



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

45th Session of the Commission for Social Development

Priority theme 3(a): Promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement by
Mr. Patrice Martin-Lalande

Member of the National Assembly of France
First Vice-President of the IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable
Development, Finance and Trade

New York, 9 February 2007

Check against delivery

Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished delegates

I am a member of the National Assembly of France and it is my great honour to address you today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, of which I am a Vice-President.

By engaging in dialogue with your Commission, we hope to continue the useful exchange of views that on the one hand may help translate your objectives into implementing legislation, budget votes and oversight by national parliaments, and on the other may provide you with an idea of the views of our member parliaments with respect to the issues on your agenda.

Let me also point out from the outset that I am not the only Member of Parliament in the room here today. Given the importance of the issue at hand - creating and securing decent work for all - the IPU informed its member parliaments of this session well ahead of time, encouraging legislators working on these issues within select parliamentary committees to join their national delegations for this meeting. I am pleased to see that a good number have accepted the invitation.

Another reason why we are attentive to this debate is that it precedes the discussion that the IPU will hold at its 116th Assembly in Indonesia at the end of April on "*Job creation and employment security in the era of globalization.*" That discussion will conclude with a resolution that is currently at the drafting stage in our Standing Committee. Our presence here as parliamentarians will serve to convey the main conclusions of your discussion on employment to our members when they meet in Indonesia.

Chairperson,

Work has a profound impact on every human life. "Decent work" provides our day-to-day material needs, but also buttresses dignity and self-respect, and builds stable societies, and strong families and communities. It is central to the first Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015 and, ultimately, to most other development objectives.

Decent employment is also central to the concerns of parliamentarians. Because of our proximity to our constituents we are constantly confronted with the distress of the unemployed, the underemployed, and those who, increasingly, fear for their jobs. For us, employment creation is not only a social and economic issue but also a key political one. It brings to the fore the tension between the haves and the have-nots. It forces tough debates in parliament and is often used as an electoral litmus test.

Since the Copenhagen Summit of 1995, the sad fact is that not much has changed in the employment situation around the world. To be sure, the service sector represents 38% of all jobs, up from 34% ten years ago, but agriculture and manufacturing continue to provide 40% and 21% respectively. We have essentially as many unemployed people as we had then as a percentage of the active population. There has been no significant improvement in the conditions of work and in safety nets, with some 60% of workers in the world going without adequate social protections. A huge proportion of the global workforce continues to earn too little to afford a decent living.

All these problems boil down to one key factor, which both the report of the United Nations Secretary-General and the draft IPU resolution that I mentioned earlier rightly highlight: all too often: employment and decent work do not occupy centre stage in national economic and social policymaking, and there is no mechanism in most countries to assess “what impact policy decisions will have on employment and decent work.” (SG report, paragraph 34).

Chairperson,

Over the last ten years, we have witnessed the further expansion of globalization in the form of more trade, more industrial off-shoring, more capital mobility across borders, and more worker migration. At the same time, there have been huge technological developments and major shifts between economic sectors (agriculture, services and manufacturing) as well as within them, placing additional pressure on workers and enterprises alike.

None of these changes, however, have been accompanied by a commensurate expansion of investment in education and training, social safety nets, and other pro-active labour market policies to allow workers to adjust and industry to retool. While not the whole story, this tendency goes a long way to explaining the downward pressure on wages, the increasing job insecurity and disparities, and the disappearing benefits that we see to various degrees around the world.

With a view to the IPU debate on job creation and employment security in the era of globalization, two members of parliament – Mrs. Elizabeth Salquero Carillo (Bolivia) and Mr. Osamah Abu Ghararah (Saudi Arabia) - have prepared a report that, in essence, finds that in our complex societies there is no single solution to this problem but rather an intricate web of social and economic policies that need to work in unison.

Education and training, the reconstitution of safety nets, and more effective labour market policies and legislation are therefore essential ingredients of any national employment creation plan, a point our organization will discuss in depth at its forthcoming Assembly.

Though still very preliminary, the draft IPU Assembly resolution contains a number of concrete points. For example, it recommends that priority in public

and foreign investment in developing countries be given to the most labour-intensive infrastructure projects that are located in poor areas and provide employment for the poor. Likewise, the draft stresses the need to ensure adequate financing of self-employment as well as of medium, small and micro enterprises in urban and rural informal sectors.

But over and above that, the IPU resolution draws attention to the role that social dialogue among the three main partners in this policy issue, namely, workers, employers and the government, must play. Under the increasing pressure of globalization, that dialogue is more important than ever to ensure that productivity gains are fairly distributed and that economic growth translates into new and good jobs.

Working on the basis of the outcome of that dialogue, it is the primary responsibility of every parliament to define and share a genuine “project” open to the world and giving each of our fellow citizens:

- a sense of the constant effort to adapt required of each citizen, who has the right to know where we stand and where we’re headed;
- personal compensation for that effort, such as employment security and a share in the equitable distribution of growth earnings.

I should not close, Chairperson, without mentioning the growing collaboration between the IPU and the ILO. This is only natural – no election is ever fought without jobs and labour issues ranking high on the agenda, and the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda gives eloquent expression to the world’s employment needs. As one example of this joint work, we are currently discussing the participation of parliamentarians in Decent Work Country Programmes, through which ILO assistance to constituents in member States is prepared and implemented, and which provide the framework for ILO cooperation in each country.

The IPU would be pleased to report to you next year on the progress it has made, when the Commission will again debate these issues. In the meantime, we wish you success in your deliberations. We hope they will contribute to making globalization and sustainable development more equitable and thus more likely to support peace around the world.

Thank you.