

Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, Pattaya, Thailand, 19 – 21 May 2014

ILO Statement

Madame Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Labour Organization is honoured to be able to contribute to the proceedings of this Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

Allow me at the outset like to thank the ESCAP under the guidance of Executive Secretary Ms. Akhtar in particular for the initiative to bring an Asia-Pacific voice to the global process of considering sustainable development goals and the post MDG agenda. This is indeed a valuable opportunity for member States and stakeholders to consider the development pathways of the region and also to recognize the excellent progress that has been made by member States of the region in economic growth and poverty reduction.

Looking forward, the ILO is glad to note that the deliberations at this Forum and the background document underline the importance of decent jobs for everyone of working age, of the need for expanded social protection, and the growing migration flows within the region and outside.

These are all areas which the tripartite constituents of the ILO have recognized in their consideration of the post-MDG Framework, which has been a regular feature of both the International Labour Conference and the Governing Body. ILO constituents – governments, workers and employers – have called for the adoption of full and productive work as an explicit goal in the post 2015 agenda, accompanied by expanded social protection. This recognizes the fact that decent jobs are the best sustainable pathway out of poverty. Social protection mitigates vulnerability, also in the context of the structural transformation evident in many countries of our region.

In Asia-Pacific, job quality is a particular challenge: More than 1 billion, or 3 in 5, of all of Asia's workers are employed in vulnerable jobs. Job-related informality is highest in South Asia.

Moreover, in developing Asia and the Pacific, more than 600 million workers still live with their families on less than two dollars per person per day. In this context, wage policies have become more and more prominent and demands by trade unions in particular, for a living wage are part of the policy debates in many countries.

As we know too well in Asia-Pacific, jobs connect people to their society and the economy. Access to safe, productive and fairly remunerated work – as a wage employee or as an own-account worker – is a key vehicle for individuals and families to gain self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a community and a way to make a productive contribution. A shift to inclusive and sustainable development will

not be possible if millions of people are denied the opportunity to earn their living in conditions of equity and dignity. Experience shows, however, that economic growth alone is not sufficient. The strong pre-crisis economic growth of recent decades was not adequate to ensure strong employment creation and inclusive economic results. Hence, the challenge of job creation will remain with us well beyond 2015.

There are other developments in the region which warrant recognition. The Asia and Pacific region is host to more than 25 percent of the world's estimated 214 million international migrants. This region's share of remittances is more than any other regions, accounting for 53 percent of the world's remittances. The economic and social impact of remittances is well recognized and documented, especially on poverty reduction, women's empowerment and education. It is important to recognize the contribution of migrants to the region's economy, their protection, and the need to mainstream migration into national development plans, and relevant sectoral policies and programmes. The Global Migration Group (GMG), which ILO chairs, would like to see migration included in the post-2015 UN development agenda, both as part of a new global partnership for inclusive development, as well as part of relevant goals and indicators. The Open Working Group rightly recognized the importance of labour migration in focus area 8 on economic growth, employment and infrastructure and the need to protect the rights of all workers, including migrant workers, in compliance with ILO norms and standards.

The discussions at the Forum have also recognized that shared prosperity and growth will only be sustainable if they respect planetary boundaries. This is well put in the Forum background paper. We should also recognize that we could have a win-win situation here in seizing the opportunity for a shift to a green growth pattern which provides for a just transformation of economies to a sustainable growth path with Green Jobs.

In short, if development is to be sustainable, it must be responsive to all three dimensions: economic, environmental and social. It must therefore be inclusive and equitable, unleashing the power of economic growth for social progress and end to poverty in the Asia-Pacific region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to close with a quote of the ILO Director-General Guy Ryder, who said:

“Setting a goal of full employment and decent work can contribute to balanced and stable growth in global consumer demand and can benefit countries and communities. But the most important thing is that it can help change lives of billions of people for the better”.

Thank you.