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**FINAL VERSION - 22 January**

**OFFICIAL SPEECH OF MR MTHUNZI MDWABA  
LAUNCH OF THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE ILO  
22 JANUARY 2019, 16:00, ILO Colonnades**

Excellencies,  
Members of the ILO Global Commission,  
Distinguished guests,  
Friends,  
Colleagues,

**Good afternoon, Bonjour, Buenas tardes!**

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to speak on this very special occasion, to officially launch the Centenary Celebrations of the International Labour Organisation.

Today is a very special day.

As one of the oldest institutions in the UN system, the year of the ILO centenary anniversary is a milestone of global importance. We have come a long way since 1919.

Interestingly, President Franklin Roosevelt, recalling the founding of the ILO, used these rather surprising words in 1941:

***"To many, it was a wild dream. Who had ever heard of Governments getting together to raise the standards of labour on an international plane? Wilder still was the idea that the people themselves who were directly affected - the workers and the employers of the various countries - should have a hand with Government in determining these labour standards."***

In today's world, what President Roosevelt called a "wild dream" has come to reality... Not only has it come to reality, it continues to prove its worth.

Our unique tripartite structure and social dialogue as the process and the means of interaction between governments, workers and employers has kept us close to economic and social realities, even in the turbulent times of the century.

### **[Silence]**

The ILO played a significant role in my own country, South Africa – in combating apartheid. I will not forget what Nelson Mandela said in his speech at the 1990 ILC:

***“Despite the thickness of the prison walls, all of us on Robben Island and other jails could hear your voices demanding our release very clearly. We drew inspiration from this. (...) We thank you that you did not tire in your struggle. We thank you for your sense of humanity and your commitment to justice which drove you to reject the very idea that we should be imprisoned and that our people should be in bondage. (...) I think we are safe in assuming that the ILO will not fail us.”***

Therefore for me, as well as many South Africans, in continuing and carrying on his legacy and fighting against injustices, we put faith and trust in the work of the ILO... I share the view of Madiba... that the ILO will not fail us.

It is also a somewhat interesting coincidence, that as the ILO celebrates its Centenary, it dove-tails with the ending of the Mandela Centenary which, inter alia, sees our President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa becoming the Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Future of Work around the same time.

I am very proud of our 100-year old heritage.

### **[What does the ILO 100-year anniversary mean for Employers?]**

My presence here symbolizes the active engagement of the Employers with the ILO since its establishment in 1919.

With 153 Member Federations in 144 countries around the world, the IOE itself will have its own centenary anniversary celebrations next year. Let me highlight that the IOE is the first business movement with a solid global commitment to social values.

The founding father of the IOE, Jules Carlier of Belgium was an active industrialist in the coal mining and metal industry. He devoted his time to the Belgian Employers' Association, and had an interest in promoting social work, especially in favour of orphans. He was the first President of the IOE and he said and I quote:

***'We are firm and honest, and the workers who deal with us know it.'***

He was said to be patient and at the same time energetic. He was very well-respected by all, he had the ability to maintain harmony between so many often discordant ideas and trends.

Now, his disposition then, almost 100 years ago, is something we would like to maintain and strengthen as an Employers' Group. To be seen as firm and honest. Patient and energetic. To maintain harmony between the many discordant ideas and trends.

**But more than that**, we would like to engage positively and constructively, working together with all governments and workers, and help those not covered under the traditional 'social contract'. It is under this context, **that I see the great potential of the ILO to be the most powerful and impactful organisation among the UN Family and in the world**. We all need to work together to solve global labour and social challenges in a balanced manner. This is a collective effort.

We support the ILO's determination to ensure full and productive employment and decent work for all, so that no one is left behind.

Productive employment and decent work are the foundations to generate wealth, to eradicate poverty and deliver dignity and democracies for people and economic growth.

We should all strive to expand opportunities in productive jobs and enterprise development which serve as a backbone for social justice and lasting peace.

We, the IOE, have worked hard during the last 100 years to engage and involve our wide network of representative and independent business organizations to uphold these values. This was from time to time an uphill battle but definitely one worth pursuing.

We look forward to continuous engagement with the UN system, including the upcoming event at the UN General Assembly high-level plenary meeting on the commemoration of the 100 years of establishment of the ILO that will take place on April 10.

### **[The second century of the ILO: our vision]**

The world of work is changing at an unprecedented speed, and the ILO needs to evolve with it. The ILO, particularly in the wake of its reflections on the future of work, will need to be innovative and ground-breaking in its own approaches. It will have to visualize and understand what will be required and it will have to support the transformation of mindsets and attitudes towards work in a balanced manner.

History not only helps to explain how and why past and present policies originated and evolved; knowledge of the rich heritage of the ILO also equips the organization better to meet its present responsibilities and future challenges.

We envision the ILO to reassert its role in the international arena as the leading UN specialised agency in its field of competence: employment creation, labour rights, social protection and social dialogue. **We see a strong ILO which can promote a harmonious balance between social progress and economic development.** An example of this can be seen at the recent panel discussion on the Partnership for Action on the Green Economy (PAGE) in Cape Town. Of course... we cannot talk about the Future of Work without talking about sustainability, and on this occasion – it was on the green economy. The ILO Director General and I both agree on the importance of tripartism and social dialogue.

[Silence]

### **[Concluding remarks]**

I will conclude with the story of the three golden keys which were used to open the doors of the ILO building, when it was inaugurated in 1926. The three keys represented the governments, employers and workers.

**It is my hope to see these three golden keys open the doors to opportunities and success in the next 100 years.**

I look forward to starting our Centenary celebrations!

Thank you.

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