



Statement by H. E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to
the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
107th Session of the International Labour Conference
Geneva, 4th June 2018

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See takes the opportunity to congratulate you for your election as president and to thank the Secretariat for all the preparatory work done throughout the last two years for the centennial activities. In the context of this 100th anniversary, my Delegation would like to reiterate that the future of work is one of the greatest challenges of our century as also witnessed by the commitment of the International Community to Sustainable Development Goal 8 in 2015.¹ The ILO, with its unique tripartite structure, its competence and longstanding experience, remains one of the most significant actors to address the challenges of its social justice mandate in the future.

The world is currently experiencing a fundamental and structural change, which requires an in-depth analysis and reconsideration of what labor is, and what it means, for the economy, society and policy-making. Indeed, growing global economic and power imbalances, increasing demographic, social and environmental challenges and persistent cyclical financial instability do not only demand continuous reflection and debate by policy makers and leaders at all levels, but also their sustained and continuous commitment.

In the age of sustainable development, labor should remain an essential channel to build an inclusive society, leaving aside the superficial measurement of human progress only in terms of economic growth and the accumulation of material wealth. According to the Holy See, labor should mean participating and contributing to an inclusive society. Hence, integral human development must rest on three legs: economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

This implies a reevaluation of work, seeing it as an essential expression of the human person, as a means by which we can pursue self-realization. The inversion of the order between means

¹ SDG Goal 8: “by 2030, to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>.

and ends, where work as a good becomes an “instrument,” and money an “end”, is a fertile ground for the reckless and amoral “culture of waste”.²

Decent work also includes the notion of a just wage. Its determination should not be left solely to the whim of the market but must include justice and equity, so to allow people to live a truly human life and to have adequate access to all goods which are destined for our common use. In the words of Pope Francis, a just wage allows people to “find meaning, a destiny, and to live with dignity, to live well”³.

Advanced technologies

The catalyst of the structural change that we are currently experiencing remains the rapidly growing field of technology; it is creating new challenges to which we have yet to come to terms. The economy has accepted the advances of technology with the assumption that it has a merely positive impact on society. In reality, the evidence shows that this is not the case. Technology and globalization are playing a major role in the progressive polarization of the labor market, in both advanced and developing countries, a phenomenon that is putting a strain on societies, which have not yet fully recovered from the financial crisis. The fear that technology may have adverse effects on the number of jobs and on their quality is not new; today, however, we need an in-depth understanding of its meaning and its potential implications. Most importantly, the temptation to replace workers with machines for cost effectiveness raises grave ethical challenges because it elevates economic efficiency and productivity over human dignity. It would be wiser to put technology at the service of the common good.

In addition, in the North and the South, we see a tendency to increase the number of jobs to the detriment of their quality. In many countries, having a job, yet remaining poor, is an increasing reality.

As noted by Pope Francis: “We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a ‘dignified sustenance’ for all people, but also their ‘general temporal welfare and prosperity’. This means [...] above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives”.⁴

Youth

In order to build a sustainable future, we also need to involve, and rely on, the next generations. The paradox is that, whereas we should expect the greatest contribution from the young, the trends inherited from the past, and the present, put youth in a marginal and vulnerable position. The world economy, although growing, is not able to create enough quality jobs (jobless growth), in particular for young people. This phenomenon also occurs in

² “*Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones*”. Considerations for an ethical discernment regarding some aspects of the present economic-financial system” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, 6 January 2018, 31.

³http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/07/10/pope_francis_speech_at_world_meeting_of_popular_movements/1157291.

⁴ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 192.

emerging countries and in the developing world where the creation of new jobs is still low compared to the high growth rates recorded by these economies. In order to build an inclusive future, we need to react and place young people at the center of labor issues⁵. In this regard, education and professional formation are of paramount importance for providing the young generation with the skills and competencies needed that will allow them to make the most of their talent and put it at the service of society. We should not neglect the role of young people in technology dissemination, the social media, research and innovation, participation to democratic life, ethical renewal and personal development. Youth should be looked at in a different way: from the most serious concern to the greatest opportunity. Young people can become the catalysts of a new vision of the future of labor, mobilizing people of all ages in a process centered on labor and inclusiveness.

Women and work

The ambition of the International Community is to guarantee decent work for all. When considering the issue of decent work for all, we should be mindful that it includes all human beings, meaning all women and men.

There is an urgent need to recognize better the equal rights of women in the labor market, to respect genuinely the tasks they carry out in their professional life, keeping in mind their aspirations within the family and within society as a whole. Unfortunately, reality nowadays still prevents many women from being employed, often due to a purely economic conception of society, which continually seeks profit to the detriment of the most vulnerable in a manner that surpasses the parameters of social justice.

Too often, women still have to choose between family and work and becoming a mother still remains a source of disadvantage at work. Every woman has the right to choose between being simultaneously a mother while carrying out a professional career or being a mother and dedicating all her activities to the family.

Family remains the fundamental unit of society and hence needs to be protected. Women represent a vital part of the family, providing an essential source of domestic unity, while being co-responsible with men in the education of children and in caring for the household. At this stage, society must recognize the social value of a woman's work in the family and of her specific role as a mother. Without a clear understanding of this aspect of human dignity, discrimination of women will never be overcome.

Women and education

Access to education, on all levels, should be one of the main drivers in the promotion of women. It is the prerequisite for access to employment, to personal autonomy and to the full participation of women in economic, social and political life. Education is the road to avert poverty and to fight all forms of discrimination between different types of professions, so as to put women and men on the same footing in terms of rights, responsibilities and wage levels.

⁵ For example: the labor market, the educational system, the family, formation and training, the enterprise and the active society.

Millions of young girls, however, especially in developing countries, are still deprived of schooling and education.

Women and slavery

The Holy See once again condemns violence at work, forced labor, modern forms of slavery and human trafficking, which particularly affects the most vulnerable parts of society, including women and girls, especially those coming from the poorest regions of the world.⁶ Those women are, sadly, subjected to their work, while work should be at the service of their human dignity.

This is the consequence of a “culture of relativism [...] which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labor on them or enslaving them [...]”.⁷ Contemporary forms of slavery, trafficking in persons and forced labor should be addressed at their roots. This task begins with acknowledging the source of human dignity, with a clear understanding that all men and women are equal in dignity and thus no human being should be treated as a mere object or as a means to an end.

Mr. President,

Allow me, in this context, to reaffirm the concern of the Holy See for those unfortunate situations where the dignity of women and men workers is vilified by violence, especially sexual violence, and harassment. It is fitting that the International Community take stock of so many experiences in order to confront the causes of these crimes, to protect workers and to assure the due reparation to the victims. It is, therefore, even more regrettable to witness the present attempt by some to hijack the preparatory text of the Commission, particularly *Item 5*, with the clear aim of introducing controversial concepts and new definitions that lack any scientific evidence, or international consensus and which are driven by an “ideological colonialism”.

Such attempts shy away from clearly addressing and effectively preventing the causes of violence in places of work and forget the need for authentic assistance to which victims of sexual harassment, women along with men, are entitled.

Mr. President,

By way of conclusion, my Delegation calls the International Community to achieve “real equality” in every area of work. As highlighted in this year’s report by the Director-General: “equality of treatment and opportunities is a founding value of our organization and at the

⁶ As reported by ILO, women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labor, accounting for 99% of victims in the commercial sex industry, and 58% in other sectors. Confer: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 123.

heart of social justice". Hence, solidarity is manifested, in the first place, by a just distribution of goods, fair remuneration for work and a zeal for a more just social order.⁸

Women who are present in every area of social, economic, cultural and political life make an indispensable contribution to growth and to shaping economic structures more worthy of humanity. Achieving full respect for women and their identity involves more than simply the condemnation of discrimination and injustices. Such respect must first and foremost be won through an effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, including all areas of a woman's life and beginning with a universal recognition of the dignity of women. Our ability to recognize this dignity comes from the use of reason itself, which is able to understand the law of God written in the heart of every human being.

Thank you, Mr. President.

⁸ Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nn. 410-414.