A large white flag with the IOE logo (a red smile and the letters IOE) is flying from a tall pole. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and trees along a waterfront under a blue sky with light clouds. A red vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

A century building a powerful and balanced voice of business

International Organisation of Employers



A powerful
and balanced
voice for business

1920-2020



A powerful
and balanced
voice for business



International Organisation of Employers

A century building a powerful and balanced voice of business

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Introduction

IOE President Erol Kiresepi

IOE's Centenary year 2020 was meant to be a year of celebration, reflection and new direction. The plan was to lead high-level dialogues, expand our global actions and host a gala dinner. But as we all now know the world faced an unprecedented health and economic emergency in 2020 impacting individuals, businesses and governments for potentially decades. As I write this, we are still in the midst of this crisis with the only certainty being that more difficult days are ahead.

IOE rapidly focused its efforts on helping the business community navigate the crisis. The Centenary events were put on hold and virtual meetings were held to identify actions to support members. Throughout the disruption, one constant and stable pillar has been how we based each action on the values that have guided IOE's work for over 100 years. It is those values that I want to recall here in this introduction to our history covering a century of achievements, challenges and steadfast dedication to promoting an economic environment that is good for business and people.

From the outset and spanning two World Wars, a Cold War and the extraordinary rise of a connected and global economy, IOE's values have remained a commitment to dialogue, solidarity between employers, and an unwavering support and investment in a free market economy and multilateral international system that works for all.

Throughout IOE's history, social dialogue has been an undeniable driving force for all we do. We are honoured to be a pillar of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) governance and engage in this dialogue with workers and

governments. As you will read in this book, that dialogue has been at times contentious and conflictual, but employers never questioned the purpose of it nor refrained from engaging in it.

The Cold War period saw a fracture between employers as two opposing economic systems fought for international supremacy. While this rupture between employer groups endured from the 1950s until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the employers defending the market economy and freedom of association through IOE stood united in support of members facing threats or the risk of it across the world within the ILO Committee on the Freedom of Association. Today, this solidarity continues with all IOE members under threat.

The founders of IOE, when they gathered for their first meeting in London in March 1920, described the great responsibility of defending against strong attacks “on capital and private ownership, and how they must recognize the significance of these attacks and get together.” From this initial effort to defend a free market economic system, IOE continues to safeguard over a century later the freedom to pursue aspirations of becoming an entrepreneur or leading an enterprise that manufactures and trades goods on an open global market.

This commitment includes supporting the protection of workers health and social well-being. Employers know that their future depends on the well-being of their employees and collaborating and negotiating with them to ensure the sustainability of their business and the market economy.

As we look forward to the next 100 years of IOE action, I do not doubt that we will continue to actively engage with the international community as we have been doing since 1920. The more than 50 million companies that are part of the IOE network today will continue the enduring pursuit of promoting business within the international multilateral system – whether it be the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the G20 along with other institutions. And on the other side, we have and will continue to promote with our members the relevance of multilateralism as one of the most effective ways to expand business opportunities and improve people’s lives.

To conclude, what you will learn as you read this book and look at the photos is that despite massive political headwinds and social upheaval, employers remain a united force - navigating the changes and staying focused on promoting the voice of business worldwide.

Foreword

IOE Secretary-General Roberto Suárez Santos

What IOE is today is the culmination of 100 years of dedicated action and progress in the pursuit of a balanced environment for business within the organisation. What is striking as you read our history is the persistence of the employers' struggles and concerns within the ILO, and the passionate engagement of IOE members and staff in defending the interests of the group.

As our then Chairman H.C. Oersted said at the funeral of Albert Thomas "Although the Employers' group, for major reasons, was sometimes obliged to oppose him, he never doubted their wholehearted attachment to social peace, which is the very purpose of the International Labour Office."

You will discover over the following pages, among other points, the outlines of the good "fights" the Employers' waged within the ILO. How we repeatedly expressed concerns about the proliferation of standards, the limited ratification of Conventions leading to poor implementation of existing standards, or the lack of consideration in the staffing and policy work of the ILO for Employer views and presence.

There were also positive outcomes for the Employers and some proud achievements. Notably, the 1998 ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This major Declaration was proposed by the Employers to promote core labour standards. More recently, the successful negotiation with governments and workers to rapidly respond to the 2008 financial crisis. During the health and economic crisis of 2020, the highly productive dialogue with tripartite members determined how the ILO's Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work can be used to transform the organisation and its impact on the world of work following this historic crisis.

No doubt future generations will have other achievements to add to this long list.

Beyond the ILO, during our 100-year history we have moved from being an international institution that was predominantly European and American to today's incredibly diverse group from across the globe, different ethnic origins and genders. It is impressive to see how historical events whether it be decolonisation and the rise of a new group of independent states, the creation and integration of employers' groups from formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation or the expanding role of women in the workplace have impacted directly the diversity of IOE membership.

As we look to the future, employers have been and will continue to be the driving forces behind the world's extraordinary economic expansion as they create jobs, expand skills and lead on innovation. Today's members of IOE represent a dynamic and robust group. The diversity of IOE membership is its strength, comprising small businesses in Europe to leading multi-nationals in Asia, collectively they are responsible for a large portion of the world's economic expansion.

The next generation of IOE members needs to continue the work started in 1920 and promote the global voice of business in a world with expanding international challenges. As we move into this next century of IOE action, I am in no doubt that our current and future members will rise to the challenge.

How private and public sector cooperation can help drive transformational change post-COVID

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres remarks at the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) Centenary Summit, 2 September 2020

Thank you very much, Mr. President. President of IOE, Erol Kiresepi, Secretary-General Roberto Suarez Santos, Director-General Guy Ryder, Presidents of the national employers' organisations, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by congratulating the International Organisation of Employers on its Centenary.

It is indeed a very old but an extremely representative business organisation in the world. The IOE has made significant contributions to global policymaking for economic and social progress, job creation, and a mutually beneficial business environment.

I welcome your decision to focus this Centenary Summit on multilateralism.

The IOE was among the first business organisations to engage directly with the multilateral system and has been an important pillar of the International Labour Organization since its earliest days.

Today, the IOE actively supports the global vision for sustainable development.

At a time when multilateralism is under severe strains, it is especially important that the IOE carries the commitment that it always has into its second century.

This is also a timely opportunity to address the global employers and business leaders at what is arguably the most challenging period in generations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken away hundreds of thousands of lives, infected millions and affected billions - with little sign of retreat.

And it has revealed fundamental global fragilities -- fragilities that extend far beyond health systems. Fragilities affect all our global institutions and multilateral efforts. We see it in the failed response to the climate crisis, in the rising inequalities or in the lawlessness in cyberspace.

These structural fault lines in our systems, policies and institutions are being exposed at a time when many, and particularly the most disadvantaged, were already growing anxious about their future.

Today, our primary task is to defeat the pandemic and rebuild lives, livelihoods, businesses, and economies.

We must reject the notion that there is a trade-off between the health of people and the health of the economy.

But we must not simply return to where we were before.

We need to work together to build a better future, to protect workers and small businesses, to promote gender equality and create opportunities for youth; we need to share development gains more equitably, ensure that all people have an opportunity to fulfil their potential and that economies thrive.

While there is still a long way to go in the fight against COVID-19, many countries have been able to contain the spread of the virus.

That was made possible in part because of the cooperation of governments, businesses, trade unions and many others. The pandemic has reminded us of both the power and imperative of global cooperation.

In the short term, governments, companies, and populations are understandably looking for solutions that will lead to a swift recovery.

However -- looking beyond, but starting now -- we need to build economies and societies that are more inclusive and

sustainable, in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, where our challenge is clear: To limit global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees, and having global emissions halved by 2030 and carbon neutrality reached in 2050.

The private sector is essential to all these efforts. So, what can businesses do?

First, continue to engage with the multilateral system, through representative organisations, to create a conducive global environment for decent work, investment, and sustainability.

In the last few decades, multilateralism was vital in creating a world with open borders for trade, security and prosperity.

Today, as this is under threat, the private sector can play a pivotal role in showing that the world can be a better, more prosperous and fairer place through international cooperation and a rules-based global economy.

Second, engage with the United Nations at the national level to help [ensure] that multilateralism works on the ground.

UN reform will lead to more direct engagement with non-state actors at the national level, including the private sector. Local and regional cooperation is a precondition for multilateralism to work globally.

Third, businesses and employers' organisation must actively participate in national and global public-private dialogue and initiatives -- and there must be space for them to do so.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda cannot succeed without the full engagement of the private sector.

The Business and Sustainable Development Commission found that companies could unlock USD 12 trillion in market opportunities by 2030 and create 380 million jobs by integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in their business strategies.

Initiatives such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the UN Global Compact, the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy are instrumental platforms to promote responsible business conduct.

Fourth, do what you do best: invest in businesses, jobs and people, especially now when hundreds of millions of people have lost their livelihoods.

You must continue to bring out the best of innovation and creativity in the service of people, help to build trust in business by doing the right thing, at the workplace, in the communities and globally.

Today, growing inequalities between and within countries, boosted by the pandemic, are fuelling ethnic nationalism and protectionism.

Combined with the anxieties about advancing drivers of change, this creates significant uncertainty about the future.

To build a better future, we need a global multilateral system that answers the real anxieties of people with practical responses.

That requires a more inclusive multilateralism. Governments today are far from the only players in terms of politics and power. The business community, trade unions, local authorities, cities and regional governments and so many others must assume more and more leadership roles in today's world. And they are doing it.

The private sector, and employers' organisations and those they represent have a real capacity to make a meaningful difference and ensure a more effective multilateralism. But they must be given the space to do so.

Each and every one of you is key to making it happen,

Thank you for your commitment, and it is indeed an enormous pleasure to be here, celebrating your centenary.

IOE Centenary Manifesto

June 2020

With a membership of more than 150 national independent organisations representing over 50 million companies worldwide that employ hundreds of millions of workers, the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) has been the global voice of the private sector for one hundred years, advocating for sustainable economic and social policies that promote free enterprise, thriving businesses and a fair society that works for everyone.

IOE's centenary is a historic milestone; calling for a reflection on our past and our achievements. It also calls for a clear vision of IOE's role as a key player in an interconnected world that can evolve rapidly, dramatically and with little warning as we have recently experienced, and for a renewed confirmation of our values, intentions, ambitions and aspirations for tomorrow.

As we address the severe economic effects of the measures taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, it is all the more urgent to place sustainable enterprises at the heart of recovery planning and to establish the conditions for growth and employment that also promote the benefits of sustainable development for the long term, beyond the 2030 timeframe.

Entrepreneurship and innovation: the foundation for competitive enterprises, sustainable development, shared growth, and employment creation

Enterprises large and small are incubators of new technologies and innovation that create career pathways for today and tomorrow. They generate nine out of ten jobs worldwide - contributing to greater economic and social equity, inclusiveness, and political stability.

Principled action and clear values have underpinned IOE's work for the past 100 years

Employers were among the founding constituents of the International Labour Organization (ILO) more than 100 years ago. Our commitment to full and productive employment, social dialogue and decent work for all in an environment that sustains competitive enterprises is as firm today as it was in 1920.

IOE played a decisive role in the adoption of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the ILO Social Justice Declaration, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and other instruments that influence the doing of business and the world of work. Throughout its 100-year history, IOE has defended the market economy as the best basis for economic progress and social wellbeing. IOE continues to uphold that the market economy will also provide a solid foundation for economic recovery and job creation in a changed world post COVID-19.

A united employer and business community

IOE's strength lies in our powerful and balanced global network, which stands united as we look to the future.

The priorities driving IOE as we enter our next century, and a new era in many respects, are to protect the autonomy and independence of employer and business organisations in the face of hostile behaviour; strengthen and support social dialogue; work together in response to critical initiatives affecting labour market policies; seek to establish relevant initiatives, such as the Global Apprenticeship Network and the Business Advisory Group on Migration; advocate with one voice that regulatory frameworks allow businesses to start up, grow, compete, develop resilience, and create jobs.

The representative and trusted voice of business in global policymaking for 100 years

IOE has a proud history of bringing the most representative voice of employers and business not only to the ILO but also, more recently, to the United Nations (UN) human rights bodies and across the UN system, to the G20 and G7 processes, and other forums that shape policies in areas that impact the world of work. These include business resilience, the future of work, employment and skills, industrial relations, human rights and responsible business conduct, sustainable development, women's empowerment, inclusion and diversity, occupational safety and health, international labour migration and fair globalisation.

Important social and economic progress has been achieved but challenges persist

Business innovation and creativity and accelerated globalisation and interconnectedness, coupled with exponential technological progress, have led to a wealth of opportunities and ongoing improvement in human development. Life expectancy has increased by almost seven years globally since 1990. Children today can expect to be in school for 3.4 years longer than in 1990. Social welfare and social protection systems have expanded, even if there remains much more to do. Impressive progress has also been recorded in the eradication of poverty, as well as in the growth of the middle classes in many emerging economies due in part to the expansion of global trade.

However, as a global community, we still face huge challenges, especially now as we have to address the disastrous economic impacts of the measures that

were taken to contain the global pandemic - from persistent unemployment, particularly among young people, to weak or uncertain growth, and poverty. More than 60% of the working population globally is in the informal sector, and in some regions this figure rises to 80%. Despite progress, child labour and forced labour remain unacceptably high. Women's effective labour market inclusion lags behind, with more than 100 countries preventing women from working in certain jobs. Low or stagnant productivity and lack of an enabling environment for sustainable business hamper growth and employment creation. Social protection systems face sustainability challenges, which are now exacerbated by the crisis, in both developed and developing economies.

Artificial intelligence and digitalisation are transforming how work is done and organised. A key challenge is to ensure that people are not marginalised, but enabled, by technological progress, and that opportunities are fully harnessed and shared. In recent months, technology has contributed to enabling business continuity and allowed organisations, including IOE and its members, to continue to provide products and services that respond in real time to the heightened expectations of stakeholders.

Climate change poses a serious threat not only to food and water security, but to the very resilience of societies, communities, businesses, and economies.

The 2030 Agenda: a key framework to address current and emerging opportunities and challenges through multi-stakeholder partnerships

IOE fully supports the 2030 Agenda as the most effective path to sustainable human development. We are particularly committed to working towards the ambitious targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 for "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all", together with SDG 17 for a revitalisation of the global partnership.

Economic, environmental, and social progress cannot be achieved without concerted and cohesive effort. We must act together now to realise the 2030 Agenda by embracing the opportunities that globalisation, new technologies and innovation present. Governments and the UN system need more than ever to work with the private sector to create an enabling environment for sustainable growth, decent work, and more jobs.

We call on governments, individually and working in the framework of the UN system to:

- Create enabling business environments that encourage companies to set up, businesses of all sizes to thrive, build resilience, and grow; and strengthen productivity, innovation and hiring in the formal economy.
- Ensure freedom of association for employers and uphold the principle of free enterprise.
- Collaborate with the private sector and other constituencies in the design and development of curricula and in re-structuring education and training systems.
- Better prioritise skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling, and apprenticeship programmes, to meet the labour market needs of today and tomorrow.
- Adopt more efficient policies to promote employment for women, young people, and marginalised groups.
- Elaborate and implement well-designed labour migration policies that create safe, orderly, and regular channels.
- Improve engagement with social partners and pursue social dialogue for job creation and skills development.
- Expand efforts to promote effective transitions towards formality.
- Support smart, open-market policies for global free trade and economic integration.
- Step up climate change policies and measures that support communities, workers, and companies to progress to a low-carbon economy.
- Ensure fair competition as a key driver of the market economy.
- Engage with the organised voice of business and fully involve IOE and its members in the implementation of programmes and initiatives by multilateral institutions, including the UN, at the national level.

Working together for shared progress

Transparency, integrity, inclusion, and diversity are core values of IOE and cement our leadership and credibility. Business has a track record of identifying and seizing opportunities, and in developing practical and realistic solutions for the challenges of the day.

Employer and business organisations are an important bridge for companies that are ready and willing to partner with the public sector and UN agencies. Together with trade unions, they play an important role in shaping labour markets, contributing to the 2030 Agenda, and providing rapid assistance to their members in confronting crises. The work done by them in relation to the COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives demonstrates the important role they play.

At this historic milestone, IOE pledges to

- Multiply efforts for a constructive dialogue with stakeholders, including trade unions and governments, to continue building a positive environment based on the market economy that delivers business resilience and competitiveness, inclusive growth and prosperity, and more and better jobs.
- Cooperate through innovative partnerships at national and international level to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Raise the profile of the IOE community, and business in general, as credible and responsible partners.
- Expand capacity-building, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing for employer organisations on trends and developments impacting business, in collaboration with other international partners and organisations.
- Contribute to changing mindsets towards skills development and lifelong learning.
- Promote gender empowerment and equality and strengthen diversity in the workplace.
- Intensify efforts to promote and implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the ILO MNE (multinational and national enterprises) Declaration.
- Increase efforts to reduce barriers to global markets, particularly for companies in the developing world.
- Continue to be an outspoken advocate for the global ecosystem for doing business, multilateralism and the value of international organisations.

MINUTES of MEETING of
PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE AND OTHER MEMBERS

22nd March 1920.

During the meeting of the Governing Body of the International Labour Bureau held in London in March 1920, opportunity was taken by Sir Allan Smith representing the British Confederation of Employers Organisations to call together the employers and a meeting took place at Claridge's Hotel on the evening of Monday, March 22nd.

There were present :

Sir Allan M. Smith, F.R.S., M.P., Employers' Representative for Great Britain on the Governing Body.

Mons. J. Geyse	do	do	France
" Lodang	do	do	Czechoslovakia
" Schindler	do	do	Switzerland
" J. Lacombe, substitute for Mons. G. Carlier	do	do	Belgium
Signor Sculatti, substitute for Signor Tirelli	do	do	Italy
Mr. T. S. Marjoribanks	C.B.E.	British Employers' Substitute Delegate at Washington Conference 1919.	
Mons. Edström		Advisor to Swedish Employers' Delegate at Washington 1919. Representing also Norway and Denmark	
Mr. A.C. Ross		Advisor to British Employers' Delegate at Washington 1919	
General A.C. Baylay, of the Confederation of Employers' Organisations of Great Britain.			

Sir Allan M. Smith, in the Chair.

The Chairman pointed out the object of this meeting which was to try and further cement the formation of an International Body of Employers, the idea of which had been discussed amongst the employers who were at Washington at the International Labour Conference, 1916. He laid stress on the importance of employers realising the great responsibility which rested on them in these days, when from so many quarters, even from certain Government officials, strong attacks were being made on Capital and private ownership, and how they must recognise the significance of these attacks and get together and discuss all aspects of industry. He thought this could not be done satisfactorily in these days of International Labour Organizations without the Employers of Labour Meeting Internationally and discussing their difficulties and striving to bring about uniformity of action as far as such was practicable, and thus vindicate beliefs in the justice and necessities, in the interests of the World's Trade, of private employers of labour.

Mons. Marin spoke of the peculiar difficulties that had arisen out of the Section of the Peace Treaty dealing with labour, how at the Governing Body the employers numbered only six out of twenty-four, and also of the feelings of certain French Employers, who seemed to hesitate with regard to forming anything like an International Employer's Federation which might give rise to misunderstandings in the eyes of the Workers' Organizations who might regard such a body as designed for fighting purposes only.

The Chairman asked those members of the provisional Advisory Council which was elected at Washington to give a report of the Scheme which they had had an opportunity of elaborating since returning to Europe. The members of this Committee present were Mons. Edström, Sweden; Mons. J. Lacroix, Belgium; and Mr. Ross, Great Britain. Mons. Coireau, France, apologized for absence.

Attached to these Minutes is the scheme as presented and explained to those present on the kind.

Several points were explained in more detail than given in the Scheme itself, and after discussion it was unanimously agreed to put the organization into being as early as possible.

Amongst the points mentioned above were the locality of the Organisation's headquarters, the number of members of the Executive Committee, which was altered from six to seven in addition to the President and two Vice-Presidents of the General Committee. It was considered advisable not to have the office of the Employer's Organisation in the same town as the head office of the International Labour Office.

The Provisionary Executive Council's Report having been unanimously adopted, the following Officers were elected :

President Mons. Jules Carlier, Belgium.

Vice-Presidents Sir Allan M. Smith, and

Mons. Louis Guerin.

Permanent Secretary who as arrangement would permit, should devote his whole time to the work of the International Employer's Organisation : Mons. Jules Lacroix.

Members of Executive Committee :

Czechoslovakia Mons. Francis X. Hedacek.

France " Geinsey.

Great Britain Mr. A. D. Ross.

Italy Signor Alberto A. Firelli.

Sweden, Norway and

Denmark Mons. J. W. Edström.

Those present agreed to accept the office to which they had been appointed.

The Chairman suggested that a request be made in future for the Governing Body of the International Labour Office to

meet on Tuesdays instead of Mondays in order to allow the Employers to meet on the Mondays prior to the full meeting.

This was approved

It was decided to send a telegram to M. Carlier expressing regret at his absence and informing him of the unanimous wish of the Employers that he should act as first President of the Employers International Organisation.

(Sgd.) ALAN M. SMITH.

Chairman.

24th March 1920.



Previous pages:
Minutes of Founding Meeting IOE 22 March 1920
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First known photo of IOE Executive Committee, Prague, 19 May 1926 & IOE General Council, 2019

Beginnings

1920-1944



The First Industrial Revolution transformed late 18th century manufacturing profoundly reshaping the world of work. The change involved a shift away from decentralised work into factories and mills employing large numbers of workers. While productivity increased drastically and people's living standards improved, the new working conditions created health risks and job insecurity.

As the 19th century unfolded, workers organised themselves and demanded better pay and treatment. As violent protests erupted across the world, politicians came to accept that laws defining humane standards of employment were needed. New national standards were adopted for working hours and minimum working age. By the end of the century, the demand for defined working conditions was supplemented by questions linked to social insurance. This three-sided interaction between legislators, workers and employers at a level well beyond that of the individual business clearly called for structured organisations for both workers and employers.

First steps before world war

The evolution towards formal employer associations at the national level was well under way although not yet complete by the early 20th century. However, it was only a matter of time before thought would be given to international coordination of employer interests. The occasion for a first attempt was an international exhibition held in Turin in 1911. An Italian lawyer called Gino Olivetti (see box) decided to organise a congress in the margins of this trade fair, bringing together employer representatives from Austria, Belgium, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom, alongside their Italian counterparts. The purpose was to gain an overview of the state of relations between employers and workers, and the stance of employers vis-à-vis social and labour legislation.

A further meeting of employers from the countries represented in Turin, this time with Germany but without Sweden, was held in Paris in May 1914 when a toast was drunk to mark the creation of just such an association. This creation was put on hold when the First World War broke out two months later.

The effort required of society during the First World War, mainly in relation to wartime production, brought about links between employers and workers which would have been unimaginable just a few years earlier and prompted governments to devise a novel international system for post-War industrial peace in which the three main stakeholders would jointly shape the framework for and details of social policy.

This was to take place in the forum of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) comprising delegations of employers, workers and government representatives from member countries. Although largely absent from the peace negotiations in Versailles and initially surprised by the notion of tripartite governance, employers nevertheless came together at the First Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Washington in October 1919.

Getting organised

Employers were struck by the level of organisation achieved by the trade unions, thanks to their experience of international conferences and associations dating back over many years. By contrast, employers were ill-prepared and conscious of their shortcomings in this new situation. Some of the ideas and projects developed at the Turin

congress were dusted off and it was decided to set up a body to provide employers with support in the context of ILO conferences. This was to be headed by Jules Carlier (who was also Chairman of the ILO Employers' Group), with Jules Lecocq acting as secretary. A working party comprising the presidents of two employer associations and three industrialists was also put in place. International Organisation of Industrial Employers (IOIE) was formally constituted during a meeting of the ILO Governing Body in March 1920, with a General Assembly convened for October of the same year.

Throughout the interwar period, IOIE leadership returned repeatedly to the question of whether the organisation should expand its mandate beyond support to ILC and, if so, in which directions.

Early experience with ILO and its instruments demonstrated the limits of this tripartite international body if it sought to proclaim unduly detailed social policy aspirations without giving full consideration to the political and economic leeway for individual Governments to ratify them.

A fresh start

Despite the horrors of war, international diplomacy on social policy was not dead but its centre of gravity moved across the Atlantic to North America. In 1941 the ILC held its final session in Washington in the White House where President Roosevelt set out his vision for the post-War order, underlining the importance of tripartite social governance for the maintenance of industrial peace as a component of wider cooperation structures. This was followed in 1944 by another session in the United States where the ILC adopted the Declaration of Philadelphia which widened the concept of tripartism. Human rights more generally were now also brought into the frame. The future work programme might have been overambitious in the eyes of the Employers' Group, but the tripartite system had been maintained.

IOIE's membership grew to 25 by 1928 at which time it included organisations from almost all the major industrial countries. After the war, the then British Employers' Confederation took the first step towards reviving the organisation by renewing contact with the federations in the 25 member countries. Shortly after this initial contact, IOIE returned to planning for upcoming ILCs.



Employers Group, International Labour Conference 7th Session, 1925



Employers' Group, International Labour Conference 14th Session, 1930



Employers' Group, chaired by Hans Christian Oersted (Denmark), 1932



Employers' Group, International Labour Conference 25th Session, 1939

Gino Olivetti

An early defender of employers



Gino Olivetti, a lawyer from Turin, was one of the earliest promoters of international coordination of employer interests. He spearheaded the organisation of the First International Congress of Employers' Organisations in Industry and Agriculture in Italy in 1911. Ahead of the first congress, he authored a report which noted the growing interest among employers to work together to better defend their shared interests.

Olivetti was one of the founding fathers of Confindustria, Italy's national employer association, and was its first Secretary General from 1910 to 1934. He was also one of the original employer members of the ILO Governing Body. During his tenure as Employer Vice-Chairman of the ILO Governing Body, he declared his commitment to the organisation in the following way: "The ILO, whose development may seem too slow to some, too fast to others, has always striven to become the motive force behind the social policy of the whole world."

Beyond the world of employers, Olivetti combined his commitment to defending employers with political, journalistic and academic activities. In reaction to anti-Jewish legislation, he left Italy in 1939 and died three years later in Argentina.

Jules Carlier

First President



"What patience, and at the same time what energy, must be displayed by a President, even one so respected, in order to maintain harmony between so many discordant ideas and trends." This is how Pierre Waline, one of the leaders of the French employers association, the Union of Metallurgical and Mining Industries (UIMM), described the negotiating and visionary talents of IOE's first president, Jules Carlier from 1920-1921.

Carlier was part of the pioneering group of employers who met in Turin in 1911 with the purpose of creating an international employers' network. He was also a leading Belgian industrialist and President of Belgium's Central Industrial Council.

Carlier held a range of senior positions in business and administration. It was considered that his efficacy in arguing successfully in the context of ILO was enhanced by his stature and impressive white beard in conjunction with perfect courtesy.



Employers' Group, First International Labour Conference - Washington, DC, 1920

IOE founding members

17 employer organisations from 16 countries were the founding members of IOE

- The Central Industrial Council of Belgium
- The Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening
- The Confederación Patronal Española
- The Arbetsgivarnas i Finland Centralförbund
- The Confédération générale de la production française
- The National Confederation of Employers' Organizations of Great Britain
- The Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana
- The Norsk Arbejdsgiverforening
- The Vereeniging van Nederlandsche Werkgevers
- The Roomsche Katholiek Verbond van Werkgevers Vakverenigingen
- The Svenska Arbetsgivareförening
- The Union centrale des Associations patronales suisses
- The Central Federation of the Mining Industry, Commerce and Finance of Poland
- The Federation of Czechoslovak Industrialists
- The Chamber of Mines of Transvaal
- The Unión Industrial Argentina
- The Japan Cotton Spinners' Association



Jules Lecocq, Secretary General (1920–1950), Trip to New York, 1937.

Jules Carlier, 1st International Labour Conference, October 1919



Employers' Group 18th Session International Labour Conference, June 1934

The first ILC negotiation

The 40-hour working week

In addition to prompting the creation of IOIE in 1920, the Washington ILC in 1919 reached agreement on limiting the working week to 48 hours, a long-standing demand of the trade unions. However, this first successfully negotiated result was subsequently diminished because very few Governments were willing to ratify, using the argument that the competitive situation of early adopters would be disadvantaged. This lack of broad implementation also placed a question mark over the credibility of the young ILO.

With the arrival of the Great Depression in the 1930s, an important response appeared at the time to be a reduction in working hours to offset rising unemployment. The theory was that there was a fixed amount of work and that a shorter working week would allow this to be distributed among more people. This clearly shifted the basis of the debate away from social progress, the premise underlying Convention No. 1, towards the promotion of employment. In 1935 the 40-hour working week was placed on the ILC agenda and a Convention was adopted despite opposition from the Employers.

Employers were deeply frustrated by the ILO's failure to consider their views and began to question the point of their participation. They believed that Governments were courting popularity rather than seeking to find balanced solutions. The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 put this

crisis of confidence between Employers and ILO on hold. IOIE was paralysed and the International Labour Office went into hibernation with a core staff in Montreal as world powers fought across the globe.

The idea of an international community to foster peace embodied in the League of Nations and associated institutions had been tested by the political developments of the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, the concept of tripartite governance of social policy sat uneasily with the reality of totalitarian governments across much of Europe and elsewhere which dictated policy from the centre and involved only token consultation. Nevertheless, creation of ILO had spurred employers to organise at international level in the framework of IOIE, an organisation initially comprising mainly European employer organisations but also representatives from Argentina, Japan and South Africa. From its inception until 1964, IOIE was hosted in Brussels by the Belgian employers.

Voices from the past

“The leaders of the French association fully understand the usefulness of, and the need for, an understanding between employers so that they can close their ranks and plan their strategy in advance when they attend international meetings...”

LOUIS GUÉRIN, French industrialist and member of Employers' Group to First ILC

“Although the Employers' Group, for major reasons, was sometimes obliged to oppose him, he never doubted their wholehearted attachment to social peace, which is the very purpose of the activities of the International Labour Office.”

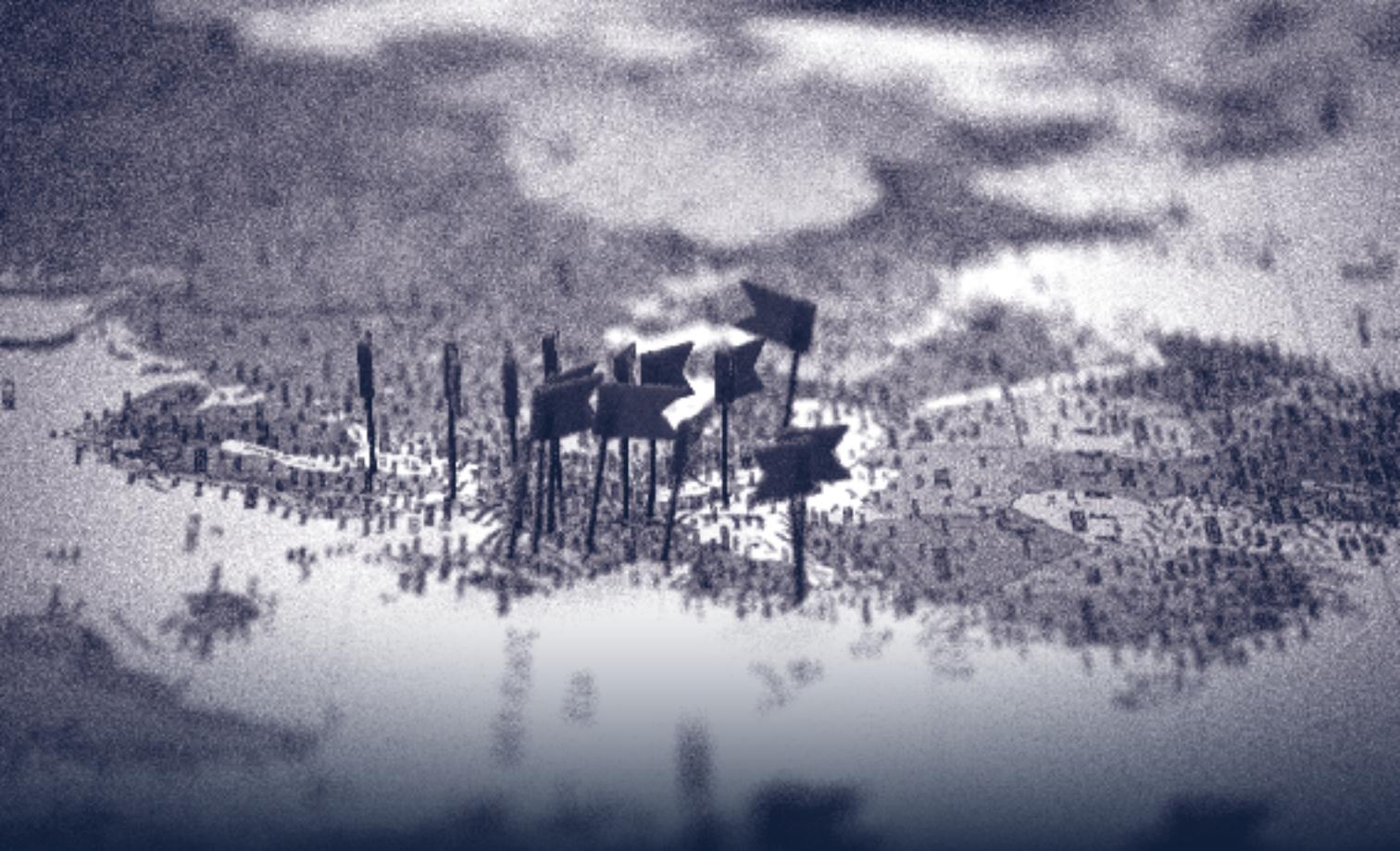
HANS CHRISTIAN OERSTED, Chairman of IOIE Executive Committee from 1929-1949, speaking at the funeral of the first ILO Director-General Albert Thomas



Expanding global influence

1944-1970





The 25 years after the end of the Second World War saw international cooperation between employer organisations broaden in terms of both membership and policies covered. From 1948, IOIE changed its name to International Organisation of Employers (IOE) in order to encompass agriculture and services as well as industry. By 1970, the seeds planted tentatively in Turin had blossomed into an organisation influencing a wide range of ILO policies, rules and standards together with other emerging policy areas within the United Nations. By the end of this period, IOE had 87 employer organisation members in 77 countries.

Previous pages:
Much of IOE's pre-war and wartime archives were either destroyed or looted.
This is the first known picture of an IOE General Council in Evian, France June 1947.

Employer concerns gain traction at ILO

The 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia was followed the next year by the Paris Conference whose mission was to reform the ILO in such a way as to allow it to dovetail with the newly minted United Nations system and its ambitions for economic and social development.

Among the initiatives to emerge from this reform was the creation within ILO of the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP). Established in 1947, ACT/EMP is tasked with fostering direct relations with employers organisations, in close collaboration with IOE, to ILO resources and keeping ILO staff and leadership informed of employer views and concerns.

Cold War politics: free Employers

The Second World War solved the problem of authoritarian Governments in most of Western Europe but entrenched it elsewhere. The issue of Employers and Workers being arms of Government with no effective autonomy in countries behind the "Iron Curtain" had been emerging since the end of the war and came to a head in 1953 when a complaint was lodged against the appointment of the Czechoslovak Employers' delegate, described in his ILC credentials as an "official of the Ministry of Heavy Engineering".

ILO Member States submit requests for ILC credentials for individuals entitled to represent it and to act on its behalf. The minimum composition of delegations is two Government delegates, one Employer and one Worker delegate.

The objection to the Czech government's credentials request came from the "free Employers' group". This group, which comprised the vast majority of Employers, was defined not by its private nature but by its capacity to take decisions in full independence of government interference.

The free Employers were all representatives of IOE members and of those organisations recognised by IOE as being representative and independent. The term "communist Employer" was used to differentiate from their free counterparts.

Some arguments advanced against the Employers' position included criticism that IOE did not

accept representatives from government-run companies. However, IOE has always considered that private enterprise is an essential element of a market economy, but also recognised that public companies played an important role in industrial development and economic growth. In fact, in many countries, public enterprises are members of employer organisations, particularly where they face competition. Many Employer delegations to the ILC or other meetings have included representatives from public companies.

The point of contention is not the definition of "Employers" but their freedom to constitute a representative and independent organisation.

ILO's tripartism presupposed an industrial relations system based on contracts and collective agreements and hence the autonomy of each of the social partners. Governments held the view that inclusiveness was more important than freedom and independence of Employer and Worker representatives. They believed that it was more useful to have or keep a State which did not respect ILO standards on the inside in the hope of exerting a positive influence on it through proximity and example.

Employers wondered whether ILO had become a hybrid creature, partly tripartite, partly intergovernmental. The presence of the communist Employers considerably limited the impact of the Employers' group. They systematically voted against the Employers' group, introducing into the tripartite deliberations an element of imbalance harmful to the formulation of ratifiable texts.

In public the communist Employers took a stand of uncompromising support for the Workers, which sometimes went as far as to cause even their own governments embarrassment. Free Employer delegates were highly irritated by this situation, in which the communist Employer members of committees imposed on the group seriously upset the balance of voting and helped to push through provisions which ignored realities. The overall impression was that they were scoring goals against their own side.

From 1954 onwards the free Employers refused to appoint delegates from communist countries as members of ILC committees.



Meeting of IOE Executive Committee, Copenhagen 1949



Vasilii Vasilievich Polyakov, Director, Moscow Carburettor Works. Employers of USSR at the 45th Session of the ILC, 1961.



117th session of the ILO Governing Body, Geneva, November 1951,
Employer representatives Sir John Forbes Watson UK, Mr Fennema Netherlands, Mr G. Allana Pakistan



127th session of the ILO Governing Body, Rome, November 1954, Employer representatives Yllanes Ramos Mexico and Gullmar Bergenström Sweden



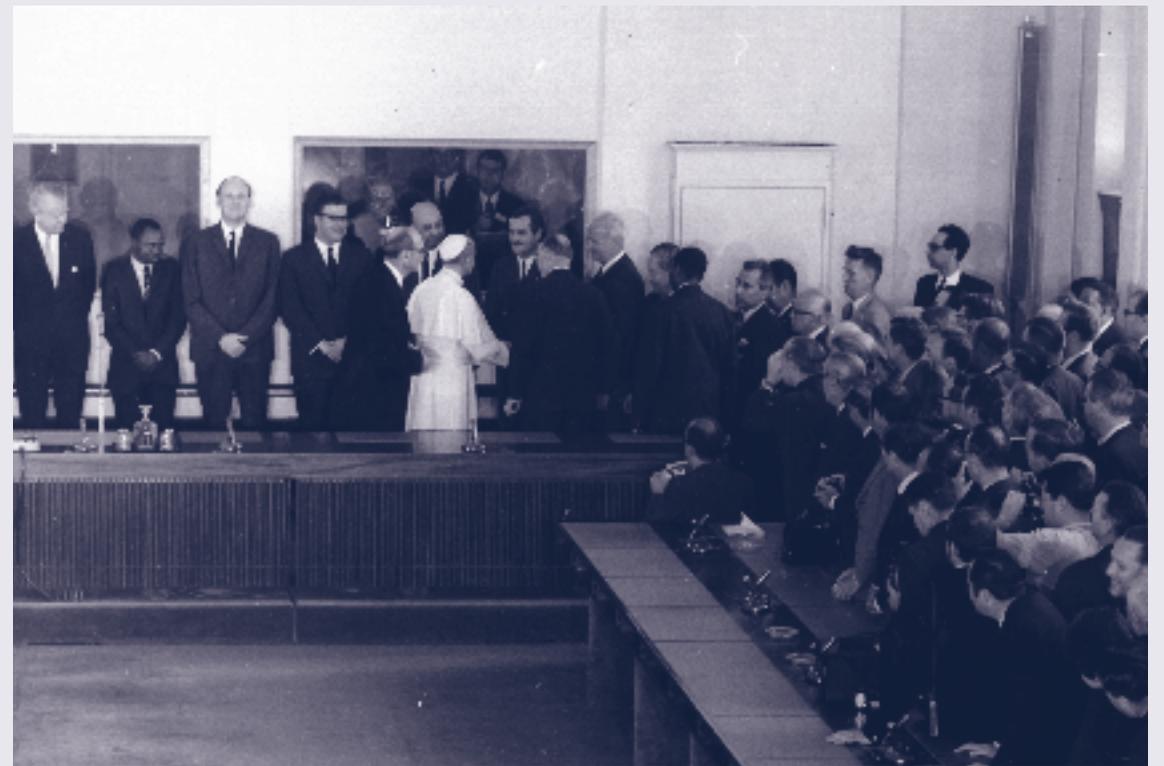
By 1965 members from the Employers' Group at ILO Conference came from nearly 100 countries



45th IOE General Council, June 1968. Employer representatives from Côte d'Ivoire and Democratic Republic of Congo



Employers' Group, 170th session of the ILO Governing Body, November 1967



Pope Paul VI with Employers' Group, International Labour Conference, 53rd Session, June 1969

Expanding influence and role

In its early years, IOE was a predominantly a European organisation. Driven in part by the independence of many former colonies, membership increased markedly over the quarter century after the Second World War. By the 1960s, IOE members overlapped to a great extent with the countries represented in Geneva – but excluding Employers from communist countries. It was becoming a truly global organisation, with a representativeness in its field of competence which has never been paralleled.

But the significance of this phenomenon goes beyond mere numbers. Most Employer delegates came from countries emerging from fragmenting colonial empires, and they had concerns which diverged from those of Employers in established industrialised countries. They wanted ILO standards to be appropriate to their economic situation and to contain flexibility clauses to that effect.

They also wanted ILO programmes that provided assistance in establishing and strengthening employer organisations. IOE, supported by ACT/EMP, set up a training programme for the leaders and supervisory staff of these new members – a development the founders of IOE could never have imagined. This development changed the nature of IOE, which meant it was no longer solely focused on being the secretariat for the Employers' Group at the ILO.

Growing mandate

This expansion of mandate and relations with ILO and other international organisations was especially evident during this period when in 1948 IOE obtained category A consultative status with the United Nations. When ILO in turn established a system for recognition of non-governmental organisations with which it cooperates closely, IOE was recognised as the only employer organisation with this status at the most complete level. The authority enjoyed by IOE within ILO is due to its recognised function as secretariat of the Employers' group at the Conference and on the Governing Body. This change of status was instrumental in IOE's decision to move from Brussels to Geneva.

Promoting free enterprise

With the growth in membership and scope of action, the IOE Executive Committee decided to update the organisation's statement of mission and fundamental principles, which was useful particularly for the organisations that were just forming in countries where the environment remained extremely hostile to enterprise.

On 13 June 1964 the General Council adopted this new manifesto on the “basic principles of the International Organisation of Employers”.

The text centres on the recognition that private enterprise is “one of the most decisive factors of economic progress and of improvement of living standards founded in the respect of the human being”.

The text also recognises social dialogue as “one of the essential conditions of a free social order”. This presupposes a “climate of collaboration between the social partners” and recourse to agreements for the solution of labour problems. The State should intervene as little as possible in the determination of wages and prices and “should not encroach upon the activities of the private undertaking.... State intervention in matters of production should at all times be of a subsidiary and, wherever possible, temporary nature”.

The importance accorded in the text to the moral and intellectual fulfilment of human beings is an implicit reference to the basic rights and freedoms of individuals, including the right of free speech, the right to freedom of movement and the choice of profession, the right to form free associations in defence of occupational interests, and the right not to be forced to do so. The text spotlights the advantages of private enterprise but also sets forth the responsibilities of businesses to workers, consumers and society as a whole. The role of businesses in education and training is also affirmed.

Particularly relevant today is how the text highlights training as one critical element in a policy for development of human resources.

Pierre Waline

Former IOE President (1946-1947) and IOE Chairman of the Executive Committee (1953-1964)



Pierre Waline, a professor of labour law at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, was associated with IOE's work for over half a century, starting in 1922, just two years after the organisation was created. He devoted his life to promoting business interests within the ILO, as well as leading IOE in a time of massive expansion of membership and mandate. He served as IOE President from 1946-1947 and as Chairman of the IOE Executive Committee from 1953-1964. He also was elected General Secretary of the Union of Metallurgical and Mining Industries in France.

Gullmar Bergenström

Former IOE President (1955-1956) and Chairman of the IOE Executive Committee (1964-1979)



Gullmar Bergenström is another example of an Employer who held many positions at IOE. He was President from 1955-1956 as well as Chairman of the IOE Executive Committee from 1964-1979. The Nordic countries were founding members of IOE and the leadership of Mr Bergenström was critical to the success of the Employers at ILO and more widely.

Naval Tata

IOE President 1950-1951, India



Naval Tata was a prominent Indian businessman and philanthropist with a marked interest in labour relations, believing that enterprises have a special responsibility to treat their employees fairly. Through IOE, he was involved with ILO in Geneva from 1946 onwards. He was President of the Employers' Federation of India for a quarter of a century until 1985. His comment about Employers from emerging countries becoming more vociferous in expressing their interests refers to ILO but is equally applicable to IOE.

Next pages:
Employers' Group, International Labour Conference, 54th session, 1970

Voices from the past

“The most important thing in this [Philadelphia] Declaration... is that it starts by insisting on freedom of association... Without liberty all is vain...”

SIR JOHN FORBES WATSON, former IOE President (1932-1933) and Chairman of the IOE Executive Committee (1949-1953)

“My organisation firmly believes that the ILO has had – and still has – a vital and important role to play in the struggle of humanity for peace, freedom and justice. Therefore, the IOE, with the untiring assistance of its staff, regards the task of participating in the work of the ILO as a very important part of its activities.”

GULLMAR BERGENSTRÖM, Chairman of the IOE Executive Committee, 1969, during ILO's 50th anniversary commemorative ceremony, ILC 1969





Protecting and promoting
employers' interests

1970-1990





An IOE leader referred to the 1970s as the golden age of collective bargaining. Employers' organisations, particularly in Europe, wove a web of contractual relations with trade unions, which brought into fashion the concept of social partnership.

Most notably during these two decades, IOE concentrated efforts on employer organisations under threat as well as a major expansion in the number of members, particularly from Africa.

By the end of 1990, IOE had 105 members in 103 countries.

Reshaping the world order

The post-1945 period was marked not only by the ideological struggle against communism. Countries including Austria, Germany, Italy and Japan were readmitted to ILO as democracy developed in the West. The spirit of freedom also took hold in the former African and Asian colonies of European countries. The phenomenon of decolonisation is clearly reflected in the fact that membership of the United Nations has increased from around 50 states in 1945 to just short of 200 now.

A feature common to many of these colonies prior to independence was the importance of agriculture and craft-based production in their economies, and their role as suppliers of primary raw materials.

This combination of factors meant that these young countries faced a unique set of challenges to develop their economies and organisations. Size, economic potential and a broadly comparable colonial history created the circumstances for a specific regional approach to economic development on the African continent.

The idea for a Pan-African Employers' Confederation (PEC) was launched at the 1973 African Regional Conference of the ILO. The purpose was to complement and support IOE's work and bring a consolidated regional view to ILO negotiations and other IOE activities.

PEC was created in October 1986 following a decision by 21 African employer organisations. The first President was Henri Georget (Niger), the Vice-Presidents were Adel Gazarine and Chike Okogwu (Nigeria), and the Secretary-General, Tom Owuor (Kenya). The new organisation was granted consultative status with the ILO soon after creation. It was also recognised by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1990. In 2012, PEC changed its name to Business Africa.

Apartheid: Employer unity at risk

Clearly the political trajectory in these newly founded African countries differs from one to another but does not usually attract undue attention. One flagrant exception to this general rule was the development of the apartheid system in South Africa in the years after the Second World War. The idea that different sections of the population should be treated differently as a function of racial background, with the former

colonialists retaining effective political control, ran directly counter to the principle of equality.

International opposition to the situation in South Africa gradually built in Africa and elsewhere through the 1950s, leading to the adoption of an ILO resolution in 1961 calling for the government to change its policy or withdraw from ILO. This was carried without disagreement. There was no mechanism within ILO for the resolution's immediate implementation, but the South African Government later decided to withdraw from ILO in the face of determined censure from other African countries.

IOE's South African member (SACCOLA – South African Employers' Consultative Committee on Labour Affairs at the time) had systematically opposed apartheid. In 1982, IOE tried to organise a dialogue between African business leaders – including from South Africa – to find a way to keep the South African employer organisation part of IOE despite the withdrawal of that country from ILO. When the proposed dialogue became public, African governments protested at IOE interference in African affairs. IOE members in Africa also objected to IOE's efforts and started to resign in protest at the organisation's perceived support for the apartheid system, with a danger that it could spread to Asia. In the political context of ILO, a split in IOE encouraged by the communist Employers, would deal a hefty blow to efforts to defend free enterprise.

To avoid the threat to ILO tripartite governance, SACCOLA was invited to withdraw from IOE voluntarily. The South African employer organisation objected, arguing that exclusion would be harmful to their national policy of hostility to racial discrimination.

A solution was found in an amendment to the IOE statutes. At the 1983 session of the General Council an amendment to the statutes was adopted to add an extra condition to membership, namely that the country of origin of the applicant organisation must be a member of the ILO, but that "if an employers' organisation does not satisfy this condition, it may, by a decision of the General Council approved by two-thirds of the members represented at the sitting, be admitted to IOE membership".

This amendment was duly passed. The South African employer organisation failed to get the two-thirds majority to remain in the organisation and were forced to leave. They were subsequently able to resume their place in IOE in 1994 following the demise of apartheid.



IOE General Council, 31 May 1971. IOE consisted of 87 members from 71 countries.



Employers' Group, 189th Session ILO Governing Body, 1973



IOE General Council, 1971 - This General Council saw a major rise in the number of women delegates.

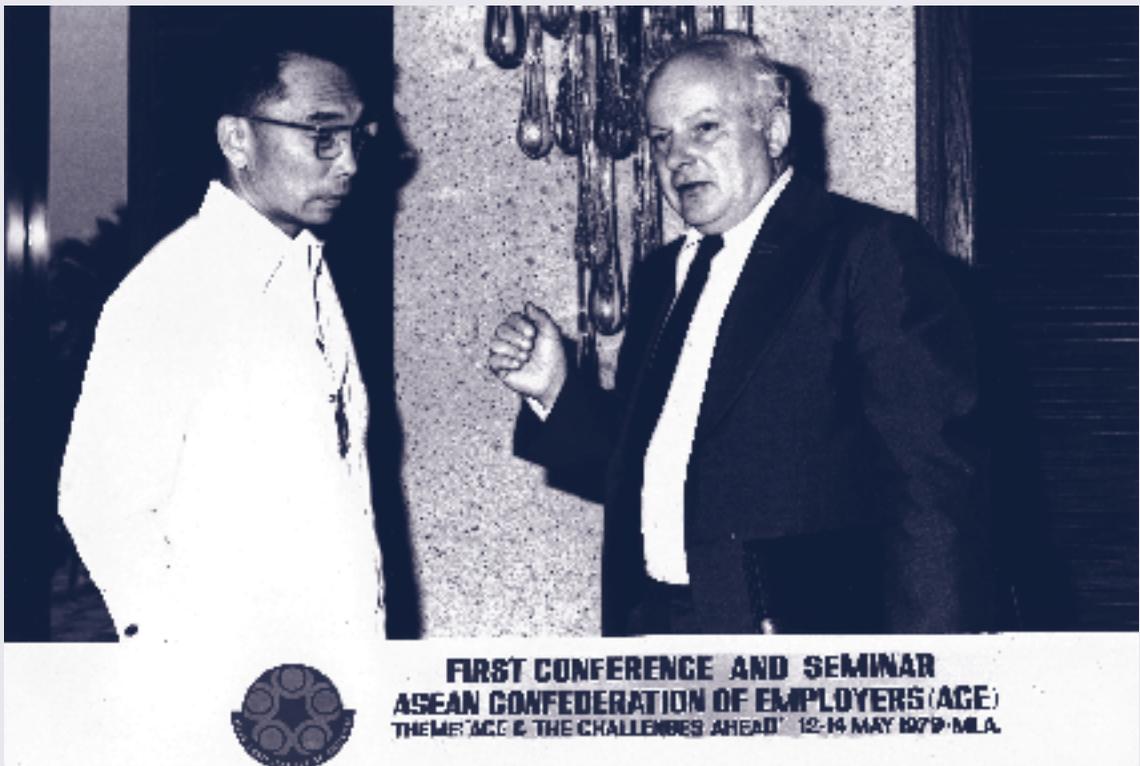


Employers' Group 60th session International Labour Conference, June 1975 / Next pages: 54th Annual IOE General Council, June 1977





Technical Seminar for Latin American Employers, Peru 1978



First Conference and Seminar of the ASEAN Confederation of Employers, May 1979



IOE President George Polites, General Council, June 1980





68th session of the International Labour Conference, Mr Koh YOSHINO, Employers' Delegate from Japan, June 1982



Jean-Jacques Oechslin, IOE President, International Labour Conference, 1982

Previous pages:
Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez meeting with representatives from COSEP, accompanied by the President of the Spanish Confederation of Employers and Raphaël Lagasse, IOE Secretary-General.



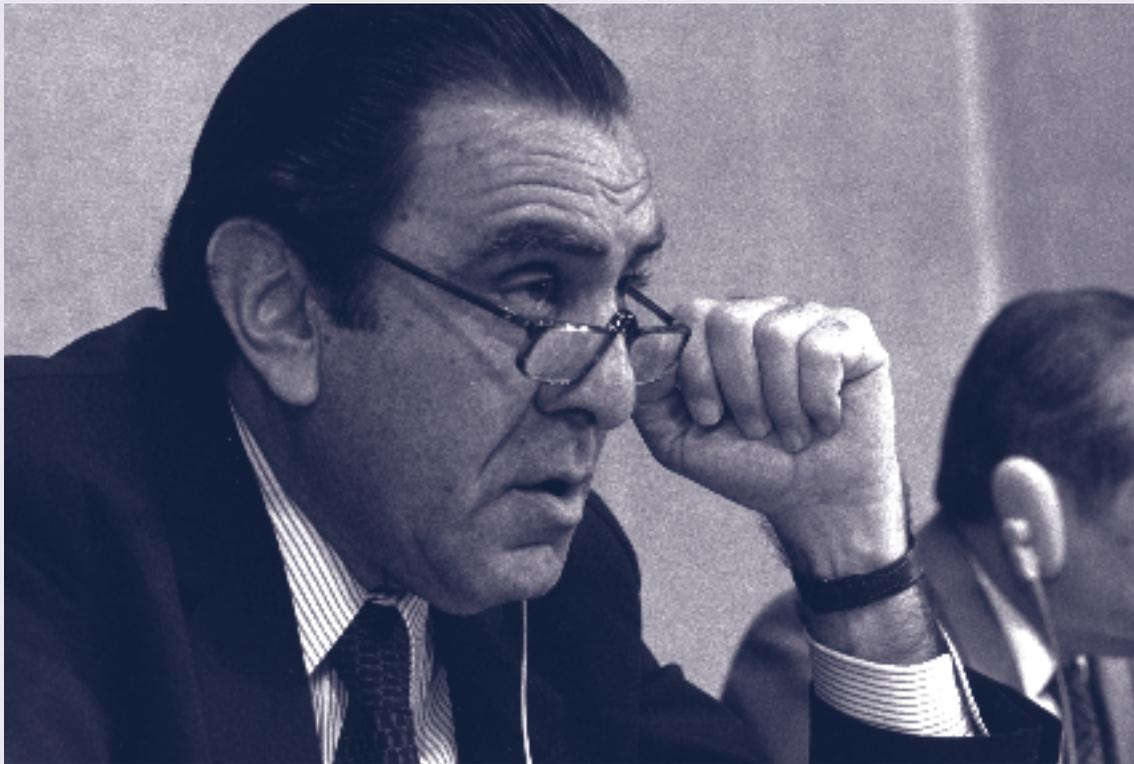
IOE Secretary-General Raphaël Lagasse on one of his many trips to Nicaragua to support the employers' organisation due to political instability.



Pope John Paul II, Visit to the Employers' Group of the 68th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1982



President Corazon C. Aquino of the Philippines, Employers' Meeting, 75th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1988



72nd session International Labour Conference, IOE President Murat Eurnekian, 1986



James A. William, Vice-President Employers' Group, 77th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1990.

Freedom of association

In 1948, as part of the effort to reinvigorate the tripartite system, ILO adopted Convention No. 87 on freedom of association and the right to organise. While this was designed primarily to protect workers from State interference, it would later also come into its own to the benefit of employers and their representative organisations.

It was only in the 1980s that the Employers' group started using the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association set up in 1951 under Convention No. 87 to protect their own constituents.

The number of cases concerning employers remains very small, but the fact that they exist is of real significance, since it shows that the freedom of employer organisations is guaranteed not only by texts but also by effective procedures.

In 1978 the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza was overthrown by a democratic coalition in which the national employer organisation took part. Unfortunately, the Sandinista regime which took over was unsympathetic to an independent business community.

Local employers, consisting essentially of small enterprises and plantations, managed to survive but were the target of the Government's hostility. Their representative organisation and member of IOE, the Higher Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), was the victim of discriminatory measures contrary to the principles of freedom of association, and their principal leaders were even imprisoned.

For the first time, IOE used the supervisory machinery of the ILO in favour of one of its own members and presented a complaint to the Committee on Freedom of Association, with 13 more following by 1990. It also lodged a formal complaint with the Conference for violation of the Conventions in force. Despite some reticence, the Workers supported these initiatives. In addition, IOE organised several visits by top-level personalities in support of the Nicaraguan employer organisation throughout the duration of the Sandinista regime, which came to an end in 1990.

Other complaints were presented against Latin American governments, such as those of Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela.

End of the Cold War: A new age for free enterprise

The two-decade period from 1970-1990 could not have ended more dramatically than with the collapse of communism in the countries of Eastern Europe. IOE President at the time, Johan von Holten from Sweden, assessed the historical impact of these changes on employers in the following way: "Where up to now there was totalitarian socialism masses are reclaiming not only their civil rights but also the freedom to own property and to engage in private enterprise. To us employers who have always believed in the market economy this is heartening indeed."

Opportunities to develop new members were a focus of IOE action for the next ten years as a result of the historical shift.

Voices from the past

"IOE has officially condemned all kinds of racial discrimination and has formally committed itself to join in the efforts to abolish apartheid, which it upholds is contrary to IOE's basic principles in the field of human rights, including the principle itself of free enterprise."

IOE Annual Report 1983

"And yet, an African employer myself, I am fully aware that many employer organisations – especially in the developing countries – are still not sufficiently structured... By assisting and advising young or new employers' organisations, IOE will become stronger, as its own representativity at the international level will be greatly increased, as well as the solidarity among employers"

HENRI GEORGET, IOE President, 1983-1984, Niger



From strength to strength

1990-2010





Expansion in Eastern Europe and Russia

The implosion of communism in Eastern Europe and Russia in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a vindication of the capitalist system: free enterprise could deliver what centralised planning and authoritarianism could not – vibrant economies. This clearly presented an opportunity for IOE.

It also constituted a major challenge. By contrast with the new IOE members following on from the wave of decolonisation, managers and workers in the formerly State-owned enterprises in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union lacked entrepreneurial capacities and to some extent the basic understanding of private sector activity.

In the absence of free enterprise as understood in the West as well as the lack of institutions supporting social dialogue, in 1992 IOE issued a joint document with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) detailing the steps both organisations believed necessary for achieving constructive economic, social and political reform and the role of ILO. Among the recommendations were: give priority to the development of independent employer institutions and trade unions; expand training activities in personnel management, the role of labour ministries and collective bargaining procedures; and increase support for the growth of employment, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, through technical and financial assistance.

Throughout the 1990s, IOE staff dedicated considerable time and resources to assisting emerging or newly formed employer organisations and following up on the recommendations made in 1992. It collaborated very closely with ACT/EMP. More than 13 new members from Eastern Europe and Central joined IOE in less than a decade – a measure of the success of the organisation’s outreach efforts.

And lastly, the issue of “communist” and “free” employers which had dogged the organisation since the 1950s was definitively resolved.

Reforming to meet new challenges

IOE celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1995 with more than 114 employer-organisation members in 112 countries. During this year, the organisation took the opportunity to pursue some structural reforms and set out new directions.

The membership firmly reiterated that ILO should remain the principal field of action. It stressed that IOE needed to continue to press for reform within the ILO as it faced a mounting funding and political crisis with the withdrawal of the US contribution. The membership also renewed the ongoing commitment to strengthening employer organisations, especially in developing and emerging countries. Beyond this, members also called for fostering stronger links with the United Nations system, including the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This was the first time that cooperation with the UN system was made part of IOE’s core strategy.

By 2010, the international community viewed IOE as the reference global organisation on matters related to employment and social dialogue. This was an extraordinary achievement for an institution that began with 17 members focused exclusively on relations with ILO.

As IOE came to celebrate its 75th anniversary in 1995, the world of business had evolved substantially from 1920. The monolithic concepts of labour and capital had softened somewhat around the edges as regulation was adjusted to take greater account of the wishes and needs of workers and employers alike. Technology also began to radically transform the workplace during this period, making it easier to do certain jobs, creating new ones and threatening others.

At the same time, a spirit of individual initiative gradually displaced the corporatism that had grown up in the years following the Second World War. In politics, communism was banished in the former Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe while the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was finally won.



IOE General Council, June 1990



81st session International Labour Conference, 1994, H. Tsujino, Japan Employers' Delegate and H. Kasakawa, Japan Employers' Adviser



IOE General Council, June 1993



IOE European Meeting, Budapest, September 1996, Péter Kiss, János Pelotás and Péter Szirmai



Jean-Jacques Oechslin and Nelson Mandela, International Labour Conference, June 1990



IOE Secretary-General Antonio Peñalosa, 2007

284th Session of the ILO Governing Body, June 2002

1998 ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

The idea for the 1998 Declaration grew out of the debate about the 1997 World Trade Organization Singapore Declaration, which included a “commitment to the observance of internationally recognised core labour standards”, but the agreed text also recognised ILO as the “competent body to set and deal with labour standards” and rejects the use of labour standards for protectionist purposes. That essentially sent the issue back to ILO, and the Employers’ proposal for “a declaration or statement of principles” to encourage countries to observe fundamental labour rights derived from ILO standards that their governments would not ratify in treaty form.

The standards cover freedom of association/ right to collective bargaining, abolition of forced and child labour and elimination of discrimination in employment.

The Declaration was adopted in 1998. The Employers and ILO leadership were pleased with the outcome as the Declaration clearly gave ILO the exclusive mandate in the field of labour standards. This was critical in a global economy where technology was on the cusp of transforming international trade.

2008 financial crisis: Global Jobs Pact

The 2008 financial and economic crisis was felt around the world, causing hardship to individuals, families and communities, and exacerbating poverty. Still committed to the pursuit of free enterprise and a market economy, the Employers understood that this massive financial collapse required a cross-cutting response of job creation together with social protection. In response, they pushed for a discussion at the 2009 ILC of the crisis and response. As a result, they negotiated and agreed with Workers and Governments a Global Jobs Pact to mitigate the jobs crisis to the greatest extent possible.

There was an emphasis on using proactive measures to shorten the lag between economic recovery and the recovery of employment, including action to improve employability such as skills development and retraining. Governments were encouraged to boost demand through macroeconomic stimulus packages and the role of social dialogue was underlined.

Changing face of employer representation

When IOE was founded in 1920 and until the 1980s, representatives of business were characterised by being only male. From the 1980s, and to a greater extent in the 1990s, women began to take on more senior roles in employer organisations and joined the ranks of the Employers’ Group. The first woman to join the Employers’ Group was in 1981. She was Lucia Sasso-Mazzufferi from Confindustria (Italy).

Lucia Sasso-Mazzufferi remained a Governing Body member for over 24 years (1981–2005). She held significant posts at the International Labour Conference, especially within the Credentials Committee—one of the oldest and important committees of the Conference—where she represented the Employers’ group (from 1981 to 1984, and again from 2001 to 2005).

More broadly, from 2007–2013, the percentage of women representing employers at the ILO increased from 18.5 to 23.5 percent. Twenty years after the start of the new century, women have become an important force both within the Employers’ Group and IOE, even though more needs to be done to expand their participation.

In 2020, five women (Renate Hornung-Draus, Hansong Liu (Penny), Marina V. Moskvina, Jacqueline Mugo, Anne Vauchez) were on IOE’s Management Board, one woman had served as Secretary-General (Linda Kromjong) and a rising proportion of women from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe were joining the Employers’ Group. With the global rise of female entrepreneurs and business leaders, there is a growing population of women ready to join the Employers’ Group, bringing with them new perspectives.



Press conference, Mission to Russia to support IOE member CCEUR in negotiations with public authorities, December 2000



Renate Hornung Draus, Employer Representative, Germany, June 2003.



284th Session of the ILO Governing Body, June 2002



Workshop for Asian employer organisations to strengthen support to small and medium businesses, 2006

Global Industrial Relations Network



In 2008, IOE's Global Industrial Relations Network (GIRN) was established. This initiative brings together major corporate companies of IOE member organisations to identify and anticipate emerging industrial relations or human resource issues and trends so that they can better prepare for and address them.

GIRN members are also given access to IOE's deep knowledge and expertise in international employment and human rights, as well as insights into UN and other multilateral initiatives impacting the global employment environment.

Global Occupational Safety and Health Network



Building on the example of the GIRN, IOE began efforts in 2008 to set up a Global Occupational Safety and Health Network (GOSH). Safety at work has been a preoccupation of IOE members since the organisation's inception. Throughout the past 100 years, IOE has supported numerous ILO Conventions to protect the health and well-being of workers. IOE set up the GOSH, the first dedicated network of OSH and sustainability professionals from multinational enterprises and member organisations to discuss and debate current and emerging issues within their remit on a confidential basis.

Voices from the past

“Respect of human rights and alleviation of poverty can only be achieved by constructive collaboration between labour and management.”

HIROSHI TSUJINO, IOE President, 1994, Japan

“This reform is important. It should enable us to take advantage of our strategic position at the crossroads of economic and social issues, to help us set in motion our own global strategy aimed at promoting free enterprise as the source of the creation of wealth and productive employment.”

HÉDI DJILANI, IOE President, 1997, Tunisia

(The reform refers to the restructuring of IOE leadership and governance. Specifically, it covered the creation of the Management Board to replace the Executive Committee, making the term of the President two years and changing the post of Chairman of IOE to Executive Vice-President to the ILO and the Secretary-General.)

“IOE is first and foremost a human community; it will endure as a political force only if it remains so.”

JEAN-JACQUES OECHSLIN, 1998



Championing business
in global relations
2010-2020



As the voice of business in a rapidly changing world, IOE was never more needed than this past decade by the more than 50 million companies we represent in 150 countries. Business and industry have transformed at a breakneck pace during this decade, as our members, and their members faced disruption from political, public health, technology and economic changes.

IOE continued to support the Employers' group at ILO but also expanded considerably its advocacy efforts with an array of multilateral organisations and platforms from the G20, the United Nations, the World Bank, the Global Compact and many others. It has also become a leader on bringing business solutions and views to a growing array of policy issues from global supply chains, business and human rights, migration and future of work. IOE's global network ensured the organisation's views were based on practical business experience and knowledge.

At the start of 2020, IOE had 159 members in 150 countries.

Leading the business team at G20

When financial markets were roiled by the 2008 economic crisis, the G20 became an important part of global governance. Whereas in 2008, the G20 Summit in Washington DC, focused almost exclusively on the financial system, half a year later in London, G20 leaders acknowledged the role of employment in achieving a sustained recovery. Since then, jobs and skills have been a focus of every G20 Leader's Declaration.

Since the beginning of the G20 process in its current form, IOE and its members have played a crucial role in representing and coordinating business views in the G20 employment and skills work stream. This entails coordinating employers' inputs within the B(usiness)20, and negotiating with L(abour)20 joint statements, such as the groundbreaking agreement of common principles on quality apprenticeships under the Russian G20 Presidency in 2013.

IOE also represents business at the G20 Employment Working Group and the G20 Labour Ministerial and follow-up on the implementation of G20 commitments at national level, through, for instance the publication of monitoring reports in 2014, 2017 and 2018. IOE Presidents Daniel Funes de Rioja and Erol Kiresepi have been part of the B20 leadership and played a crucial role in bringing the business experience and standpoint into the G20 process.

IOE also took the lead in coordinating business follow-up to the G20 youth employment commitments by setting up the Global Apprenticeships Network (GAN) in 2013. The GAN is a business-led public private partnership, with the overarching goal of encouraging and linking business initiatives on skills and employment opportunities for youth - notably through apprenticeships, work-readiness programmes and work-based training. Today, GAN has 16 national networks and comprises 11 member companies around the world. It has provided more than 20 million skilling opportunities for youth in more than 20 countries.

Standing up for business and human rights

Over the past 20 years, the links between business and human rights were increasingly debated in view of globalisation, privatisation, rapid growth of civil society groups and increased consumer awareness. At the 1999 Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on world business leaders to initiate a Global Compact of shared values and principles to give a human face to the global market. IOE strongly supported the establishment of the Global Compact and has been on its board since the start. Many IOE members federations host the focal point of the national Global Compact Networks.

The discussion on the roles and responsibilities of business for human rights, however, did not end with the establishment of the Global Compact. In 2003, a subcommittee of the then UN Human Rights Commission adopted so called “Draft Norms” on corporate responsibility for human rights. These draft norms pursued an approach whereby the

responsibility for enforcement of human rights incumbent on governments was transferred to companies. IOE strongly rejected this “privatization” of human rights. Instead it fully engaged in the mandate of the Special Representative John Ruggie, who proposed in 2008 a concept for human rights and companies which he breaks down into three principles: protect, respect and remedy:

- Protect: it is the duty of the state to protect the people within its borders against human rights infringements by non-state players.
- Respect: it is the duty of companies to respect human rights and to put in place the management structures necessary to this end.
- Remedy: judicial and non-judicial grievance mechanisms need to be developed and reinforced in order to improve defence against human rights infringements.

IOE played an instrumental role in the development of the “protect, respect and remedy” framework, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which operationalise the framework and were endorsed by the Human Rights Council in June 2011.

Since then IOE has engaged through peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, advocacy work and partnerships in the promotion and implementation of the UN Guiding Principles. Together with USCIB and the US Chambers of Commerce and hosted by The Coca-Cola Company, IOE has been sponsor of the annual human rights conference in Atlanta since its beginning 2008 and established a similar

annual conference format in Europe. Numerous capacity workshops were held around the world.

As the leading business voice on human rights issues, IOE also has engaged strongly in the negotiations on a binding UN Treaty on business and human rights, which started after the vote in favor of the establishment of an Intergovernmental Working Group on this issue by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014. IOE has worked to ensure that the approach of the UN Guiding Principles is fully respected and has coordinated other business groups and initiatives on this subject.

IOE partner companies meeting with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, November 2019





G20 Meeting in Paris with IOE President Daniel Funes de Rioja, 2011



IOE Business and Human Rights Conference, Madrid, April 2019



IOE President Erol Kiresepi, IOE Vice-President for Africa Jacqueline Mugo and IOE Vice-President to the ILO Mthunzi Mdwaba, June 2018



IOE Secretary-General Roberto Suárez Santos is part of a panel discussion during the UN Climate Change Conference, Madrid, December 2019



Spearheading business partnerships for fair migration policies

Well-regulated migration is an economic imperative, and businesses are frequent users of national migration systems. Their experience with the practical workings of immigration laws, procedures, and policies, as well as knowledge of market and staffing trends, make them an important source of information and a major stakeholder in the formation of migration policies. IOE has long participated in migration debates at the ILO and in other multilateral forums. This engagement has intensified over the past decade.

A primary focus has been the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), an informal inter-governmental consultative process created in 2007 and open to all UN member states. At first, business participated in civil society delegations to GFMD meetings and consultations. But the business voice at these events was subsumed by the wider concerns of numerous other organisations, and from the outset IOE made the case for a dedicated channel for private sector input. At the same time, it prepared itself to engage more intensively in migration policy discussions, establishing a Working Group on Migration Policy in 2014.

Its efforts were rewarded when the 2015 GFMD Summit endorsed the creation of a Business Mechanism with the aim of ensuring more meaningful private sector participation in GFMD policy dialogues. The Business Mechanism also provided a platform for IOE engagement in the negotiation of the UN Global Compact on Migration, adopted in 2018.

By engaging the global IOE network, the Business Mechanism has increased the involvement of employer organisations on migration issues, both with their member companies and their governments. It has also encouraged innovative thinking within employer organisations on practical measures to improve the functioning of migration systems.

Defending employers' views on the future of work

As technological advances in artificial intelligence cause widespread disruption in the workplace, anticipating these changes and equipping employer organisations and their members with the knowledge on how best to respond has been a major focus of IOE's work this past decade. In 2016, IOE published one of the most comprehensive reviews on the subject. The strength of the publication is both the analysis of the trends, along with a detailed list of practical and achievable recommendations on how best to adapt to this rapidly and constantly changing business environment. Following this landmark publication, IOE began focusing its work in this policy area on promoting skills development. This remains one of the institution's top priorities.

IOE brought this expertise to an ILO initiative carrying out a global reflection on the future of work in the lead up to ILO's Centenary. IOE's Vice-President to the ILO and Employers' Group Spokesperson, Mthunzi Mdwaba, was nominated to be one of the core participants. The result of this yearlong effort left Mr. Mdwaba, together with a large portion of IOE members, dissatisfied as the recommendations failed among other issues to mention the positive role of the private sector and the shared responsibility of all stakeholders to define a future of work that supports employers and employees. Their views would have been well understood by previous IOE leaders from Jules Carlier to Pierre Waline to Naval Tata.

However, the hard work undertaken by IOE leaders to change the direction of ILO led to a historical tripartite agreement on the occasion of the ILO Centenary: its Centenary Declaration. This historical document strengthens the leadership and credibility of ILO as it is inspired by a proper recognition of the role of the private sector together with the need to assure a proper business environment.

IOE President Erol Kiresepi addressing the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of the Centenary of the International Labour Organization

Bringing the force of business to Agenda 2030

Sustainability, green jobs and decent work have been on IOE's policy agenda since the 2000s. We, together with our members, made critical contributions to the negotiations that resulted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Following from that, Employers' also brought their expertise and problem-solving focus to the 2013 International Labour Conference debate on sustainable development, decent work and green jobs. As risks from climate change and rising inequality, together with the growing urgency around achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, Employers' clearly shared the international concern that more needs to be done to reverse these serious trends.

Galvanising the business community, IOE organised its first global summit in Bahrain with some 500 participants. At the top of the agenda was a dialogue on SDGs followed by the adoption of the Bahrain Declaration. The Declaration affirmed the business community's commitment to support achieving the SDGs and its readiness to work and cooperate at national and international level to reach the targets; to engage with trade unions and all other stakeholders in dialogue and negotiations that contribute to better jobs, growth and prosperity among others.

Building on the momentum created in Bahrain, IOE set up a global policy group of employer representatives to bring substantive inputs to UN efforts towards achieving Agenda 2030. The aim is to build a library of how businesses are integrating sustainability practices in their strategies and work streams, together with consolidating positions on private sector contributions to achieving SDG targets.

A new presence in New York is helping the organisation to become active and visible in different UN-led initiatives. As part of this foothold, in 2019, IOE took on the leadership role of coordinator for the Business and Industry Stakeholder Group before the UN institutions. This crucial role was recognition of the important contributions IOE has made towards achieving the targets of Agenda 2030 and the strength of IOE's network to put policies into practice.

New services and policy working groups: closer to members

More recently, IOE has considerably increased its efforts to reflect and promote the concerns and views of its members at global debates within UN and other international organisations.

In addition, IOE is expanding its capacity-building work, increasing its contributions to national discussions, and, in general, being much closer to our members and supporting them with their different priorities. We regularly visit members in all regions. IOE also organizes regional and global activities and events on issues that concern business. Funding from donors has expanded since 2015, enabling the organisation to take on these new initiatives.

The creation of five policy working groups from human rights to sustainability among others, using the opportunity of regular employers gathering at the ILO together with the use of improved virtual tools, means IOE can now gather more rapidly and accurately the diverse and significant contributions from members, provide valuable guidance and inputs to address national challenges and developments, and anticipate and prepare for global and national discussions and initiatives that impact the world of business.



IOE General Council, IOE President Erol Kiresepi and IOE Vice-President to the ILO Mthunzi Mdwaba, 2019



IOE President, Secretary-General and staff member meet with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during the Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration, December 2018



IOE Secretary-General Brent Wilton, 2013



IOE Secretary-General Linda Kromjong, 2015

Voices from our leadership

“Employers fundamentally believe in a fair playing field in the world of work. No one should be left behind...The strength of the ILO is its unique tripartite governance structure...nowhere else do the silos between the principal actors in the world of work breakdown and work together towards a better future.

MTHUNZI MDWABA, IOE Vice-President to the ILO, International Labour Conference, 2019

“If the UN wants the SDGs to be successfully implemented on the ground and improve people’s lives, it needs to engage with employers and business federations.”

EROL KIRESEPI, IOE President, B20 Summit, Tokyo, 2019.



“It is my firm belief that economic openness has been a key driver in increasing democracy around the globe. These two elements – economic and political freedom – consolidate each other, contribute to social and economic development and together hold the solution to inclusion in the process of globalization.”

DANIEL FUNES DE RIOJA, IOE Honorary President, ILO Forum on Decent Work for a Fair Globalization

“Human rights are of very, very great importance both for all of us as citizens but also for enterprises and for their representatives... In countries where the implementation and the respect of human rights is good, it is also better and easier for businesses to be good employers and do good business so we do see a very concrete link between the possibility to be a good employer and the respect and the enforcement of human rights by the governments.”

RENATE HORNUNG-DRAUS, IOE Regional Vice-President, Europe and Central Asia

Secretary-Generals from 1920 - present



Jules Lecocq
1920-1950



George Emery
1951-1959



Raphaël Lagasse
1959-1989



Costas Kapartis
1989-1999



Antonio Peñalosa
1999-2011



Brent Wilton
2011-2015



Linda Kromjong
2015-2018



Roberto Suárez Santos
2018-

Presidents since 1920

1920 - 1921	Jules Carlier	Belgium
1921 - 1922	Sir Allan Smith	UK
1922 - 1923	Robert Pinot	France
1923 - 1924	S. Edström	Sweden
1924 - 1925	Gino Olivetti	Italy
1925 - 1926	François Hodacz	Czechoslovakia
1926 - 1927	C. Tzaut	Switzerland
1927 - 1928	Hans Christian C. Oersted	Denmark
1928 - 1929	H. Vogel	Germany
1929 - 1930	P. Cort van der Linden	Netherlands
1930 - 1931	W. Gemmill	Union of South Africa
1931 - 1932	D. Curcin	Yugoslavia
1932 - 1933	Sir John Forbes Watson	UK
1933 - 1934	T. Watanabe	Japan
1934 - 1935	T. Schmidt	Austria
1935 - 1936	F. Junoy y Rabat	Spain
1936 - 1937	D. Erulkar	India
1937 - 1938	C. Erlandsen	Norway
1938 - 1939	Lambert-Ribot	France
1939 - 1940	K. Mauritz	Estonia
1940 - 1945	Vacant due to Second World War	
1945 - 1946	D. Erulkar	India
1946 - 1947	Pierre Waline	France
1947 - 1948	C. Kuntschen	Switzerland
1948 - 1949	Julio Pons	Uruguay
1949 - 1950	Louis Cornil	Belgium
1950 - 1951	Naval Tata	India
1951 - 1952	C. McCormick	USA
1952 - 1953	A.G. Fennema	Netherlands
1953 - 1954	P. Campanella	Italy
1954 - 1955	H. Taylor	Canada
1955 - 1956	Gullmar Bergenström	Sweden
1956 - 1957	G. Allana	Pakistan
1957 - 1958	Sir Richard Sneddon	UK
1958 - 1959	Fernando Yllanes Ramos	Mexico
1959 - 1960	F. Faupel	Germany
1960 - 1961	Mishiro	Japan
1961 - 1962	J. O'Brien	Ireland
1962 - 1963	M. A. Rifaat	United Arab Republic
1963 - 1964	B. Machado Neto	Brazil
1964 - 1965	Ostberg	Norway
1965 - 1966	D. Andriantsitohaina	Madagascar

1966 - 1967	Sir Grant Ferrier	Australia
1967 - 1968	S. Wajid Ali	Pakistan
1968 - 1969	Desmaison	Peru
1969 - 1970	Sir George Pollock	UK
1970 - 1971	Edwin P. Neilan	USA
1971 - 1972	M. Ghayour	Iran
1972 - 1973	S. B. Chambers	Jamaica
1973 - 1974	Abebe Abate	Ethiopia
1974 - 1975	Gonzales Blanco	Brazil
1975 - 1976	Marwan Nasr	Lebanon
1976 - 1977	Albert Verschuere	Belgium
06/1977 - 12/1977	Kazuo Yoshimura	Japan
1978 - 1979	James A. Ola	Nigeria
1979 - 1980	George Polites	Australia
1980 - 1981	Keith Richan	Canada
1981 - 1982	Max Arbesser-Rastburg	Austria
1982 - 1983	Horacio Villalobos	Venezuela
1983 - 1984	Henri Georget	Niger
1984 - 1985	Aurelio Periquet	Philippines
1985 - 1986	Roger Décosterd	Switzerland
1986 - 1987	Murat Eurnekian	Argentina
1987 - 1988	Gazarine	Egypt
1988 - 1989	J. W. Rowe	New Zealand
1989 - 1990	Johan von Holten	Sweden
1990 - 1991	Charles Smith	USA
1991 - 1992	J. Santos Neves Filho	Brazil
1992 - 1993	Tom Diju Owuor	Kenya
1993 - 1994	Horoshi Tsujino	Japan
1994 - 1995	Cornélie Hak	Netherlands
1995 - 1996	Abraham Katz	USA
1996 - 1997	Jorge de Regil	Mexico
1997 - 1999	Hédi Djilani	Tunisia
1999 - 2001	Ashraf Tabani	Pakistan
2001 - 2003	François Perigot	France
2003 - 2005	François Perigot	France
2005 - 2006	François Perigot	France
2006 - 2008	Abraham Katz	USA
2008 - 2011	Wiseman Lumkile Nkuhlu	South Africa
2011 - 2014	Tan Sri Dato Azman	Malaysia
2014 - 2017	Daniel Funes de Rioja	Argentina
2017 - 2021	Erol Kiresepi	Turkey

IOE Chairman of the Executive Committee from 1920 - 2000

1920 - 1929	Jules Carlier	Belgium
1929 - 1949	Hans Christian Oersted	Denmark
1949 - 1953	Sir John Forbes	United Kingdom
1953 - 1964	Pierre Waline	France
1964 - 1979	Gullmar Bergenström	Sweden
1979 - 1998	Jean-Jacques Oechslin	France
1998 - 2000	Rolf Thüsing	Germany

Vice Presidents to the ILO from 2001 - present

2001 - 2013 (formerly known as IOE Executive Vice President)	Daniel Funes de Rioja	Argentina
2014 - 2016	Jorgen Ronnest	Denmark
2017 - present	Mthunzi Mdwaba	South Africa

Acknowledgement

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