8th Annual Global Solidarity Summer School ICTU

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Dia ghuit agus Conas a ta sibh?

Well, from now on I either speak Italian or English, so I guess it is easier for all of you if I stick to English.

Minister of State for International Development Joe Mc Hugh,
Congress President Brian Campfield,
Mags O’Brian, Kevin Daily, Chairs of the Global Solidarity Committee,
Brothers and sisters,

It is a great pleasure and honour to be here addressing your gathering that this year is focused on two major issues calling the labour movement as well as society as a whole to swift action: climate change and the international refugees’ crisis. These are topics that are also prominently in the agenda of the International Labour Organization, which I am here to represent.

Allow me first of all to bring you the warm greetings of our Director General Guy Ryder, whom many of you would remember as head of the International Trade Union Confederation prior to take the helm of the ILO.

Let me say in short what the ILO is: the first agency of the United Nations, actually preceding the birth of the UN since it is the only international body that survived the League of Nations established after World War I. The ILO was therefore established in 1919 and we are soon celebrating its 100 years of action.

Yesterday, when I met the ICTU Forum on European and International matters in Dublin and we had a passionate discussion about how to be better mutually supportive, I told the ICTU leadership how much impression I got from all the wonderful display of pride around town about the 100 years of the Republic (and I want to specifically cite the wonderful display on the SIPTU building). This is why I think you are probably the audience that understand better how that historical period is important
and brings us to the values that should be leading our action as current universal reference: freedom, mutual respect, human rights, solidarity and what is still the leading goal of the ILO: social justice.

The United Nations as a whole has tried to give an answer through a set of universal goals to be addressed by all countries (while in the past the targets were only directed towards developing countries it is now clear that the efforts need to be collective and those who have more need to do more): the Sustainable Development Goals that, as President said, were recently adopted and the Summer School discussed in depth last year.

I am pleased to have been able to bring to you (thanks to the request from David Joyce, the support of the ILO Communication Department which issued them and very importantly my husband who carried the box to the airport) the bags that were distributed last June to the Delegates accredited at the International Labour Conference in Geneva. This way every time you go shopping you will be able to recall the whole set of SDGs, each of them complementary and necessary for the development of stable and progressive democratic societies.

Different parts of the UN and its agencies are particularly mandated to lead on each of them. The ILO is in charge of Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth. “Decent Work” is at the core of the ILO mandate: governments, employers and workers organizations have agreed that the way forward for pursuing a fair globalization is through promoting employment, guarantee rights at work, extend social security and labour protection and promote social dialogue. These are the four pillars of the ILO Decent Work agenda with gender and poverty reduction as cross-cutting themes.

Roughly half the world’s population still lives on the equivalent of about US$2 a day. And in too many places, having a job doesn’t guarantee the ability to escape from poverty, including in our countries where workers, mostly young workers, are destined to precarious jobs with no rights nor benefits. A continued lack of decent work opportunities, insufficient investments and under-consumption lead to an erosion of the basic social contract underlying democratic societies: that all must share the fruits of progress.

The ILO Director General Guy Ryder has launched a Centenary initiative, addressing the world of work today and its most important Decent Work deficits. It is centred on three major axis:

Jobs, poverty and social protection (there is the need to create 600 million jobs, social protection only available to 27% of world’s population, 40% of the world’s working-age youth are either unemployed or have a job to live in poverty)

The quality of work (half of population in informal economy, rise of precarious jobs, each year around 2,3 m workers lose their life in accidents at work, poor health and disability)

Internalization of production (global value chains and Export Processing Zones without workers’ rights in particular freedom of association and the right to bargaining collectively, lack of fair fiscal policies for starting or maintaining quality public services, but also the challenge of the 150 million international migrant workers, who – because of current policy trends as well as work organization and immigration policies risk to become those with no chance to climb the social ladder, being stuck to the least desired jobs in a given society).
As already pointed out by President Campfield and Minister McHugh, the recent increases in refugees and other forcibly displaced people is unfortunately likely to increase in the future, hence the need for a joint and urgent response. First, let me point out that this is not just a European crisis: 80% of the displaced people are in developing countries.

For example, the number of Syrian refugees registered in neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt) is 4.3 million people, but the estimates are at over 6 million (in Lebanon one in four people living in the country is a refugee, but any king of income generation activity is illegal; as a result 70% of displaced Syrians in Lebanon live below the poverty line).

Lack of access to formal employment has also led to growth of informal employment and increased exploitation, with growing cases of child labour, trafficking and forced labour.

The right to work and guarantee of non-discrimination is therefore an essential component for both refugees and to respond to fears from domestic workforce witnessing the exploitation from undercutting of wages and working conditions undermining established labour market or collective agreement standards.

The ILO has contributed to the policy discussion through a recent Technical Meeting that has adopted (through a quite difficult discussion)” Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market” and next week will hold a Meeting of Experts hopefully adopting “Operational Guidelines on Fair Recruitment” in so contributing to practical guidance for governments and social partners, to be read in conjunction with its International Labour Standards (in particular C 97 and 143 on Migrant workers, not ratified by Ireland, as well as core labour standards on Freedom of Association, Collective Bargaining, non-discrimination and fight against child labour, forced labour and trafficking).

The international community but also governments and civil society worldwide of course also need to tackle the sources of the crisis including conflicts and economic crises. This implies a response at two levels of action, both in the countries affected by the conflicts or climate change and in the countries of destination.

Allow me here a brief reference to your support for Palestinian workers and people in general. As you are aware, every year the International Labour Conference receives a Report from the Director General on the Occupied Palestinian territories. Unfortunately the latest edition still highlights how the Israeli occupation led to a serious deterioration of the Palestinian economy, high unemployment and worsening labour conditions. It is a topic that you will develop with your well-known passion and solidarity and I want to pay tribute to them.

In my last remarks on the issue of migration and refugees, I spoke about climate change, a reason for many to have to leave their countries, but also an immediate general direct concern for our societies.

You will discuss the matter in depth later on today. Allow me to simply say that the effects of climate change are already seriously affecting labour markets and employment. Droughts, heat waves, heavy rains, etc have displaced workers, disrupted business and heavily affected working conditions and OSH, in particular let me reiterate that the countries most affected are Least Developed
Countries and Small Island Developing States, with women more likely to be affected than men because of existing gender inequalities.

I welcome the ICTU focus on Climate Change since it is evident that often workers approach this theme also with fears about losing their current jobs due to possible changes in production and consumption. It is a reality that we need to address concretely, not to shy away from the debate.

It is crucial for TUs to link the job challenges when discussing climate change and demand a “just transition” to a sustainable low-carbon and environmentally sustainable society for all.

If government address the climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies with investments in new technology, products, services and infrastructures, this can provide up to 60 million new much needed jobs.

In November 2015 the ILO adopted detailed Guidelines for Just Transition, based on evidence and lessons-learnt from country-level policies and sectoral strategies, going from employment-centred macro-economic policies, to social protection to safeguard workers affected by negative impact of climate change, economic restructuring and resource constraints to ensuring social dialogue and coordination, in order to build broad political consensus. The restructuring processes need to be embedded in a culture of industrial relations marked by strong workers’ participation as well by tripartite for a at national level, with the involvement of various Ministries in order to ensure policy coherence.

Allow me to finish this brief excursus, going back to the presence of Minister Mc Hugh, in order to thank Ireland and in particular Irish Aid for its contribution to the ILO work of development cooperation. If I am correct, Ireland is currently renegotiating an agreement with the ILO, after having strongly partnered up to 2015 on issues such as disability, women’s entrepreneurship, forced labour and child labour.

I want to praise the fact that in particular the projects on child labour and forced labour had been built with a focus on a governance based on social dialogue, with a strong involvement of trade unions in the countries at stake (and with results praised across the Un system, such as in Tokor, Ghana).

I have been pleased to hear Minister Mc Hugh to cite an upcoming renewed strong link between Irish Aid and ICTU and I hope the ILO will be part of the equation.

The recent adoption by the ILO Conference of the 2014 Protocol to the ILO C. 29 on Forced Labour (which we hope soon Ireland will ratify), has also contributed to the specific SDG 8.7 target. Under this goal it calls for effective measures to end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour in all its forms, including the worst forms of child labour.

To this end an Alliance 8.7 comes to be created. We hope that this Alliance will bring together governments, social partners, development agencies, academia and civil society in order to propose concrete action to tackle the scourge of 21 million women, men and children trapped in forced labour, $150 billion illicit profits generated annually from forced labour; 168 million girls and boys still in child labour, despite significant reduction in recent years.
As I mentioned before, the action cannot be focused only on specific current measures, but we need long-term prevention strategies, such as quality income-earning activities, social security, labour protection and the right for all workers to organize and bargaining collectively.

In essence “Decent Work” is the way for the “Future of Work” that we want.

Your initiative on Global Solidarity is an important piece of the global puzzle for “social justice” that we must start designing today through concrete engagements as you are doing.
I wish you all the best for your deliberations.