

**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 104th Session of the International Labor Conference 2015)**

- 1- The Arab Group expresses its sincerest appreciation to Mr. Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labor Office, for delegating again a Commission of ILO to visit Palestine and the other Arab territories under the Israeli occupation to present an accurate account of what is happening on the ground. The Commission is duly to present a neutral unbiased evaluation for the negative effects of the policies and practices of the occupation authorities on social, economic and humanitarian conditions of the Arab workers and their families in these areas. The Commission's report shall be annexed to ILO Director General's report to 104th session of the International Labor Conference (2015). This comes in implementation of relevant ILC resolutions issued in 1974 and 1980.
- 2- The group also expresses its appreciation to Mr. Guy Ryder's efforts to participate in improving the human, economic and social conditions of the Arab people in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories through supporting and enacting the activation of the enhanced program of technical cooperation for the occupied Arab territories, and for his approaches to participate in the process of the reconstruction of Gaza. As the Arab Group highly appreciates these efforts, the Group calls on the International Labor Organization to mobilize more financial resources in the next phase to enable this program to achieve more tangible achievements for the Arab peoples in the occupied territories, with more focus on building Palestinian capabilities and institutions, as well as refreshing the economy to generate more productive and rewarding job opportunities.
- 3- The Arab Group highly appreciates endeavors of the ILO Commission of Inquiry, which visited Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories in March 2015, to prepare this report, which describes and analyzes the realities of the current economic and social conditions in the occupied Arab territories, while adopting a high level of commitment, neutrality and transparency. The Group is also thankful for releasing the report early, in response to a previous Arab Group request. The Group highly appreciates the approach adopted in preparing the report, as it includes two chapters directly connected to the effects of the Israeli occupation on the retreats in economy, labor markets, and the Palestinian labor rights in a context of discrimination. The Arab Group recommends that it is necessary in the next phase for the International labor Organization to focus on the effective interventions to tackle these issues, as an integral part of the core purviews of the ILO.

- 4- The Arab Group welcomes the outcomes of the meeting held in Geneva in March 2015 between the ILO Commission of Inquiry and the delegation of the Arab Labor Organization for more consultations on the conditions of the Arab workers and their families in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories in light of the ongoing abusive practices of the Israeli occupation. The Commission has been provided with the relevant available data and information by the Arab Labor organization. As the Arab Group well understands that the Commission could not visit Syria for security reasons, it sees no reason for abstaining from visiting the occupied South Lebanon, and therefore the report does not cover what is happening in this area.
- 5- In regard of the Commission's visit to the occupied Syrian Golan, and similar to its 2014 visit, the Commission indicated that the visit was conducted after having a permission from the Israeli authorities, as a gesture of goodwill, as the Israeli government does not consider the Golan now as an occupied territory for it was unilaterally annexed in 1981, a decision that was never recognized by the United Nations. Therefore, the Arab Group sees that this issue should be tackled with all due reservations and duly denounces this decision, and calls for the international community to work on forcing Israeli authorities to respect international legitimacy and resolutions, and above all calling that the above mentioned permission should not be regarded as a precedent, per se.
- 6- The report indicates that the Commission made consultations and discussions with several Palestinian and Israeli organizations and entities, relevant international and non-governmental organizations, and Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan. As the circle of discussions and consultations widens, the Arab Group does not see a justification for the Commission for not meeting representatives of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.
- 7- The Director General of the International labor Office indicates that the status quo is predominantly overshadowed by a high level of distrust, which affects in particular the lives and livelihood of Palestinian workers and their families, asking querying about the policies to be adopted by the new Israeli government, as the peace process is still on hold, and the continuous dispute between the two parties is that Israel freezes tax revenues, which is collected by Israel and then transferred to the Palestinian Authority. The Arab Group recommends the necessity to focus on this issue, which directly affects the Palestinian balance. The Arab Group also calls on putting an end to these abusive Israeli practices, which recur every time the Palestinian State attempts to practice its legal rights to join international treaties and bodies.
- 8- The Arab Group calls on the International Labor Organization and its constitutional arms to exert more efforts to find suitable solutions to tackle the concrete reluctance of donors to meet their financial commitments, especially in regard of the outcomes of the conference on the reconstruction of Gaza so that the International Labor Organization may perfectly do its duties in this process.
- 9- The report repeatedly mentions the statement "the war on Gaza", and the Arab Group sees that things should be named with their real names, and therefore

clearer statements should have been used such as "the brutal assault on Gaza by the Israeli occupation authorities," especially after considering the huge devastation and losses this brutal assault has caused.

In this connection, too, we see that the Director General's expression of concern that the tensions he had warned from in his 2014 report, describing Gaza as a 'tinderbox' that is about to explode, has taken a severe turn last summer, and duly this statement is not up to this terrible and painful experience.

- 10- The report indicates the decline of the Palestinian economy, in light of the severe restrictions imposed on it as well as the expansion of the Israeli settlements, and that the increase of opportunities for Palestinians to work in the Israeli labor market should be welcomed. These procedures, however, may not be welcomed by the Arab Group as they do not serve the best interests of the Palestinians in light of the percentage of the increase of the already high labor force. Therefore, the International Labor Organization should persistently push towards developing and reviving the Palestinian economy to be able to provide more job opportunities for the Palestinians on their land, and therefore reduce their need to work in the Israeli market. According to ILO Director General's remarks, this would categorically solve the problem, which means that the double burden of the continuation of the occupation and settlements did not allow the development of the Palestinian economy and provide enough job opportunities in regard of Decent Work.
- 11- The Director General of the International Labor Office sees that the cooperation between the Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions is 'evaluated'. However, one third of the Palestinians working in the Israeli economy, and a larger percent of workers in the settlements, do not enjoy the benefits of the collective bargaining and other mechanisms of the official labor market. This, initially, needs decisive and quick intervention from the ILO to guarantee the rights of the Palestinian workers and to protect them from all forms of abuse and discrimination, according to the applicable labor legislations and the principles and standards of the International labor Organization. This would make the cooperation between the Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions more feasible.
- 12- The Arab Group stresses the repeated Arab requests to modify the title of the annex of the Director General's report, according to Item 1 of the report introduction presented to the 104th session of the International Labor Conference, which states: "In accordance with the resolution concerning the implications of Israeli settlements in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories in connection with the situation of Arab workers, adopted by the International Labor Conference at its 66th Session (1980),...", we stress that the content of the report does express the resolutions of the ILC in 1974 and 1980 on discrimination and violations of union freedoms and rights, whereas the title of the current report does not.
- 13- The report indicates that "there is no end in sight to occupation and separation. It is difficult to see any serious new move towards a two-state solution coming

from the direct partners themselves. Any initiative would have to come from the international community, but it would also need a genuine engagement by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority". In this connection, it is worth noting that peace is an Arab strategic option that all Arab states, including Palestine, are committed to. However, every time peace is offered to Israel, more Israeli complications and escalations arise, especially expansion in Israeli settlements and increasing attempts to interrupt the geographic contiguity needed to establish an independent Palestinian state, having Jerusalem as its capital. These trends have been stressed in the report, which states "*if the current trends continue*". It will be, then, too difficult to see how a viable Palestinian state would be established within the borders of 1967.

14- The Arab Group agrees with the concluding observations of the Director General of the International Labor Office, which have been reached based on spotting and analyzing economic, social, and humanitarian conditions of Arab people and workers in the occupied Arab territories as the Israeli occupation continues. The Arab Group agrees, in particular, with Item 129 of the report which states: "The basic constraint remains: restrictions arising out of the Israeli occupation and the settlements, which are increasingly entrenched in the occupied territories. There is a feeling that the space for development of the Palestinian society, and ultimately for a sovereign Palestinian state, continues to diminish". The Arab Group has not been surprised by such a concluding remark, which has been repeated in previous reports, and which would remain ink on paper as the current report does not include an agenda or a work plan for the ILO to help improving the current situation. This needs more efforts from the part of the Director General if the ILO and its legislative arms to respond to the repeated Arab Group requests in several ILC sessions, which include, but not limited to the following:

- i. Drafting the concluding remarks of the Director General's report as a work plan, to be financed and implemented mainly by the International Labor Organization with the cooperation of other Arab, regional and international donors, while deciding upon the roles and responsibilities of all parties that would participate in implementing the work plan so that the concluding remarks would turn from ink on paper to action. The International Labor Organization should be responsible for issues of labor legislations, social security, union rights and freedoms, the application of international labor standards, employment issues, wages, labor protection, gender equality, fighting labor exploitation, discrimination, establishing decent work, and improving work conditions, among others.
- ii. Exerting more efforts with regional and international groups, bodies and institutions to intervene, effectively and appropriately, to practice more pressures on the occupation authorities to prevent the collapse of the peace process, and to intensify and accelerate negotiations to reach the final and fair solution to establish a viable Palestinian state through adopting the following practical steps:
 - Supporting Palestinian endeavors to join a group of international treaties as a natural right, while condemning and denouncing the

Israeli reaction of threatening to seize Palestinian tax revenues, following the Israeli footsteps made earlier against the Palestinians in similar situations and therefore calling for the international community to quickly intervene to release the seized funds.

- Asking Israel to quickly transfer, to the Palestinian authorities, the accumulated amounts in the Israeli social security authorities and funds as these amounts are the contributions of Palestinian workers who do not benefit from them in Israel.
 - Urging the donor countries and entities to commit to transfer promised finances and aids in due time to revive the Palestinian economy and to provide tools for creating more job opportunities, combating poverty and unemployment, as well as reducing the deterioration of conditions of workers and their families.
 - Condemning Israeli plans for settlement expansion, Judaizing Jerusalem, and land confiscation, and demanding to lift the blockade on Gaza, and remove restrictions on mobility of people, goods, resources, and production elements of different economic and production sectors.
 - Putting in place a clear perception for ILO participation in the process of Gaza Reconstruction.
 - Finding appropriate solutions to face the continuation of violating union rights and freedoms, as well as Palestinian workers' rights, to protect them in the Israeli labor market, and putting an end to the blatant violations of the Israeli labor laws, and ILO standards and principles, especially in regard of exploitation and discrimination.
- iii. Providing more financial and technical support to enable the International labor Organization to make more tangible achievements for the Palestinian workers and their families through the activation of the enhanced program of technical cooperation for Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories, as well as the Palestine Decent Work Program, which was recently adopted.
- iv. Finding an appropriate formula to engage the conference delegates in discussing the annex of the report on Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories, considering it as an integral part of the International labor Office Director General's report to the International Labor Conference.

