



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer
of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
106th Session of the International Labour Conference

Geneva, 12 June 2017

Mr. President,

Over the last decade we have witnessed the inability of the world economy to create a sufficient number of jobs, not only in developed countries but even in emerging markets. This structural problem, known, even before the economic crisis, as jobless growth, will lead to severe strains on those searching for meaningful work and to increasing social unrest in local communities.

Current Economic Situation

The world economy is still confronted with increasing economic inequalities on every continent, a situation that deepens the employment and social gaps. As highlighted in the World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2017, in the current year the Global GDP growth hit a six-year low, at 3.1%, well below the rate previously projected. Looking at the forecast, global unemployment levels and rates are expected to remain high in the short term bringing total unemployment to just over 200 million¹. Youth unemployment is already at a much higher level than average unemployment for the adult populations². In 2015, almost 43 per cent of the global youth labour force was either unemployed or living in poverty despite having a job. Currently, 71 million youth are unemployed and 156 million young workers are living in poverty, as a result of the low quality of jobs available to young people. This scenario witnesses to the inability to create jobs, condemning the young people to have no place in society, since they have been pushed “to the margins of public life, forcing them to migrate or to beg for jobs that no longer exist or fail to promise them a future”³.

¹World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2017, ILO 2017, Geneva, Executive Summary.
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_541211.pdf

² Global employment trends for youth, 2016, Geneva.

³ Pope Francis, *Homily*, Vatican Basilica, 31 December 2016.

Jobless growth and automation

Mr. President,

While we must be wary of the potentially large number of job losses due to automation, we should also recognize that technology is now making it possible to create a new class of jobs that did not exist few years ago. These jobs will probably be characterized by a degree of creativity and innovation of which only the human person is capable. However, we need to be aware of two major risks associated with recent technological trends.

1. Despite the creation of new jobs, the overall balance between job creation and job destruction is likely to be negative. In particular, as a result of automation, more workers are substituted by robots, each day, both in developed and developing countries. It is no longer something affecting only low-skilled jobs, but a lot of medium and high skilled jobs are currently at risk of being lost to automation too. The increased use of robots in developed countries risks eroding the traditional labour-cost advantage of developing countries. In particular, the “share of occupations that could experience significant automation is actually higher in developing countries than in more advanced ones, where many of these jobs have already disappeared”⁴, and this concerns about two-thirds of all jobs.

This process is still too new to derive conclusive evidence. Several studies, however, report alarming predictions, suggesting that between 30 to 50% of the jobs in both advanced and developing countries are at risk of automation. Therefore, in this new industrial revolution, the risk of an increase in unemployment caused by automatization is likely to happen and it will change “work in ways that challenge existing social protections and reveal the inadequacy of existing labor laws”.⁵ The replacement of workers by new generation technology will lead to social environments never seen before, where we will be faced with significant ethical challenges. As stated by Pope Francis, by taking this path, “we end up working against ourselves”. Unless enterprises, governments, policy-makers, workers and jobseekers proactively respond together to these fast-encroaching technologies, opportunities may be lost and numerous industries may find themselves unprepared for the consequences.

The ILO, with its “unique tripartite structure, its competence, and its longstanding experience in the social field, has an essential role to play in evolving principles for the guidance of governments, workers' and employers' organisations, and multinational enterprises”⁶. Looking

⁴ World Bank, 2016, World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends, Washington, D.C.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.35.

⁶ ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, Geneva, November, 1977.

at the debate on future of work the ILO is very well situated to ensure that the automation of work remains rooted in the concerns of the smallest and most vital units that make up modern society: the family, the workplace and the community.

2. Another major risk depends on the fact that technology requires new and more sophisticated skills which not every member of society has. This could lead to further inequality of opportunities and, in particular, it could harm even more the weakest members of society. In fact, in a more technological and digitalized world the possibility to acquire new skills could make the difference between reintegration in the labour market and long-time unemployment. This is true both in advanced and in developing countries. Particularly in the developing countries, low skilled jobs and the low cost of work have allowed a strong reduction in the unemployment rate, helping a strong economic growth. Now, if the comparative advantage, brought about by the low cost of work, is reduced by a new wave of automatization, the risk is that we will observe in many cases a much earlier de-industrialization than originally projected.

Mr. President,

In advanced economies, the risk is that the skills gap will translate into a widening inequality, which will, in turn, further exacerbate social tensions. A radical re-thinking of education is needed, shifting away from the 'universal' secondary school/university curriculum towards more flexible alternatives that favour continuing life-long learning, employability and a capacity for moral judgement.

The Holy See has consistently stated here, as in other fora, that the term "education" refers not only to classroom teaching and vocational training but also to the complete formation of the person. In fact, what people need most is not only to increase their skills but also to be educated to understand reality in its entirety and to have the moral judgment to face changes and uncertainties that the future will bring. Policymakers tend to see education mainly as a key to economic survival, however, looking at the challenges to which we are called, it will be critical to widen the horizon. The educational responsibility of all who have at heart the common good and the welfare of future generations requires both a continued engagement for a free and accessible primary education, and for its quality. Education, in fact, is not only "directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity," but it is also a means for the participation of the individual in a free society and an instrument that promotes mutual understanding and "friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups".⁷

⁷ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966 and entry into force 3 January 1976, Art. 13, 1.

The future of work that we would like to see will be the result of our common efforts to realize a common vision. In shaping this product we should not forget that work is instrumental for the integral development of the human being. Work fulfils three basic human needs in our societies: the wish to develop capabilities, the need to interact with others and the need to earn one's sustenance. As stated by Pope Francis: "work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspect of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to the others"⁸.

Worker rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person and reflect the priority of the subjective over the objective dimension of work. All different worker rights should be practiced in accordance not only with the common good, but also with the universal destination of goods and respect for private property, subsidiarity and participation, and solidarity.

Sustainable Development Goals and decent work

Mr. President,

Looking at the ambitious set of Goals approved by the International Community in 2015, we find an explicit rejection "of the idea that there need be inherent contradiction or tension between continued economic growth and decent work-centred development processes, on the one hand, and environmental sustainability on the other"⁹. As clearly noted by Pope Francis, "where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature, its phases of decay and regeneration, or the complexity of ecosystems which may be gravely upset by human intervention"¹⁰. This reflects the technocratic paradigm—the tendency to see nature as something to be manipulated, mastered and controlled, with no concern for its inherent value or limits. The role of business is central to face these challenges, and it must be transformed if it would be able to play a constructive role. A start can be with bearing the true "economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources"¹¹, which is a precondition for ethical behaviour. The future of work, then, must be understood in the context of sustainable development and of environmental challenges, because, as evidence shows, "transition to an

⁸ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato sii*, p.127.

⁹ Ryder, Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative, Report of the ILO Director General, doc. ILC.106/DG/I, para.33.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato sii*, p. 190.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, New York, 18 April 2008.

inclusive green economy can indeed act as a new engine for growth and a strong driver of decent work creation in developing, emerging and advanced economies”¹².

In conclusion,

Mr. President, looking at the dialogue on the future of work, the transition to a new generation of technology has entailed a new set of challenges to be faced by our societies. The stakes are high, and there is the real danger that, in the near future, our economies will be characterized by large numbers of unemployed persons and large inequalities that will fuel social unrest. It is up to us to invert this trend. The recognition of the centrality of the human person suggests that, while investing in technology, we must always take into account the human dimension and social cohesion as the natural end of any economic enterprise. By investing in people we will create a wealthier and more just society in which persons may find both their complete identity and the fulfilment of their aspirations and their talents.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹² Ryder, *Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative*, Report of the ILO Director General, doc. ILC.106/DG/I, para. 35.