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# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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## INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALL'89ª CONFERENZA INTERNAZIONALE DEL LAVORO

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Si è svolta a Ginevra nei giorni 5-12 giugno l'89ª sessione della Conferenza Generale del Lavoro, alla quale ha partecipato una Delegazione di Osservazione della Santa Sede, guidata dall'Osservatore permanente presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite ed Istituzioni Specializzate a Ginevra, S.E. Mons. Diarmuid Martin.

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento pronunciato dal Capo Delegazione nella mattinata di martedì 12 giugno:

#### • INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. DIARMUID MARTIN

Madame President,

The Holy See has followed with interest the progress made in recent years in implementing the policy of modernization and renewal of the International Labour Organization. The ILO is one of the oldest members of the family of International Organizations. Its mandate, however, remains always new and of vital interest. Its activities continue to affect the lives and the future of all the citizens of the world. Young people, especially, know that work is a key to the realisation of their hopes for personal fulfilment, for a satisfying and secure family life and indeed for the prosperity and peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

The theme of work needs to become even more central in international reflection in our day, when human aspirations have to be realised within a dramatically changed situation of economic and political interdependence. Equitable global economic integration will only be lasting when it is based on policies which integrate and fully respect the dignity of each human person, the unity and interdependence of the human family and the sharing of and common stewardship for the goods of all of creation.

It is within this broad context that one of the new overarching themes of the ILO's renewal policy has emerged: the concept of "decent work", a concept which stresses the qualitative aspects of work and its deepest connections with human dignity. Speaking just over one year ago at the Jubilee Gathering of Workers in Rome, Pope John Paul II recalled that "it is ever more necessary to establish a global coalition in favour of "decent work". All must work so that the economic system in which we live does not upset the fundamental order of the priority of work over capital, of the common good over private interest".

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Pope John Paul's Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* on human work. Even though remarkable changes which have taken place in the past twenty years, the principal elements of that Encyclical, which placed the human person at the centre of its reflection, constitute still today the essential components of decent work. Many of the same elements have been taken up by the Director General's Report, especially in his reflections on the significance of work. It is neither technology nor the market which are the primary subjects of work, but the human person. We realize today as never before that the decisive force in production is not just capital, but the human person and his or her knowledge, creativity and capacity for innovation and organization.

A society in which the right to work is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace (cf. *Laborem exercens*, n.18).

An agenda for decent work today, however, must look not only at increasing the quantity of work, in assuring access to work for all, it must also address the question of the quality of work, so that in work the person "achieves fulfilment as a human being, and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'" (Cf. *Laborem exercens*, n.9).

The International Labour Organization with its important network of Conventions and Recommendations has made pioneering and painstaking efforts in this area, building up the widest possible consensus on issues such as the elimination of forced and compulsory labour and the worst forms of child labour. We must ensure that this consensus now becomes universal. We must identify common strategies which show that increased productivity and competitiveness are not incompatible with an improvement in the quality of work, even while bearing in mind the variety of local conditions. If anything, the long-term search to ensure optimal economic growth must establish as a principal thrust and inspiration a real concern for the lives of workers and their families, in whatever part of the world they live.

The Delegation of the Holy See is especially happy to note the references in the Director General's report to the relationship between work and the family. He rightly notes "how the income and the satisfaction derived from work has a direct impact on family life and the quality of family relationships" (p.6). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* itself (Art.23, 3) affirms that the part of the scope of the right to a just and favourable remuneration is to ensure an existence worthy of human dignity for the workers's family. In today's economic order, we must ensure that workers and their families are not disproportionately exposed to the effects of external economic shocks. Even though the social statistics are there for all to see, we have not yet fully drawn the lessons of the effects on poor workers of so many recent economic crises or adjustment programmes. Policies of economic development must always include the provision of adequate social protection and social safety nets for the weakest.

One effect of recent economic crises has been that many children have been forced to leave school and enter the workforce, very often into the informal sector without any social protection. One new approach to the relationships between family and work which we have seen in these years is that of interesting - and indeed cost-effective - experiments which help children to remain in school, through offering modest subsidies to integrate family income. In our knowledge-based economy, economic opportunity is directly linked with access to education. Coalitions for "decent work" can also work to assist families to see that their children's aspirations for education are realised. Programmes which enable children to have greater opportunity for education and thus to enter the workforce better prepared have been shown to have significant impact on the fight against poverty.

The fight against poverty is today the proclaimed dominant aim of intergovernmental cooperation in favour of development. The concept of "decent work" must be integrated more effectively into development and poverty reduction programmes. One of the concrete ways of verifying the success of the Poverty Reduction Strategies, which the poorest countries are being asked to elaborate and apply, is quite simply to ask: how far have they improved access to work, both in its quantitative and qualitative aspects? The inspiration of our initiatives to fight poverty is rightly moving from an assistential approach, with its attendant dangers of creating dependency, to one founded on empowerment, on enabling people to realise their God-given capacities. This movement to

human empowerment must inevitably pass along the way of work.

We are called to foster the qualitative aspects of work, and especially the rights of workers, in an economic environment in which the very nature of the employer-employee relationship is changing. The fact that employer and employee may be separated by a network of subcontractors dispersed across different parts of the world does not mean that the responsibility for maintaining the highest attainable respect of labour standards may be weakened. We must decouple labour standards from any linkage with barely hidden protectionism and move to a situation in which, as the Director general says in his report "labour and other social policies need to be part of a coherent development strategy".

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