

Committee on the Application of Standards

Date: 03 June 2021

▶ **Written information supplied for the General Discussion: Application of international labour standards in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (segment 2)**

Mr. Marc Leemans, Workers' Spokesperson

As it was not possible during the discussion to address all the points raised by the Experts in the part of their report concerning the application of international labour standards during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Workers' spokesperson wishes to submit the following written observations to supplement the intervention made during the sitting.

Emphasis should once again be placed on the need for a post-COVID recovery that respects international labour standards. We have noted in recent years that certain international institutions went as far as recommending the adoption of national measures that were contrary to international labour standards, under the pretext of creating an environment conducive to investment. This short-term calculation has shown the disastrous results that it implies in times of crisis.

It is therefore essential for the ILO to reaffirm, especially in relation to these international institutions, that the post COVID recovery must be focussed on the creation of a working environment that places emphasis on the human, inclusive, sure and resilient, which can offer lasting guarantees of means of subsistence to workers in times of crisis and build economies capable of resisting the terrible shocks arising out of the various crises that we will unfortunately still have to face in future. It is essential for all stakeholders to work with us hand-in-hand in order to achieve the sustainable development goals that the world has set itself.

There are a number of fields in which international labour standards are also of fundamental importance, but which it was not possible to address in the intervention made during the sitting, and which deserve to be covered by the written comments.

The employment policy instruments will be particularly valuable in setting in motion a human-centred post-COVID recovery. We will have the opportunity to come back to this more fully in the discussion on the General Survey.

The universal ratification of Convention No. 182 was an important symbolic step that crowned the efforts made up to then by the international community with a view to the complete eradication of child labour, including its worst forms. However, the shock of the crisis is threatening to undermine the progress that has been achieved. It is therefore essential for every measure to be taken to prevent children from also being victims of

this crisis and for everything to be done to spare them from work, including its worst forms. We call on the international community, as well as member States, to reinforce programmes to combat child labour, particularly by strengthening support for families that are badly affected by the crisis.

Nor can the crisis be used as a pretext for the implementation of compulsory employment policies. Although exceptions are contained in the international instruments that combat forced labour, these exceptions must be very strictly interpreted and limited to what is strictly required by the situation. As it will inevitably be necessary to relaunch employment as we come out of the crisis, the international instruments on employment policy must serve as a guide to member States.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination have also come under pressure during the crisis. Women appear to be paying a heavy price for the crisis. It is necessary to pay particular attention to reinforcing, among others, the measures intended to give effect to Convention No. 111. As workplace violence and harassment have also increased markedly during the crisis, Convention No. 190, which has now entered into force, will certainly be a fundamental tool to combat this scourge. It is important to create an inclusive working environment in which all categories of workers have their place.

We have already referred above to the dangerous short-term tendency consisting of dismantling the rights contained in international labour standards, and this danger also arises in particular in relation to wages. And yet it seems clear to us that a post-COVID recovery should also include the upwards adjustment of the lowest wages; low wages that are often paid to those frontline workers referred to in the opening speech and the intervention in the sitting on this subject. Member States will have to ensure that workers can benefit from an adequate, legal and negotiated minimum wage, which guarantees them a decent income. It is only in this way that we will be able to achieve the objectives set by the ILO of achieving greater social justice and less inequality and poverty.

The Committee of Experts has emphasized the particular impact of the crisis on indigenous peoples in view of their vulnerability and the specific socio-economic conditions with which they are confronted. We call on member States to pay particular attention to indigenous peoples, to adopt all the necessary measures to take into account their specific needs and to engage in dialogue with these peoples. The effective implementation of Convention No. 169 will be fundamental in this regard. As we have already indicated, our response to the crisis cannot leave anyone behind.

As already indicated in the intervention during the sitting, we insist once again on the need to follow up the impact of COVID in all member States in the years to come. The Committee of Experts certainly has a role to play in the assessment of the measures taken in member States and in the formulation of recommendations with a view to further improving our responses to the consequences of the crisis, in full conformity with international labour standards.

The Workers' Group of the Committee on the Application of Standards will in this regard follow with interest the outcome of the discussions in the COVID response Committee.