

European Union

**International Labour Conference
101st Session
(Geneva, 30 May- 14 June 2012)**

**Tribute to Mr Juan Somavia
ILO Director-General, 1999-2012
13 June 2012**

Mr President,

Mr Secretary-general of the Conference

Dear Director-General,

It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the EU and its member States, the acceding and candidate countries as well as Switzerland, Norway and Ukraine in paying tribute to your work as head of the ILO over the years.

We did some research. When you addressed the Conference for the first time on 1 June 1999, you said you had four strategic objectives.

The first related to fundamental principles and rights at work. You said the ILO had a **historic** mission to promote social justice and dignity at work through its Conventions. This year, a report analysed the interconnections between the eight fundamental conventions and their links with the human rights framework. The eight conventions are now firmly established as "core labour standards" and serve as a benchmark for respect of labour rights. So you met your first objective!

The second strategic objective you identified back in 1999 was the creation of employment. You called it the ILO's **political** mandate. You wanted to see the ILO commit itself to the creation of more and better jobs. Now in a structure that brings together employers and workers, we know full well that creating employment depends on the climate for investment and business creation being favourable. You said that the two areas were inextricably linked. Of course, creating jobs in the current global economic crisis is an even greater challenge. We have to strive for quality employment, particularly for the young. Under your leadership, the ILO has laid the groundwork for tackling the challenge with the Global Jobs Pact in 2009, and continuing efforts to promote employment at global level, as we have seen during this conference.

Your third strategic objective was social protection. You called it the ILO's **ethical** mission. You said the concept was foreign to the vast majority across the world, who had no social protection in their daily lives. This session of the Conference is adopting a recommendation on social protection floors. And that is a step in the right direction!

The fourth priority you identified was tripartism and social dialogue, which you called the ILO's **organising** mission. You said that social dialogue could not exert any influence

without strong employers' and workers' organisations. Tripartism cannot be effective without strong labour ministries and modern labour administrations. This session is showing again how much influence social dialogue can wield and how strong the employers' and workers' organisations are.

You said that development and gender equality for women would be cross-cutting issues for all four strategic objectives. And you said that the concept of decent work encompassed all four strategic objectives. In 2008 we adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation, which encapsulates all four strategic objectives. So, all in all, your achievements have been remarkable!

From the start you made clear what you wanted from the constituents and you guided us towards meeting those objectives. As you said, you have reduced the waiting time between hope and reality.

Dear Juan,

Your fellow countryman Pablo Neruda wrote a beautiful poem called “Si me olvidas” — if you forget me.

The foundations you have laid are sound and the ILO can continue to build on them.

We will not forget you.