the Alliance, we need to integrate the different policy components of combating trafficking into a single coherent strategy. So criminal justice, victim care and compensation, labour market

policy, must all have their place. None alone will be enough. But put together, they can be. Which is precisely what brings the different international organizations together in this Alliance and to this Conference.

We need also to increase our knowledge and understanding of situations and processes which are complex. For its part, the ILO has given high priority to research and statistical work. We have, for example cooperated closely with, and developed the capacities of, national statistical bureaux on survey work. Guidelines will be released for this later in the year.

The ILO brings to the Alliance its strong normative framework which we believe to be of fundamental importance. Not just the forced labour Conventions themselves – Nos. 29 and 105 – but also those covering, for example, labour inspection, labour administration, private employment agencies and, since its adoption last week by the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference, Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

And I want to insist, as the Alliance has previously done, on the potential of this new instrument to address domestic servitude. But that potential has to be realized, in the first place through its widespread ratification which we hope to see in the months ahead with the efforts of all of the social forces which have mobilized in support of its adoption.

One of the major objectives of the ILO's Special Action Programme on Forced Labour has been to harness the energy and commitment of its tripartite constituents – employers' organizations and trade unions as well as Governments. They have an enormous contribution to make and have demonstrated very clearly that they are committed to making it.

Through the leadership of the International Organisation of Employers and of the International Trade Union Confederation respectively, the ILO can now count with global alliances of business and of trade unions, each of which are ever more active in the development of national action plans and referral mechanisms. You will hear more about this from their representatives very shortly.

Dear Colleagues,

As I said at the outset, the ILO very much appreciates the focus of this year's Alliance Conference on Decent Work and Social Justice. It underlines the centrality of the ILO's mandate and labour market policy, labour institutions, and regulation to the work and objectives of the Alliance. Equally, it highlights what we understand as the ILO's responsibilities to the Alliance.

My Director-General, Juan Somavia, has asked me to assure you that the ILO is determined to be equal to those responsibilities – in the Alliance itself and through UN GIFT too. We believe it is part of our job to bring all parties from the world of work to the table and to interact fully with those engaged in other areas of crucial importance to the struggle against trafficking to ensure that our combined efforts render the best possible outcomes.

Thank you for your attention.
