

OPENING SPEECH FOR MR MTHUNZI MDWABA

THE LAUNCH OF ILO GLOBAL COMMISSION ON FUTURE OF WORK REPORT

22 JANUARY 2019, 10:55, ILO

Excellencies,

Members of the ILO Global Commission,

Distinguished guests,

Friends,

Colleagues,

Good Morning, Bonjour, Buenos Dias and given that I have people from home must also say Sanibonani(Zulu), Molweni(Xhosa) , Dumelang(South Sotho) and Habari za asubuhi(Swahili).

As an *ex-officio* participant of the Global Commission, I am honoured and thrilled to have been part of this whole process.

The Global Commission debates have been **highly inspiring and extremely refreshing**, thanks to the high calibre of the Commissioners who gave generously of their time and expertise.

We have gone through 18 months of hard work, 3 drafts have been circulated and a number of thematic debates organized.

I would like to thank them for this incredible and highly ambitious journey of enlightenment and reflection on a number of complex issues that affect us all.

The changes we see in the world of work and of business are unprecedented.

The Report captures the complexity of the issues at stake well, by recognizing the remarkable opportunities that advanced technologies offer, as well as the challenges.

I can recall the shock in some of my colleagues faces when I asked them if they had seen the Black Panther movie as an example of both the developing world as well one of a thriving society because of technology.

The Commissioners had the difficult task of presenting concrete and realistic proposals for action, to be applied throughout the globe and at different levels of developments.

While embracing this difficult challenge, we have pooled together our strengths to visualize how to achieve our ambitions for the next century.

I believe important efforts were done towards achieving our ambitions, bearing in mind that nobody can foresee the future in 100 years - it is hard to gaze through a crystal glass for a period this far in the future, but everyone certainly did so with gusto!!

Whilst some of the recommendations are practical and forward-looking, others are aspirational and difficult to implement in the short to medium term.

As once said: “if you have a great ambition, take as a big a step as possible in the direction of fulfilling it. The step may only be a tiny one, but trust that it may be the largest one possible for now”.

Now, speaking also as the Vice-President for the Employers’ Group in the ILO, the largest private sector organization in the world, with 153 employer organization members in 144 countries and over 50 million companies through same, it is important to emphasize that the ex-officio participants are not signatories of the Report. This is clearly expressed on page 75 of the English version of the Report that mentions how we participated in our personal capacities, not representing the respective ILO Constituents. This will allow our respective groups to receive this report and develop their own views on the content and proposed recommendations. This now goes into real social dialogue mode.

Turning to the specific content of the recommendations contained in the report, I want to highlight, from the outset, **the value and relevance of the proposals calling for:**

- a strengthening of lifelong learning systems and the focus on skills;
- the support of “people through future of work transitions”;
- the reinforcement of policies on gender equality;
- the “strengthening of social protection systems”, always considering first and foremost the need for their sustainability; and

- the promotion of collective representation and social dialogue.

The rationale behind these proposals is already at the forefront of business priorities.

Despite their valuable intentions, other recommendations need further refinement and reflection and time will tell.

I must though take this opportunity to distance myself from the recommendations on establishing a “Universal Labour Guarantee” and on the “expansion of time sovereignty” due to their non-feasibility and vagueness in terms of possible means of financing.

Likewise, the recommendation on “setting an international governance system for digital labour platforms that sets and requires platforms and their clients to respect certain minimum rights and protection” is highly challenging. I do not see this system of transnational rights being established and successfully managed.

With regards to the recommendation on reshaping business incentive structures for the implementation of the human-centered agenda, there is no accompanying proposal for establishing incentives for businesses to thrive in the future and invest in technology.

Moreover, there is no acknowledgement of the positive role of the private sector into the future of work, in spite of concrete suggestions and texts offered on this very important aspect.

Additionally, the Report is addressed to Governments, Workers’ and Employers’ Organisations, companies, individuals and civil society in general. The audience is clear.

However, the recommendations require actions mainly from Governments and companies, thus leaving aside all other stakeholders that could have seized the occasion to take ownership and develop their own responsibilities. **Everyone has an active role to play in the future of work.** I also think it is apt to mention the highly quoted African Proverb - "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together", as this will remain relevant in the future we are navigating.

Finally, All of us have been mindful of the difficulty of the Commission's ambitious task, simultaneously with the importance of thinking out of the box.

As Albert Einstein once said: *"the world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking"*. He also said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results" **We cannot think about the future with the same mindset we have been using in the past. There is a lot of attitudinal change we must all embark on to change the world in an impactful way.**

The report serves as a valuable input to start the debate about the future of work we want in the 2019 International Labour Conference. We look forward to starting these discussions and to negotiating the outcome document which will define how ILO constituents and the ILO as an institution should harness the opportunities and face the challenges of the future of work. Visualizing and understanding what will be required and transforming mindsets and aptitudes towards work is a prerequisite to make this ambitious journey a successful one for all.

Thank you, Merci beaucoup, Muchas gracias, Asante Sana.