Gender equality and decent work
Consequences for employment and social protection

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Executive Summary

1. The ILO gender equality campaign - "Gender equality at the heart of decent work" - is one of the main topics at the International Labour Conference held in June and is an opportunity to take stock of progress and outstanding challenges with respect to creating conditions for practical gender equality in the world of work. 2009 has also been marked by the spread and intensification of the financial crisis (originating in the United States). This crisis has already spread from the world of finance to make a profound impact on the real economy and the lives of millions of men and women worldwide, harming the growth prospects of industrialised and developing countries alike. This makes it all the more urgent to discuss the future of decent work, and within its context, gender equality, which is one of its core components.

2. The AICESIS report on "Gender equality and decent work and the consequences for employment and social protection" was prepared by the economic and social councils as a contribution to the major and valuable analysis carried out by the ILO in its Report VI Gender equality at the heart of decent work, which will be presented at the ILC's 98th session and act as a basis for discussion.

3. This report is subdivided into three chapters. The first chapter analyses labour conditions and gender inequality in the global economy in order to highlight the major difficulties facing women in industrialised and developing countries. The second chapter proposes, in the light of the available data, to analyse the negative impact of the economic and financial crisis on the implementation of policies on gender and dignity at work. Finally, the third chapter situates the Decent Work Agenda and the role of the ILO in the global governance framework. The crisis has reopened the debate on globalisation, growth imbalances, the need for a new development model compatible with principles of equitable income distribution and social justice. We therefore argue that in view of the foregoing, the ILO should be guaranteed its rightful role, especially with respect to the international financial institutions (IFIs), at a time when a "new" Bretton Woods is under discussion.

4. In light of the analysis undertaken, the report will lastly attempt to set out a number of composite proposals for the future in order to ensure that gender equality, as a condition for achieving decent work, continues to be considered as a top priority on national and international agendas. This is the context in which the AICESIS and its members should frame their future role, especially with respect to identifying adequate responses to the impact of the crisis on employment and on working conditions.
Introduction

5. The Decent Work Agenda was completed when the ILO summarised its function and role in its 1999 report, grouping every aspect of its activities under the common concept of decent work.

6. This change involved a number of innovative features, the most important of which was guaranteeing that the decent work ethos would be applied broadly, incorporating all areas of work, whether formal or informal (work and not just jobs). Closely linked to this change was another innovation. Decent work is becoming a meta-right, which in the words of Professor Amartya Sen, responds to the need for "acknowledging certain basic rights, whether or not they are legislated, as part of a decent society; the practical implications that emanate from this acknowledgement go beyond new legislation to other social, political and economic actions."

7. As part of the process of affirming the dignity of work, also and especially as a meta-right, attention was focused on the situation of women in the labour market and the goal of gender equality. Based on the ILO conventions in this field and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), this goal is an important component of the broader concept of decent work.

8. The ILO must continue to integrate the Decent Work Agenda and gender equality, which must be rigorously applied not only within the ILO but also in the wider framework of the United Nations' work. Over the years, the UN has established groups, committees and major legal instruments to pursue the objective of gender equality. The resulting multifaceted international framework has made a stronger role for women one of the criteria for framing effective policies to foster development and economic growth and protect the environment. Cross-cutting objectives have been identified which apply to industrialised and developing countries alike, and aim to ensure that women have every opportunity to take part in the labour market, economic activity and politics.
Chapter 1

Work and gender inequality in the global economy

9. The phenomena summed up in the concept of globalisation – the IT revolution and the opening of markets – have engendered ambivalent processes over the last two decades. On the one hand, we have witnessed exceptional job creation and, in turn, a massive influx of women onto the labour market. In some regions of the world this has led to a reduction in family poverty and opened up new opportunities for female emancipation. However, on the other hand, vast regions of the world have fallen by the wayside of the development process, social inequality has worsened and poverty has not been defeated. Furthermore, and maybe above all, in these instances decent work remains a distant aspiration, and women are the first victims of the unemployment, underemployment and undeclared employment that characterises rural areas and the outskirts of major megalopolises in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

10. Gender equality still presents a very varied picture even in industrialised countries where the social rights of women in paid employment may have improved appreciably but strongly discriminatory factors persist in employment models: insecurity of employment, incompatibility of working hours with family commitments, salary discrimination and meagre training or career opportunities.

11. Seen from this perspective, globalisation of the economy, which is still largely guided by an ideology of deregulation, continues to require a strong commitment in order to achieve gender equality objectives in the world of work, which are at the heart of the ILO agenda and campaign. However, the debate on the most effective answers to the economic crisis is turning away from deregulation. Examples of this include the recent London Summit and the meeting of G8 labour ministers, as well as the ILO’s analysis in the report to be presented at the ILC’s 98th session: Tackling the global jobs crisis: Recovery through decent work policies.

1.1 Key challenges facing industrialised countries

12. Female employment and the many faces of atypical employment of women – In 2008, of about three billion people working around the world, 40.5%, i.e. about one billion two hundred million, were women. During the last decade, female employment has continued to rise (+1.2%) while male employment has fallen (-1.1). This increase is most striking in Europe, whereas in the United States the female employment rate has stabilised and the male employment rate has fallen. In the European Union, of an overall increase in employment of 22 million over a ten-year period (1997-2007), a little less than two-thirds (14 million as against 8 million) are women.
13. This is a significant result. However, the optimism derived from a steady rise in female employment must be tempered by a study of the quality of their employment. A substantial proportion of this new employment is in fact atypical, characterised by the increase in fixed-term employment, self-employment, or "false" self-employment, and temping. These types of insecurity and inadequate protection in fact weigh heavily on women, who have to leave the labour market, often with little hope or re-entering it, when, in their core working years, they become mothers and bring up children.

14. One "atypical" form of employment is "part-time" employment, in which women are increasingly employed. Two points emerge from this situation. The first is that the number of women in part-time employment puts the quantitative increase in female employment in a different perspective if we consider equivalent full-time employment. The second is that part-time status could provide an alibi for reinforcing the subordinate status of female employment. First of all, there is a risk of perpetuating the role of women as the natural family carer, and preventing couples from sharing responsibilities in this area. Secondly, it conceals the inadequacies of public child and disability support services.

15. Last but not least, the perpetuation of this employment model contributes, i.e. when it is not the main cause, to reducing women's opportunities for training, professional development, and career stability.

16. In order to improve the working conditions of women in part-time employment - i.e. over a third of women employees - a number of basic conditions must be met. Firstly, part-time employment must, as far as possible, be freely chosen by women for personal or family reasons or for training or other purposes. Secondly, legal and contractual measures must be put in place to ensure that an employee's decision to work part-time or full-time can be reversed, in either direction, subject to production organisation.

17. The gender pay gap – In rich countries, the pay gap disadvantaging women is characterised by income stagnation and growing inequalities between the highest and lowest income groups. In this situation, which affects women and men, the income gap has remained largely unchanged over time, despite economic growth. Despite the commitments and hopes of the Lisbon Agenda, the gap, which continues to hover in the region of 15%, has only been narrowed by one point in the EU during the course of almost a decade. Poverty levels have remained stable and the pay gap disadvantaging women has remained unchanged.

18. The origins of the pay gap are complex. Deeply rooted and stubborn cultural factors are certainly at the top of the list: sexist and political stereotypes which for many years explicitly discriminated against female employment in terms of pay and employment prospects. Many analysts attribute this to a difference in skills, work experience and productivity. Qualifications and training are considered to be a major factor in pay discrimination, as are maternity, family care work and the reconciliation of work and family life. Some analyses have demonstrated that the sector can play a stronger role than qualifications. In traditionally
female sectors, pay is generally lower than those in which men predominate - but even within
the same sector and the same firm, the gender pay gap persists and affects every level of
qualification, especially highly qualified jobs (such as management).

19. According to an OECD survey, in the goods manufacturing sectors, the female employment
rate is 23%, whereas sectors with female employment rates of over 50% are mainly
concentrated in people-oriented and social services, such as health and education. This
sectoral division of labour is reflected in working conditions since the industrial sector
provides more stability and sounder social security, coupled with stronger traditional trade
union representation and collective bargaining.

20. The American case is particularly significant from this perspective. In the United States, most
new jobs are concentrated in two main service industries, i.e. the retail, hospitality and
restaurant sectors, and health and education. In the retail sector, wages are 57% of the average
for the industry, whereas in health and education, they are set at 76%. Sectoral divisions of
labour are at the root of income disparities.

21. But the precise extent to which the labour market structure and the demand-supply gap for
female labour tend to maintain and exacerbate pay gaps highlights the irreplaceable role
played by social services with the capacity to compensate for imbalances in the labour market
and social security systems that give rise to objective "discrimination" against women. From
this point of view, women need to have their own "voice" (in the Hirschman sense of the
word) in all institutions involved in regulating labour relations.

22. Empowerment and the "reconciliation" objective - The challenges involved in reconciling
work and family commitments and bridging the pay gap go hand in hand with the
empowerment of women, individually and collectively, in the workplace, the institutions and
society. From this perspective, it is vital to promote adequate female representation in
political, economic and trade union decision-making bodies, in contractual activities and in
social dialogue (bilateral and trilateral).

1.2 Female labour in emerging and developing economies

23. In developing countries, the main challenge remains the eradication of poverty, which
impacts on the situation of women in general and at work. The education of women and their
health are still central to national policies and are still the premise for dignity at work and
gender equality.

24. The Millennium Development Goals – Goals 3 and 5 form the basis of the UN's work to
support women. Achieving these goals has an impact on women's ability to enter the labour
market and the conditions in which they can do so. According to a recent report by the
African Development Bank, there are three key areas in the fight to eliminate gender disparity
and empower women: education, employment and political decision-making. Only in the first

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of these have satisfactory results been achieved: progress has been extremely limited in the remaining two. Furthermore, according to international estimates reported by the UN: of the 1.3 billion people who live in poverty, some 70% are women; work carried out by women accounts for 66% of the global total, but receives only 5% of the total wealth produced by work; in the poorest countries, there are nearly twice as many women over 15 years of age without formal education as there are men.

25. Gender mainstreaming - Gender mainstreaming is one of the most important goals of all UN activities. The African Development Bank's projects and activities have also focused on this area in the last three years. A number of important documents are currently in preparation, including "Gender Guidelines for agriculture, education, health and infrastructure", which covers the key sectors for development in Africa. The major first Euro-Mediterranean inter-ministerial conference on gender equality, held in Istanbul in 2006, aimed to boost gender mainstreaming and promote regional integration.

26. Employment rates – During the last two decades, the increasing globalisation of labour has led to a marked increase in female employment rates in emerging economies. Many of them have registered very high female employment rates, comparable to those in Scandinavian countries. China, which has a female employment rate of 70%, is the most striking example, but many South-East Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are on the same course. This is the result of the rapid industrialisation that followed the new international division of labour in industrial production, which led to a drop in male employment rates in industrialised countries and raised overall employment rates, including the female rate, in new industrialised countries.

27. Opportunities for women, especially the younger generations, to find paid employment are framed in a process of urbanisation and emergence from extreme or near extreme poverty, which characterises rural areas or the outskirts of urban areas in poor countries. Employment growth does not, however, necessarily signify the attainment of the decent work, and more specifically, the gender equality objective. Industrial labour in emerging countries does not create "privileged" situations for people working in these jobs. The gap between an unlimited supply of labour in different continents and the relatively limited demand for it from multinationals further weakens the position of the new masses of workers in emerging countries. In this respect, it becomes increasingly difficult and all the more important to meet the core labour and gender equality standards that the ILO has made central to the commitment to a social and human dimension to globalisation.

28. Market competition and trade liberalisation - Since 2000, the ILO has been highlighting the contradictions and difficulties obstructing the development of the "social dimension of globalisation". An ILO document aptly bearing this title sums up some of the essential aspects of a globalised labour market. According to this document "relocation and the transnational nature of firms in some sectors have changed the political economy of industrial relations, weakening the bargaining position of workers. Some governments, keen to attract or retain
investment (foreign and domestic), offer "discounts' on labour protection, further undermining the ability of workers to bargain over decent work" (GB.279/WP/SDG/2). Under these conditions of competition between labour markets, female employment is particularly affected by a lack of many of the characteristics that define decent work, namely "fair and equal treatment, safety at work, economic and social security in old age, through ill health and in time of hardship, more opportunities to develop one's creativity and potentials, voice and representation, and dignity, respect and freedom at work". (Amelita King Dejardin, ILO, Gender dimensions of globalization, 2008).

However, free trade policies are not "gender-neutral" but have a profound redistributive effect. Whether multilateral, bilateral or regional, trade liberalisation agreements must therefore strive to increase their ability to take account of the specific situation of women in a given country or region through appropriate clauses encouraging the development of fairer markets, including from a gender equality perspective. Industry is already familiar with and applies important concepts such as corporate social responsibility, the ILO's Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which help make the market a fairer place.
Chapter 2

The financial crisis and its impact on female employment

29. What impact is the crisis having on gender equality objectives? According to an ILO report: "The world economy has been significantly affected by the financial crisis and prospects are the worst since the Great Depression" (The Financial and Economic Crisis: A Decent Work Response, 2009). According to OECD forecasts, the recession will impact, albeit in different ways, on the various regions of the world, with serious implications for employment.

30. The worsening international crisis confirms the likelihood of the worst case scenario for a rise in unemployment, presented by the ILO at the beginning of 2009. According to these projections, a further 52 million people will lose their jobs, raising the total level of unemployment from 179 in 2007 to 231 million in 2009. It is estimated that the 52 million newly unemployed will include 22 million women.

31. Although, at first sight, job losses seem higher among men than among women (especially in the USA and the EU), this is due to the fact that the first sectors to be affected where in the manufacturing and construction industries, sectors with a high rate of male employment. However, as the crisis persists and deepens, job losses will become increasingly higher in the service sectors where female employment predominates.

32. In East and South-East Asian New Industrialised Countries (NICs), the situation is different. The female employment rate is high in industry and they will be hard hit by the strong downturn in manufacturing production triggered by the fall in exports.

33. Finally, in the poorest countries of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the strong predominance of farming jobs will tend to mask overall job losses and female job losses in particular. But the living and working conditions of women will deteriorate.

2.1 The impact of the crisis in Europe and the USA

34. The impact of the crisis will be influenced by the existence and efficiency of protection networks in the various regions of the world and in specific countries. Indeed, the more or less damaging consequences, in terms of female employment, will depend on the level of protection provided by social protection systems. Europe presents a very varied picture. The Nordic countries have high levels of protection. In other countries, especially in the Mediterranean area and in the enlargement countries in Eastern Europe, requirements for entitlement to income support during periods of unemployment tend to exclude a consistent percentage of the female labour force, often working under non-standard contracts.

35. In the USA, where the crisis has already had a strongly negative impact on employment levels (with an overall rise of more than 10% forecast for 2010), the outlook is particularly grave for
women. Unemployment benefit depends on length of employment prior to redundancy, the number of hours previously worked and the income received.

36. These requirements will penalise temporary and part-time labour, consisting largely of women. In this case, loss of employment compounds the absence of a replacement income, coupled with loss of health care assistance, adding to the 47 million citizens already without it.

37. In this situation, there is a high risk that millions of women will be deprived of social assistance and catapulted into a state of poverty. The distribution of food stamps had already reached a record high of 36 million in March this year and although gender data is not available, there are many indications that women are the hardest hit.

38. Regarding this issue that concerns rich countries, the ongoing crisis and its consequences point to a consideration of a general order. The increase in highly flexible employment (ranging from fixed-term employment to part-time employment) has helped to raise the overall employment rate and the female employment rate in particular. However, these employment typologies call for higher and not lower levels of support and monitoring to ensure that they do not result in marginalised and under-protected forms of employment.

39. In other words, the flexibility of employment typologies, where, in cases such as part-time employment, women predominate, necessitates the establishment of a much broader social protection network. A network that can guarantee an adequate replacement income during periods of unemployment, and family support for those with children or disabled dependents, guaranteed continuity of the right to health care in cases where there is no free universal health care system, continuity of public social insurance.

2.2 The impact of the crisis on female employment in developing countries

40. The crisis will impact differently in other parts of the world. At the extreme ends of the spectrum, we have, as has already been seen, high-growth regions such as East and South-East Asia on the one hand, and the poor countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, on the other. The impact and consequences of the crisis from the perspective of female employment present themselves differently in these two cases.

41. In one of the two groups of emerging countries, stretching from Asia to Latin America and North Africa, the crisis is affecting male and female employment simultaneously, and mainly in the manufacturing industry, which has contracted dramatically due to falling exports. And these are the very countries that have high female employment rates in industrial sectors such as the clothing, footwear, microelectronics, and agri-food industries, which depend on exports to the crisis-ridden northern hemisphere.
In China, where there are no safety nets, job losses along the highly urbanised coast are forcing millions of men and women to return to the western regions they came from, i.e. the poorest farm-based regions. This threatens to be a step backwards, especially for women, in terms of the personal freedom they have found despite the hardships involved in remunerated work and the new urban culture and lifestyle.

The ongoing crisis, unlike the South-East Asian crisis of 1997-98, which could be defined as endogenous, depends to a considerable extent on developments in the global crisis. As the international crisis deepens and persists, the crisis in new industrialised countries could spiral in on itself. If this happens, the ensuing unemployment and deterioration in social conditions are bound to affect women in a particular way.

The Chinese government has announced a set of public measures in an attempt to mitigate the impact of the crisis triggered by the fall in international demand for consumer goods and foreign investment. The success of this policy will not only be determined by support for public investment but also by social policies.

Decent work and gender equality are too often perceived as obstacles or drags on the attainment of higher international competitive performance. However, the crisis shows that social policies and gender equality objectives provide a solid basis for facing the market turbulence that accompanies globalisation.

**The crisis and the situation of women in Sub-Saharan Africa**

At the other end of the spectrum, the developing world includes the poorest countries of South Asian and Sub-Saharan Africa. These regions will continue to experience growth, but at half pace, and lagging even further behind the rest of the world. Somewhere in between, we find Latin America, where Brazil tends to retain a position of relative stability, but where others, including large countries like Argentina and Mexico, will experience a fall in production and employment, since they are highly integrated in international trade.

We also need to consider the fragility of employment in the poorest regions of the world. Almost a billion and a half people – representing just over half the total labour force worldwide – work in an employment typology defined as "vulnerable" and characterised by insecurity, low wages, and risk of poverty. And women predominate in vulnerable employment, which includes self-employment or unremunerated work in family-based concerns.

In 2007, over three-quarters of the working population in Sub-Saharan Africa were in vulnerable employment. According to current forecasts, this is expected to rise to four-fifths (81.8%) by the end of 2009 as a result of the crisis. This means that almost 250 million out of 300 million workers could be defined as "at risk". According to this scenario, over 87% of women are in vulnerable employment. In general, they tend to be women working in rural
areas, in cooperation with the rest of the family, in conditions of substantial poverty. Although in the past a certain degree of development contributed to reducing this extremely weak form of employment for women, the crisis is now re-propagating and spreading it.

49. The already slow and insufficient progress in the situation of women therefore risks being undermined, along with the general population's situation, by the current crisis. In an explicit admonition, on the eve of the G20 of 2 April, World Bank President, Robert Zoellick, made the following incisive statement: "In London, Washington and Paris people talk of bonuses or no bonuses. In parts of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America the struggle is for food or no food".

50. A report entitled "Impact of the Crisis on African Economies – Sustaining Growth and Poverty Reduction, African Perspectives and Recommendations to the G20", explains clearly how the economic growth Africa has been experiencing in recent years has been jeopardised by this crisis, which will affect trade in farm products, investment and development aid, i.e. three basic areas of growth and subsistence.

51. Under these circumstances, a broad consensus has started to emerge and consolidate around the fact that recovery cannot be entrusted to a straightforward return to the old growth model. It is becoming increasingly clear that sustainable and stable growth requires a new social dimension. The ILO's position and its struggle now seem central to the development of a new governance model.

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Chapter 3

Decent work in global governance

52. The financial crisis includes among its causes, not only financial regulation dysfunctions, but also unresolved social problems, which have been exacerbated over time. In other words, the ideology of deregulation not only impacted on the financial world but also on social relations.

53. In two decades, female employment has risen in OECD countries by forty million, a little under half the increase in male employment. However, this new employment - whether voluntary or the result of family necessity - came into existence under largely precarious labour conditions characterised by pay gaps and lower levels of rights and protection.

54. The situation has not changed substantially in the new century. In the Global Report on Equality, the ILO pointed to a steady increase in the female employment rate but at the same time stressed the need for a comprehensive set of policies to combat gender-based segregation, in the areas of work, pay and family/work reconciliation. This situation shows that women's issues are central to inequality. And the second cannot be tackled until a solution has been found to the first.

3.1 Various routes out of the crisis

55. The economic crisis threatens to worsen the overall labour situation and that of women in particular as well as the social imbalances that fuel frustration and protectionist tendencies.

56. Inequality is once again the focus of attention. This implies taking a critical look at the development model that has conditioned the world and its functioning in recent decades. Financial reorganisation and the development of new banking and financial regulations are necessary, but not sufficient.

57. Seen from the perspective of the ILO Agenda's social objectives, the crisis confronts us with a clear alternative. On the one hand, there is what we could term as the "low" or uncertain road out of the crisis, which focuses exclusively on its financial aspects, with the risk of exacerbating protectionist tendencies and building new "walls" to separate the different parts of the world.

58. On the other hand, there is the "high" road, or what many economists call the New New Deal, which put us back on course for achieving concrete social standards in the knowledge that women's working conditions are more than just an instrument for individual emancipation, they are an instrument for rebalancing the values underpinning society.

59. The "high road" out of the crisis, as opposed to a return to protectionism, closure, conflict, and competition based on the exploitation of labour, calls for economic and social public
policies that are compatible with fair and sustainable development, even in terms of social balances. Investment in environmental protection and renewable energy, which are central to President Obama's programme as well as to China's and the EU's investment plans, could create "green" jobs, just as public investment in education and health could create new demand for female labour geared to more advanced social models.

60. Since the need to reform international governance instruments has been universally recognised, the time has come to raise the question of social rights as an incontrovertible objective of recognised and effective international governance. If we accept this premise, then we need to give the ILO a new "voice" in international forums that debate and determine the criteria for economic and financial support and make direct recommendations to nations.

61. In 2000, the ILO document on the social dimension of globalisation previously quoted, states that: "The general drive to liberalise national and international markets has… led to a general questioning of the value and utility of labour standards and labour institutions. Recommendations emphasising a smaller role for the State, the deregulation of labour markets and restructuring of the public sector became elements of conditions for financial assistance to developing and transition countries".

62. Criticism of international financial institutions that used to seem unorthodox is now widespread, so that it can now be said that "The old Washington consensus is over" (New York Times, 05.04.09).

3.2 The ILO and the new governance framework

63. If there are grounds for this need for profound change, then it follows that a "new" Bretton Woods aimed at redefining global governance players and instruments, if it is to be truly innovative and effective, should reconcile the objectives of monetary and financial regulations with the need for sustainable growth that fully incorporates the objectives of social justice and fighting inequality, starting with discrimination against women.

64. In other words, building on the report of the High-level panel on UN System-wide Coherence entitled "Delivering as One", we need to proceed with greater incisiveness and determination towards a clear and specific connection between matters for economic regulation together and the ILO's social principles. In this context, the considerable importance of the Stiglitz Commission's work on the measurement of economic performance and the social process should be recognised.

65. In any case, it would be difficult to continue along the old road of neoliberalism and deregulation. The international financial institutions are either in crisis or in the process of redefining themselves. The WTO, almost ten years after the Seattle crisis, has yet to bring the Doha negotiations to a successful conclusion. The World Bank, under new leadership, is trying to update its positions, in line with the need to support developing countries, taking
greater responsibility for people's primary needs. And the International Monetary Fund needs to supersede the ideological mindset that J. Stiglitz has defined as "fundamentalist", insofar as it is primarily inspired by stabilisation principles that take no account of social consequences.

It seems to be moving towards renewal, which its director-general, Mr Strauss-Kahn, during a recent meeting of the ILO's Governing Body described as follows: "The IMF was established for a range of reasons, including the promotion of growth and employment around the world", significantly adding that: "Having the input of the ILO – i.e. of workers and employers – is crucial for the IMF" (ILO - Geneva, 23 March 2009).

If we indeed wish to overhaul the inter-institutional relations underpinning a new governance project, it will no longer be enough, as has been the case in the past, to recognise the ILO's undisputed mandate in the field of core social rights. The ILO will have to be equipped with new and more effective instruments for participation and involvement. It has to be given a leading role in the new global governance framework, placing decent work at the centre of the rules that will tomorrow lay the foundations for the building of a new global order.

New inter-institutional relations entail the right of the ILO, and more specifically its director-general, to take part in preparing decisions that reflect the social and human dimensions of positions influencing the economic processes of individual countries and, in particular, those of developing countries. Decent work and, at its heart, gender equality, could therefore become a concrete parameter for the links between compatible economic growth and social progress, in the "Global Jobs Pact" framework.

Renewed prospects for a cultural, institutional and political overhaul would enable national ESCs, in their own turn, to take an initiative along the same lines and in support of the ILO, also by promoting the specific monitoring of gender equality objectives.

It is in this sense that the crisis, in addition to being a source of justified alarm and grave concern for the future of social relations, could also become an opportunity for a profound renewal and re-endorsement of ILO objectives, successfully concluding the gender equality campaign in the decent work framework.
Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made in light of this analysis:

1. As a result of the crisis, additional steps must be taken to monitor and implement initiatives in the field of gender equality, with particular emphasis on the impact of the crisis on developing countries and furthering the Millennium Development Goals.

2. In emerging and developed countries, labour protection networks must be made stronger, combating forms of insecure employment and the lack of social protection networks which, driven by the crisis, are aggravating the conditions of working women.

3. In the knowledge that the crisis is multiplying the impact of economic policies on labour conditions and particularly on the conditions of working women, national economy and labour councils should analyse and draw up proposals on the policies of international financial institutions (Monetary Fund, World Bank, WTO) in order to assess and encourage coherence with the ILO's gender equality objectives.

4. At the same time, the councils should act as a "bridge" with national and international civil society organisations to boost synergies in order to further the principles and practices of decent work in general and gender equality in particular.

5. The role of AICESIS and individual national and regional economic and social councils should be strengthened by promoting and enhancing tripartite social dialogue, progress in the defence of social standards being a vital element in coping with the crisis.

6. Last but not least, the ILO must be reinforced, imperatively and without delay, acknowledging that it plays a central role and is as important as the international financial institutions in the framework of the "new" Bretton Woods linking the goals of currency and financial regulation with the need for sustainable growth which includes the objectives of social justice and the fight against inequality, beginning with discrimination against women.


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