

**Remarks of Ambet Yuson, General Secretary, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) to the International Labour Conference 14 June 2019**

Dear Chair, and Vice-Chairs, delegates and guests.

A century ago, the mission of the ILO was, and it remains peace. The Great War had shown that the suppression of conflict and the resolution of conflict were quite different and yielded different results. Peace was social justice, was fairness, and was rights, including workers right to freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike.

The centenary is not a time to adapt values to today's fashions, to accept that the labour of a human being has become, once again, a commodity or to decide that human dignity should belong only to those who can afford it. It is, rather, a time to renew the social contract that spawned the ILO.

Much progress has been made in a century, but this anniversary is a good time to go beyond the celebration and compare modern aims and actions to important principles and values of ensuring the rights of all workers.

Have standards become acceptable only if they do not interfere or affect the market? Have relations of social partners that produce negotiations and reasonable compromises too often been replaced by a relationship of the rulers and the ruled? Have the very operations of genuine democracy, the way that we govern ourselves, been crowded out by fear and hatred, disinformation, manipulation, and brutality? Must identity be used against others and must "outsider" mean "enemy"?

In our ranks at BWI, we rarely see people in the arena of battle trying to destroy others. Instead, we see human beings in families, in neighbourhoods, in communities and in workplaces who understand that progress and better lives for all depend on collective action and solidarity. In no area is the embrace of decent, constructive conduct and practices more urgent than in the acceptance of migrants and refugees. Their human rights, including workers' rights, must be fully protected or the rights of all workers are threatened.

The values and standards of the ILO are central to the work that we do every day. We still feel and cherish those profound aspirations of humankind.

In our sectors, those values also inform our concerns about the future of work and what will be shaping that future. Will that future be precarious, determined by stock prices, by dividends, by financial markets, by short-term gain? Or will workers and their trade unions have a say?

The Independent Commission on the Future of Work set up by the ILO argued for a human-centred approach to the future of work, in other words, the future of work was linked to the future of workers; what is best for workers, for human beings. And, they addressed issues that rob workers of rights, of security and of dignity. It is vital that other multilateral institutions, who are having great impact on the lives and rights of workers participate in this discussion and are influenced by ILO labour standards.

The Commission took the market into account, but they did not worship it or consider it infallible. They said that without action to correct the course of the global market, "we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social, and economic repercussions".

That same human-centred approach means that standards and their implementation are more needed than ever with the growth of global inequality, radical changes in the organisation of work

with global supply chains and a few very powerful companies. Those challenges need to be addressed with ILO values and standards.

The values and standards of the ILO are more necessary than ever with the changes in the nature of work and practices that encourage stress often being designed to undermine the employment relationship and security.

In the light of those changes, new standards such as on the current, burning issue of violence at work need to be considered to fill in gaps. BWI strongly supports the call for a Convention and Recommendation on violence and harassment in the world of work. We have an incredible opportunity to adopt a new Convention that will help shape the next 100 years by protecting workers and, in particular, women workers from violence.

As important as having good standards, however, is the ratification and implementation of these standards. I would not be an ardent trade unionist if I failed to mention the importance of ensuring the right to strike. It is an important part of trade union rights. The relationship between employers and workers in the workplace is inherently unequal. The right to strike can help offset that imbalance. To deprive workers of that right is to leave them defenseless.

If we are to measure up to our values for the future of work and for the future in general, we must take inspiration from those who built the ILO. They were not cynical nor were they afraid of their own shadows. Rather, they mobilised and acted with the same will and sense of urgency that had made it possible to survive 100 years.

I would like to end my intervention by recognizing the thousands of women who are on strike today in Switzerland demanding gender equality, equal pay, respect and dignity. I urge you to join me in supporting the strike today.