



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 99th Session of the International Labour Conference
Geneva, 10 June 2010

Mr. President,

The effects of the financial and economic crisis have globally damaged the welfare of families and individuals. Timid, uneven and uncertain signs of recovery notwithstanding, the impact of this recession has stifled progress in poverty reduction, increased unemployment in developed countries and every household has suffered setbacks in low-income countries. In 2015, 20 million more people in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 53 million more people globally, will find themselves in extreme poverty ¹. While there is general agreement on the need for structural reforms, vested interests must not lay most of the burden on wage earners, rural people, and already marginalized groups in society. Economic mechanisms without ethical criteria will not lead to constructive solutions.

The crisis can open a new perspective on the role of markets and on the role of the State. The food crisis of 2008 has shown that countries lacking basic food supplies could not simply rely on the forces of the market to ensure food for their people. Several export countries responded with protectionism and speculation resulting from the perception of shortage. Countries heavily dependent on food import witnessed serious protests. Thus a certain degree of self-sufficiency and a better regulation of the commodities markets became a logical conclusion.

The 2009 financial crisis has shown that financial markets are not self-regulating. Greed prevented the interruption of a process whose systemic risks had been foreseen by many. Financial measures and the assurance provided by States and Central Banks saved the banking system and avoided financial meltdown but were not capable of preventing the subsequent serious economic crisis that has resulted in a significant increase of unemployment and precariousness and has affected the most vulnerable persons and countries. Another result has been the enormous amount of public debt generated, especially by major advanced economies. In industrialised countries, in

¹ The crisis will likely have serious costs as measured by several human development indicators: 1,2 million more children under five and 265,000 more infants will die between 2009 and 2015; 50,000 more students will not complete primary education in 2015; 100 million less people will have access to safe drinking water in 2015. cf, World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report 2010: The MDGs after the Crisis*.

coming years, gross public debt will exceed 100 per cent of GDP thus raising sustainability issues. Governments, weakened by the level of their debt, feel obliged by the financial markets to reduce it. Public budgets and growth will be affected: taxes will increase, buying power will decrease, and unemployment will grow. The weak economic recovery runs the risk of being jeopardised.

This is a delicate condition for major advanced economies, since the process of fiscal consolidation will constrain economic growth. Recent experience shows that the adjustment coefficient is the level of employment, the buying power of people and their ability to feed, educate, and care for themselves. Justice demands that the suffering of people should not be the coefficient of adjustment of the economic system. While the merits of open markets in the creation of wealth should be acknowledged, some additional and internationally coordinated action, as well as the development of some means of common governance, appear necessary. We need to keep in mind that work is more than wages; it is the means to self-fulfilment and the way to achieve one's life project.

The Delegation of the Holy See fully supports the aim of the ILO to give priority to persons and their work in the search for innovative and dynamic policies aimed at removing structural impediments to the recovery of the economy. The attention to domestic workers and the positive vote taken on a new binding instrument for their protection express preference for the most vulnerable members of society. Domestic workers are doubly at risk. First, they come from the most disadvantaged segments of society with very limited resources for protection. Extreme necessity pushes them to take up any job available, even though, in more than a few cases, conditions at work are very hard. Second, the ambiance of their employment is open to exploitation. Women and girls constitute the majority within this category of workers. Often, they lack juridical and social protection, fair remuneration, limits on the amount of hours they are expected to work, a guarantee for a weekly period of rest, safeguards during times of illness or for maternity. When abuses occur, there is no appeal and the only option is to escape and thus to lose salary due as well as employment. On many occasions, within the privacy of the domestic walls, the dignity of domestic workers is violated. Physical and sexual harassment are not uncommon. Racial and religious identities expose these workers, especially women, to heavy discrimination.

If the domestic worker is an immigrant, especially if without proper documentation and/a labour contract, his/her vulnerability is much greater. But we should consider that this is one of the few sectors of the economy where immigrant workers are complementing and not substituting indigenous workers, since typically they accept jobs that the latter are unwilling to assume. In many poor countries, young girls are engaged in domestic work and their own families see their service as a normal contribution to family survival. On the other hand, domestic workers assume a critical role, especially in Western societies, where life-style and demographic changes demand their presence. They become an important presence in the family since they manage the

household, care for the elderly and for the children and thus allow mothers and daughters to pursue careers and active roles in society. Another important contribution offered by domestic workers is found in the remittances that they send home and that benefit families and local development. The opportunity and necessity of a new binding norm, an International Convention on Domestic Workers, appears undeniable: it will promote opportune national legislation for their protection, support their rights of association, of collective negotiation, and of union representation. An education campaign already should initiate to make domestic workers, as well as employers, aware of reciprocal duties and rights. This widening horizon on the world of work offers both a challenge and new possibilities, as the social encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, states: "...labour unions — which have always been encouraged and supported by the Church — ... Looking to wider concerns than the specific category of labour for which they were formed, union organizations are called to address some of the new questions arising in our society...The global context in which work takes place also demands that national labour unions, which tend to limit themselves to defending the interests of their registered members, should turn their attention to those outside their membership, and in particular to workers in developing countries where social rights are often violated. The protection of these workers, ...will enable trade unions to demonstrate the authentic ethical and cultural motivations that made it possible for them, in a different social and labour context, to play a decisive role in development."²

As part of this widening of horizons in the struggle for a global implementation of decent work, attention should focus on other categories of workers in need of protection: the masses of still unorganized workers, rural workers, and unemployed youth. The rights of unorganized workers are too often ignored, and, as a result, their security in the work place, their protection from unjust firing, and their entitlement to at least a minimum salary are not respected. Rural workers, in particular, are left out of the range of attention. Not always ready to confront market forces because of lack of training or lack of information, due to the current crisis, they risk being deprived of public support for technical capacity-building or for trade. These are badly needed measures responding to readjustment policies that proved to be counter-productive. Thus, some of these policies should be revised, and an allowance made for an incremental opening of borders for homogeneous groups of countries, for as long as they can improve their productivity and their capacity to profit from the market. In 92 countries, agriculture represents more than 75% of the GDP; between 2 and 2.5 billion persons derive their income from agriculture. This sector of the economy is a source of work, of food, of social networks, of emancipation of women, and of protection (or degradation) of the environment. By creatively supporting work in this sector, malnutrition and poverty can be reduced and eventually eliminated, and such workers integrated in the global economy.

² Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 64.

Finally, child labour and youth unemployment call for a concerted response. More than 215 million children are constrained to work, many in dangerous conditions. The number of unemployed youths has increased by 8.5 million between 2008 and 2009, the largest year-on-year increase in the last 10 years, and by more than 10 million since 2007. Wasted capacities and frustration can have disastrous social consequences for the future.

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The economic crisis can become an opportunity. The complexity of the situation makes it difficult to make appropriate choices. If, however, the recovery is comprehensive in its embrace of all workers, renews the tripartite dialogue that is at the core of the ILO mission, and gives priority to people and their talents, then a step forward will be taken in the pursuit of justice by the international community. In this approach, *A Global Jobs Pact* indeed will reduce the time lag between economic recovery and a recovery with decent work opportunities. If a reduction in military expenses is added to these efforts, rather than the 6 per cent increase in such expenses that occurred in 2009, more resources can be channelled toward the recovery of truly decent jobs. Men and women, workers, employers and entrepreneurs, constitute the best resources available; their intelligence, creativity and energy can develop new jobs and sustain innovation if their freedom is not detached from the responsibility to prevent the emergence of financial speculation at the expense of the real economy and of greed destructive of jobs and savings.

In conclusion, good decisions are necessary in order to move toward a post-crisis phase of the globalization of the economy and of work. But only a corresponding “ethical interaction of consciences and minds” will give rise to integral development³ where the human person is at the centre of labour relations, confident to journey toward a better future.

³ *Ibid.* n.9