



## ***International Advocacy Reports and Statements***

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### **98<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference Geneva, 3-19 June 2009**

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#### **Committee of the Whole and the Global Jobs Pact**

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) annual International Labour Conference (ILC) met from 3 to 19 June in Geneva. The main focus of the conference was the global financial and economic crisis and its effect on employment. Nine heads of state addressed the Conference at a Global Jobs Summit which also featured four high-level panels coordinating responses to the crisis, reforming development cooperation, managing the national jobs agenda, and upholding labour standards and working conditions. Conference delegates agreed to convene a special "Committee of the Whole on Crisis Responses" that integrated these discussions into a "Global Jobs Pact".

The Committee of the Whole, which met in 18 sittings from 3 to 9 June, was an unusual deviation from ILO Conference procedures. The credit goes in large part to the leadership of the Employers' Group of the ILO Governing Body, which took the initiative to propose the reorganization of the Conference at short notice to deal more effectively with the issues at hand. The procedural device allowed all members of the ILO to participate under informal rules of procedure, to engage in dialogue with a wide range of experts and to negotiate freely and without recorded votes. The main objective of the Committee was to look beyond the causes of the crisis to craft a recovery plan that would include the full panoply of employment-related action items – that is, a Global Jobs Pact that was adopted by the Conference on 19 June.<sup>1</sup> This Global Jobs Pact has already served to elevate the visibility of the ILO and employment-oriented policies in the global coordination of efforts to stimulate recovery from the economic and financial crisis.

Gender related issues were frequently mentioned by Conference delegates and the experts who were invited to assist the deliberations in the Committee of the Whole. For example, Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative stated that the financial crisis was an opportunity to integrate a gender focus more effectively into the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. She urged ILO constituents to reach out to women's organizations to broaden the participation of women in ILO policy-setting. Mention was made by worker representatives of the need to close the gender

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<sup>1</sup> Recovering from the Crisis: A Global Jobs Pact, International Labour Conference 98<sup>th</sup> session, Geneva, 19 June 2009, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_108456.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_108456.pdf)

pay gap and the Workers' group was especially supportive of the gender dimension of the crisis being taken fully into account in the final document along with measures to overcome structural gender discrimination. Government officials also spoke of the need to focus on gender, to redress the balance and to resolve inequalities.<sup>2</sup>

Gender equality received the most substantial attention however, when the officers of the ILO Committee on Gender Equality were invited to present the outcomes of their work to the Committee of the Whole during a special sitting. This unusual procedure was a significant gesture to contribute to the work of the Committee's drafting group on how best to incorporate the gender dimension of the crisis response. The chair of the Committee on Gender Equality referred delegates to the analysis in their report, *Gender equality at the heart of decent work* on how the crisis impacts in different ways on women and men.<sup>3</sup> The chair presented ten points that the Committee of the Whole could take into consideration as follows:

1. Gender equality in the world of work is widely recognized as one of the ILO's core values;
2. The ILO has a clear role to play in looking at international economic and financial policies from the perspective of gender equality with a view to achieving policy coherence;
3. The failure to uphold universally recognized rights during times of economic crisis is also a failure of economic policy;
4. The crisis is an opportunity to form new gender equality responses;
5. When preparing and evaluating government budgets the relative impacts on women and men should be considered;
6. Gender concerns should be included in all the measures contained in recovery packages;
7. Immediate responses to the crisis should include job preservation and creation measures, skills training and support for small and medium-sized enterprises;
8. Further down the line the Committee had a number of measures to propose including formalizing informal jobs, revising legislation, assisting with the work/life balance, combating stereotypes, etc;
9. An equal voice should be given to women when designing and evaluating recovery packages; and
10. Research into emerging issues be strengthened at the ILO to promote policy coherence and gender equality at the international level.

The Employer Vice-Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality added that the Employers' Group believed the findings of the Committee, arrived at as they were through a process of tripartite consensus to be of the utmost importance. She also

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Committee of the Whole on Crisis Responses, Provisional Record 19, International Labour Conference 98<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva, June 2009, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_108440.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_108440.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Report VI, International Labour Conference 98<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva, June 2009, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_105119.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_105119.pdf)

observed that it is mostly women in the informal economy and they suffer most from discrimination there. She stressed, among other things the value of women's entrepreneurship and insisted that any measures taken be tangible and sustainable. The Worker Vice-Chair of the Committee emphasized the need for equality and that what the Committee on Gender Equality was trying to achieve was consistent with what the Committee of the Whole is trying to achieve in responding to the crisis. In the event, the contribution of the Committee on Gender Equality did indeed have an impact on the final text of the Global Jobs Pact. The key issues that they raised were integrated into the final text with notable support from the Workers' Group and from the Africa Group, among others.

The Global Jobs Pact is a substantial supplement to the other major declarations of policy issued by the ILO, including the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization that was adopted just a year ago. It does add something to the mix by specifically stating that "The world should look different after the crisis", and then describing how priority attention to protecting and growing employment should be directed to sustainable enterprises, quality public services and adequate social protection for all. The document lays out a set of guiding principles, followed by specific policy options on accelerating employment creation, jobs recovery and sustainable enterprises; building social protection systems and protecting people; strengthening respect for international labour standards; and advancing social dialogue, including collective bargaining "where appropriate at all levels". Preambular language refers to the importance of the response to the crisis producing a fair globalization, a greener economy and development that, among other goals, promotes gender equality. In elaborating the guiding principles, the Global Jobs Pact specifies that recovery policies should reduce gender inequality and narrow the gender pay gap. In prescribing "the way forward", the Pact sees the current crisis as an opportunity to shape *new* gender equality policy, by integrating gender concerns in *all* measures and by ensuring that women have an equal voice with men in designing and assessing the success of recovery packages.

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