

## **Remarks of the Arab Group on the Annex of the Director General's Report on the Situation of Workers in the Occupied Arab Territories**

**(The 102<sup>nd</sup> Session of the International Labor Conference 2013)**

1. The Arab Group expresses its sincerest appreciation to Mr. Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labor Office, for his enthusiasm to pursue implementing ILC resolutions issued 1974 and 1980 on following up conditions of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. This report is the first to be presented by Mr. Ryder to the 102<sup>nd</sup> session of the International Labor Conference (2013) since he took office of the International Labor Organization on October 2012. The Group highly appreciates endeavors of the high-level Commission of Inquiry, delegated by the Director General to Palestine, to report what is happening on the ground, adopting a high level of commitment, neutrality and transparency.
2. The Director General's report describes conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories as dominated by a high level of uncertainty, and it describes the situation as a real danger to wipe out all economic and social achievements, which have been supported by the international community in the two decades that followed Oslo Accords. The report sees further that there is no real achievement on the ground that can be "maintained", as settlement activities, restrictions, demolition of Palestinian homes and other structures continue. This is a fatal blow to the peace process and endeavors to support the two-state solution.

The Arab Group calls on the international community and peace-lovers all over the world to quickly remedy the current situation, and correct the path of this major leap to the back, and to push forward as well as support the creation of an independent Palestinian state, based on what the Commission stresses in its 2011 report that current national Palestinian institutions are strong enough to create an independent state.

3. The report points out that the current situation requires Israel to take measures to lift excessive restrictions on people and entrepreneurs. However such restrictions should be eliminated completely. The Arab Group sees that this approach is not sufficient, and it would have been better to ask Israel obviously to accelerate putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, South Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.
4. The Arab Group agrees with the concluding observations of the Director General that the ILO sees that such negative developments affect the status and rights of workers, employers and labor market authorities and institutions. The Palestinian Economy should have witnessed more

progress to build the independent state; instead, it is forced to strive to exist while suffering from stagnation, high unemployment rates, poverty, and food dependency. The Arab Group calls upon the International Labor Organization to enact such concluding observations, which are among the core values and principles of this Organization.

5. The Director General mentions the financial crisis of the Palestinian Authority, considering that the crisis is aggravated due to the continued failure of donors to fulfill their promised obligations, and not only due to the Israeli decision to suspend the payment of customs clearance revenues to the Palestinian Authority, which represent the most significant revenues to cover staff salaries. This suspension has come as an Israeli reaction to the United Nations General Assembly resolution to grant Palestine the status of a non-member Observer State. In this context, the Arab Group condemns and denounces the arbitrary Israeli practices, especially that this was preceded by a similar Israeli reaction when UNESCO issued a similar resolution in favor of Palestine. Therefore, the Arab Group calls upon the Director General of the International Labor Office to denounce such practices and to focus on direct effects of such a decision on the Palestinian economy, and to call on Israel to quickly release the suspended funds and to guarantee the non-recurrence of such tactics.
6. The Arab Group agrees with the Director General's concluding remarks that the Israeli reaction to the United Nations General Assembly resolution on Palestine, the unprecedented Israeli settlement expansion, and imposing restrictions on the Palestinian economy that jeopardizes the two-state solution. What is required, in addition to the serious negotiations, is taking concrete steps to boost the peace process and to revive the Palestinian economy. The Arab Group sees that these concluding observations lack an obvious call from the ILO to the international community to condemn these practices, to assign responsibilities of all key players and to use all possible pressures on Israel to revive hopes of Arab peoples to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories.
7. The Arab Group observes that the report of the Commission of the International Labor Organization has not tackled the Israeli occupied Arab territories in South Lebanon. Furthermore, the Commission did not consult, in Cairo, with the concerned Arab parties without offering any justifications, unlike the security concerns and justifications that prevented the Commission from arriving at the Syrian Golan, as this part has been covered by the Arab Labor Organization.
8. The report indicates that hostilities that took place in Gaza in November 2012 led to the killing of 158 Palestinians and the demolition of 328 homes, and making thousands homeless, without mentioning the name of Israel, the volume of the arsenal used in the aggression on Gaza, or stating

any condemnations to these actions. On the other hand, the Commission mentioned that six Israelis were killed by Palestinian missiles.

9. The report points out that work of the Palestinians in Israel and the settlements remains largely unregulated and is open to abuse as it is regulated by the system of licenses and quotas, which leads to exploiting and abusing Palestinian workers by Israeli and Palestinian agents. The report adds that among 83000 workers in Israel and the settlements in 2012, a quarter of them were estimated to work in Israel without licenses. In spite of all the efforts exerted by Palestinian Trade Unions, Palestinian workers still face significant difficulties in bring cases before courts for violating their rights In this connection, the Arab Group calls upon the Director General of the International Labor Office to quickly adopt practical steps to eliminate abusing Palestinian workers in both Palestine and Israel, as the Director General has stressed that the International Labor Organization may offer appropriate assistance in this regard.
10. The Arab Group appreciates the commitment of the International Labor Organization to pursue implementing ILC resolutions issued 1974 and 1980. Also, the Group highly appreciates endeavors of the Commission that made this report, which describes with a high level of commitment, neutrality and transparency the status of workers, employers, economic and social conditions, as well as the state of affairs of the Palestinian people and institutions, on the ground.

Agreeing with the present Director General on the concluding observations, the Arab Group hopes that the Director General would give more attention to the demands of the Arab Group, which were raised to the former Director General of the International Labor Organization, as most of the demands are repeated in the consecutive sessions of the Conference, but no real progress was realized. Such demands include, but not limited to:

- a. The International Labor Organization Commission visiting Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, without disregarding South Lebanon, would start the visit earlier so that the Commission and concerned parties would have sufficient time to be well prepared and present the report of the Director General in all official languages of the Conference, including Arabic, so that the Conference participants would study the report conveniently,
- b. The title of the report would come in harmony with the two relevant ILC resolutions: The report would be an implementation for the conference resolution on discrimination and violations of union freedoms and rights (1974), not only 1980 resolution on Israeli settlements,

- c. The Arab group wishes that the concluding observations of the Director General's report would include a reference to the repeated demands of the Arab group, so that such demands may be followed up and implemented by the new Director General of the International Labor Office,
- d. Taking practical steps and mobilizing international support for intervention and adequately making pressures against Israel to revive the Palestinian economy, to make available more job opportunities, and to improve the living standard of the Palestinian people through:
- Condemning Israeli resolutions of suspending the payment of customs clearance revenues to the Palestinian Authority, and calling for Israel to quickly transfer all the due amounts while pledging not to resort to such oppressive measures in the future,
  - Transferring to the Palestinian authorities the accumulated amounts in the Social Security Authorities in Israel as these amounts are used in Israel while they are the contributions of Palestinian workers,
  - Urging the donors to meet their obligations in due time, and expand the circle of aids to remedy the significant decline in developing socio-economic conditions and to build institutions capable of constructing and sustaining an independent Palestinian state,
  - Removing all obstacles and restrictions on the mobility of people, goods, equipment, production elements and reconstruction materials,
  - Exerting more efforts to support, finance and secure the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection of risks of non-sustainability, as the Commission stresses in its report the importance of the Fund in the remedy of the high levels of poverty and unemployment, and the role of the International Labor Organization, as a partner in this Fund, to find appropriate solutions for its finance.
- e. Drafting the concluding remarks of the Director General's report as a short and medium-term work plan, to be financed primarily by the International Labor Organization and other Arab and international donors to guarantee that Israel would abide by national labor legislations and international labor standards, while combating the phenomena of discrimination, abuse, maltreatment and violation of labor rights in Israel and the settlements, while improving working conditions,
- f. Finding the right formula for conference delegates to discuss the annex of the Director General's report on the occupied Arab territories, and to

deem it as an integral part of the Director General's report to the International Labor Conference, and thus it would be discussed in the plenary session or in the context of forming a special committee for the annex.

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