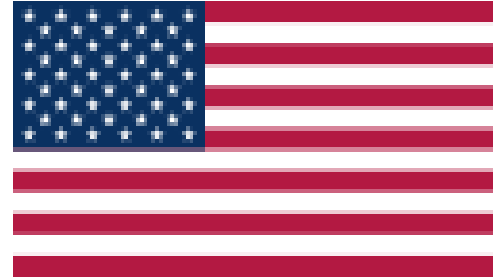


Committee: International Labour Organization

State: The United States of America – Government’s Representative



Agenda:

Achieving the Decent Work Agenda Through Reinforcement of Collective Agreements

Sustainable economic development and reducing poverty were crucial goals in economy on the global stage for many years. However, after the effects of 2008 global financial and economic crisis had been observed, creation of a work agenda which gives attention to job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective¹ became urgent for international policymakers. At this point, decent work played an essential role for sustainable development. The key role of decent work for all in achieving sustainable development is highlighted by Sustainable Development Goal 8 which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.² Decent work answers a wide range of needs of a worker including the fundamental rights such as freedom from discrimination, safe working conditions, fair wages, collective bargaining, and freedom of association. Although fundamental rights hold a significant portion when it comes to maintaining decent work, it cannot be seen as sufficient alone. The key factors of sustainable improvement- economic equality, access to training and workplace flexibility- are also necessary. Decent Work Agenda has four main pillars: employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue; so these elements should be integrated into the scope of sustainable development more frequently.

As the United States of America, we support Sustainable Development Goals 8 through technical assistance projects, worker-centered trade policies, and direct engagement with countries to support fundamental labor rights.³ We see it as a responsibility for the development of all nations together, and to further enhance the global development similar actions should be taken from other UN Member States.

¹ <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>

² <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/employment-decent-work-all-and-social-protection>

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Furthermore, we define a safe environment with OSHA standards which are rules that describe the methods that employers must use to protect their employees from hazards.⁵ These standards prioritize hazard mitigation, employee training, monitoring workplace conditions and more. We see these standards realistic and applicable in real world, so we highly encourage other nations to agree on these requirements to ensure a safer and better environment for workers.

The current challenges that workers face today cannot be overlooked, the satisfaction of them will be a vehicle for achieving sustainable development. The common problems can be listed as follows: job insecurity, poor working conditions, inequality in wages, discrimination and lack of diversity in workplaces, unionization problems, technological disruption, shift to remote working... The International Labour Organization needs to make legislations regarding these topics and expect its' members to ratify them. In this document, some of these issues will be analyzed briefly according to their importance and urgency.

³<https://www.usaid.gov/sdgs/sdg8#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20supports%20SDG,to%20support%20fundamental%20labor%20rights.>

⁴<https://careers.atkinsrealis.com/blogs/2023-1/how-north-america-is-embracing-sustainable-goals#:~:text=The%20US%20adopted%20the%2017,to%20meet%20them%20by%202030.>

⁵<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/osha3021.pdf>

Firstly, the wellbeing of workplace must have the pre-eminence because according to the World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends of ILO in 2019, poor working conditions were selected as the main challenge in global employment. The new data show that a majority of the 3.3 billion people employed globally in 2018 had inadequate economic security, material well-being and equality of opportunity. Also, progress in reducing unemployment globally is not being reflected in improvements in the quality of work. The report, published by the ILO, cites the persistence of a number of major deficits in decent work, warning that, at the current rate of progress, attaining the goal of decent work for all, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8, seems unrealistic for many countries.⁶ The ILO Deputy Director General for Policy Deborah Greenfield stated that “SDG 8 is not just about full employment but the quality of that employment” which ultimately expressed the organization’s desire to promote decent work by getting high quality and production from workers. He continued his speech with “Equality and decent work are two of the pillars underpinning sustainable development.”, showcasing that the aim of sustainable improvement, especially financially, can be real only if decent work is a focus of world nations. As it has been mentioned before, we see the applications of OSHA standards in workplaces as the most effective solution on the matter. Without ensuring a safe environment for workers, the future of global economy will face huge threats.

Secondly, in similar fashion, wage inequality has become a rising issue around the globe for centuries. Nevertheless, Global Wage Report indicates that wage inequality has declined in two-thirds of countries worldwide since start of 21st century. Despite this positive change has represented the outcomes of international economy policies since early 2000s, significant wage differentials still persist worldwide. Another interesting aspect of the research was the decrease among low-income countries were more significant than the one among wealthier countries. Moreover, the report also finds that global wages have been growing faster than inflation in recent times. In 2023, global real wages grew by 1.8 per cent with projections reaching 2.7 per cent growth for 2024, the highest increase in more than 15 years.⁷ These results also mark a well recovery in wages considering the inflation in 2022. ILO Director General Gilbert F. Houngbo said, "The return to positive real wage growth is a welcome development. However, we must not forget that millions of workers and their families continue to suffer from the cost-of-living crisis that has eroded their living standards and that wage disparities between and within countries remain unacceptably high.". This quote repeatedly appreciates the current efforts, but also underlines further actions to increase the incomes of workers.

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/poor-working-conditions-are-main-global-employment-challenge>

⁷ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/wage-inequality-has-declined-two-thirds-countries-worldwide-start-21st>

Coming up with a solution can be seen challenging, but as Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”. We have to find the ideas which will bring our world and people to a better future. Global Wage Report concludes that “reducing wage inequality requires both strong wage policies and structural support for equitable growth. By addressing these challenges countries can make real progress toward reducing wage gaps and promoting fair, sustainable, economic growth for workers worldwide”. This statement seems to be one of the best answers directed to the problem, and as the US we believe that by strengthening their wage policies, countries will have a positive outcome on their economy too.

And the last problem that will be explained is the integration of technology to the global labor market and the ongoing effects of it to the future of work. The ILO addressed the Public employment services network stakeholder conference, exploring the labor and skills shortages affecting Europe’s labor market now and into the future.⁸ experienced individuals upon the topic have involved in the conference. Key statements were mostly in regards to the changing labor markets in the world. “The rapid digital transformation we are experiencing does carry sizeable challenges,” said Sukti Dasgupta, ILO Branch Chief of EMPLAB. In her speech, she explained the need for investments to make digital technology more accessible at reasonable prices. On the topic, Ms. Dasgupta further mentioned that “Digital skills should be part of early learning, compulsory and secondary school curricula.”. This way, new generations will be able to respond to the needs of the current trend of labor markets.

In addition, certain groups which are already disadvantaged, risk being further affected by the labor market transformation and disruption caused by digital technology, such as women, middle and low-skilled workers and workers with vocational training. To adapt these individuals to workforce, the best solution hides in public employment services(PES). Let us remember a quote from Ms. Dasgupta, “In order to perform this and other functions properly, PES must strengthen their capacity to adapt themselves internally to changing labour markets, increasing fiscal consolidation, and frequently changing demands of their clients”.

⁸ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-digital-technology-disrupts-labour-market-various-ways-and-accentuates>

After the short introduction to the issues of workers worldwide and giving our solution ideas, it is time to move on with the two major topics upon the agenda: trade(labor) unions and collective bargaining.

To start, trade union is defined as a “workers’ organization constituted for the purpose of furthering and defending the interests of workers” by International Labour Organization.⁹ The history of trade unions mostly followed by strikes. The first recorded labor strike is actually related with the United States, it was made by Philadelphia printers in 1786, who opposed a wage reduction and demanded \$6 per week in wages.¹⁰ The origins of modern labor unions can be traced back to the United Kingdom. The devastating effects of Industrial Revolution has struck badly to the workers in Europe. After that, Marxism made its’ big impact on the world and strengthened the unionism among labor communities. And today, such unions have spread all over the globe. To connect the topic with our agenda, trade unions are established as common representatives of workers, so they are beneficial for the wellbeing of workers and, overall, sustainable economic development. An arguable point of these unions is the density of them. Trade union density refers to a percentage of the total number of workers in a given location who are trade union members.¹¹ The latest reports indicate the decrease in the density of trade unions in global arena.¹² Several reasons can be listed to understand this fall, but the most notable ones are the decline in manufacturing, globalization and governmental policies. As the United States, which is a nation actively participating in the calculation of this index, we do not find trade union density or collective bargaining coverage sufficient by their selves. The basic reasons are their lack of specificity, comparability and accuracy in determination process. To generate precise data, International Labour Organization could lead a global action by serving as a common body to develop standard measurements.

⁹ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/description-industrial-relations-data/#:~:text=Concepts%20and%20definitions,defending%20the%20interests%20of%20workers.>

¹⁰ <https://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/social-science/economy/labor/strike/strikes-in-the-united-states>

¹¹ https://web.archive.org/web/20181009132038/https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/description_IR_EN.pdf

¹² [https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?df\[ds\]=DisseminateFinalDMZ&df\[id\]=DSD_TUD_CBC%40DF_TUD&df\[ag\]=OECD.ELS.SAE&dq=..&pd=2000%2C&to\[TIME_PERIOD\]=false](https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?df[ds]=DisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_TUD_CBC%40DF_TUD&df[ag]=OECD.ELS.SAE&dq=..&pd=2000%2C&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false)

The final discussion point that will be addressed is collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is a key means through which employers and their organizations and trade unions can establish fair wages and working conditions. It also provides the basis for sound labour relations. Typical issues on the bargaining agenda include wages, working time, training, occupational health and safety and equal treatment. The objective of these negotiations is to arrive at a collective agreement that regulates terms and conditions of employment.¹³ The United States has its' own way of collective bargaining. While it differs locally, in general stage, it follows nearly the same steps with other world nations. According to National Education Association(NEA), the steps are outlined as Preparing for bargaining, conducting negotiations, ratifying the contract, resolving a contract dispute and changing or clarifying the contract.¹⁴

The American collective bargaining system embraces at least three characteristics distinctive to industrial relations in the United States. Perhaps the most significant is that our system of industrial relations is highly decentralized.¹⁵ Decentralization has enabled bargaining to be greater detailed and have a wider scope. Most of the role was on local officials who have deeper understanding of the issues. On the other hand, governmental rule makers have much lesser role so the duty on their arms is lightened. A second characteristic is the principle of exclusive jurisdiction or representation where one union serves as the sole representative for all employees in the plant or appropriate bargaining unit.¹⁵ In early days of the union movement, the existence of trade unions has caused conflict and divided loyalty. Thus, the AFL decided to proceed with one union for each recognized field of activity. This practice is also appropriate for our American political traditions. A third characteristic is the role the law plays in the process.¹⁵ As it is previously mentioned, our bargaining process includes the resolving of a contract dispute. This step is mainly applied in coordination with the countries' laws.

As we came to the end of this document, we, as the United States of America, want to express our belief in global collaboration for tackling such issues. We expect all representatives to remain active through the conference.

¹³https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@travail/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_425004.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/How%20Does%20Collective%20Bargaining%20Work%3F%20A%20Step-by-Step%20Guide.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/amworkerconclusion>

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