



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 108th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE

[10-21 June 2019, Geneva]

Greetings

It is an honour and a joy for the Holy See to participate at this 108th assembly of the International Labour Organization. I offer a special thanks to the Director-General, Mr Guy Ryder, who has so kindly invited me to present this message, and for his having invited me – on several occasions – to visit the ILO offices in Geneva, an invitation I hope I will be able to accept as soon as my duties allow.

In order to express my gratitude and appreciation for the vitality of your 100-year-old, but still young institution, I would like to start by highlighting the importance that labour has for humankind and for the planet. Despite all our efforts at peacebuilding, social justice and labour standards,^[1] we still face serious problems of unemployment, exploitation, human trafficking and slave labour, unfair wages, unhealthy working environments, depletion of natural environments, and questionable technological methods and practices.

Work and personal and socio-ecological fulfilment

Work is not just something that we do in exchange for something else. Work is first and foremost “a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment”.^[2] It has also a subjective dimension. It is an expression of our creation in the *image and likeness of God, the worker (Gen 2:3)*. Thus, “we are created with a vocation to work”.^[3]

As well as being essential to the realization of the person, work is also fundamental to social

development. My predecessor Saint John Paul II put it beautifully, when he explained that “work is work *with* others and work *for* others”; and as its fruit, labour offers “occasions for exchange, relationship and encounter”.^[4] Every day, millions of people cooperate in development through their manual or intellectual activities, in large cities or rural areas, with sophisticated or simple assignments. All are expressions of a concrete love for the promotion of the common good, of a civil love.^[5]

Yet our vocation to work is also inextricably connected with the way we interact with our environment and with nature. We are called to work, to “till and to keep” the garden of the world (cf. *Gen 2:15*), that is, to cultivate the ground of the earth to serve our needs without failing to take care of and protect it.^[6] Work is a path to growth, but only when it is an integral growth that contributes to the entire ecosystem of life: to individuals, societies and the planet.

Therefore, work cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere tool in the production chain of goods and services.^[7] Rather, since it is the foundation for human development, work takes priority over any other factor of production, including capital.^[8] Hence the ethical imperative of “defending jobs”,^[9] and of creating new ones in proportion to the increase in economic viability,^[10] as well as ensuring the dignity of the work itself.^[11]

Creating and defending jobs today

However, we need only to take a frank look at the facts to see that work, quite often, sadly hinders human fulfilment and does not serve to till and keep God’s creation or to enhance the dignity of workers. So, what kind of work should we defend, create and promote?

This is a complex issue. In today’s interconnected world, responding to the complexity of “labour” issues requires a thorough and interdisciplinary analysis. I welcome the ILO’s approaches in this regard, especially its present attempt to redefine work in light of the *new* socio-economic and political realities, particularly those that are affecting the poor. Thank you also for allowing the Church to be part of this initiative through the role of the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the ILO.^[12]

When the model of economic development is based only on the material dimension of the person, or when it benefits only some to the exclusion of others, or when it harms the environment, it causes “sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course”.^[13] The new course for sustainable economic development needs to set *the person* and *work* at the centre of development, while seeking to integrate labour issues with environmental ones. Everything is interconnected, and we must respond comprehensively.^[14]

Contribution of the first set of triple “T”

A valid contribution to this integral response is what some social movements and worker unions have called the triple “T” (*tierra, techo, trabajo*): land, roof and work.[15] We do not want a system of economic development that pushes people to be unemployed, homeless or exiled. “The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone”[16] and “reach everyone fairly”.[17] This issue acquires special relevance in relation to the ownership of land, both in rural and urban areas, and with the legal process for guaranteeing access to it.[18] In this matter, the criterion of justice *par excellence* is the application of the principle of “*the universal destination of goods of the earth*”, where the “*right of everyone to their use*” is “the fundamental principle of the entire ethical-social order”.[19]

The interdependence between labour and the environment forces us to rethink the kind of tasks that we want to promote in the future and those that need to be replaced or relocated, such as the activities of the polluting fossil fuel industry. It is imperative to transit from the current fossil energy model to a more renewable one, if we want to take care of our mother earth, without which there is no possible work. But it is unfair if this energy transition is conducted at the expense of the needy. While promoting and defending jobs, we need to take into account the connection between “roof, land and work”.[20]

Contribution of the second set of triple “T”

Another contribution to a comprehensive response to the current issues surrounding work is another set of triple “T”: namely, *tradition, time and technology*.

The word *tradition* comes from Latin “*tradere*”; it means to transmit to others, to deliver, particularly to the next generations. In the field of labour, we need to transmit not only technological “know-how”, but also experiences, visions and hopes. This intergenerational dynamic is fundamental at this moment of history, when we need to combine wisdom with passion for the sake of humanity and of our common home.

In terms of *time*, we know that “the continued acceleration of changes” and “a more intensified pace of life and work”, do not contribute to sustainable development or to the improvement of the quality of people’s life.[21] We need to stop conceiving of time in a fragmented way, as just a disposable and costly dimension of business. In reality, *time* is a gift (from God) to be received, cherished and valued, where we can initiate processes of human advancement, where we can be attentive to the life surrounding us. That is why we need time to work, and we need time to rest; we need time to labour, and we need time to contemplate the beauty of human work and of nature.[22] We need time to slow down and realize the importance of being present in the moment rather than always rushing on to the next moment.

We also know that *technology*, from which we receive so many benefits and opportunities, can hinder sustainable development when it is associated with a paradigm of power, domination and

manipulation.[23] In the current context of the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by this rapid and refined digital technology, robotics and artificial intelligence,[24] the world needs institutions like the ILO. You have the capacity to challenge a widespread toxic mentality for which it does not matter if there is social or environmental degradation; for which it does not matter what or who is used and discarded; for which it does not matter if there is forced labour of children or unemployment of youth.[25]

As the theme of the 2019 *ILO Day Against Child Labour* advocates, “Children shouldn’t work in fields, but on dreams!”. [26] Regarding young people, “lack of work impacts negatively on [their] capacity to dream and hope, and it deprives them of the possibility of contributing to the development of society”. [27] Youth unemployment and job insecurity are often linked with an economic mindset of exploitation of labour and of the environment, with a technocratic culture that does not put the human being at its centre, and with the lack of political will to address in depth this complex issue.[28] It is not a surprise, then, that young people demand change and “wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded”. [29] We need to listen to the young generation in order to counter the attitude of dominion through an attitude of care: care for the earth and for future generations. This is a “basic question of justice [and of intergenerational justice], since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us”. [30]

A global institution like the ILO is well equipped to promote, alongside the Church, such a mentality of care, inclusion and real human development. For that, we must promote and defend jobs while taking into account this connection between *tradition, time and technology*. [31]

Conclusion

In today’s interconnected and complex world, we need to highlight the importance of good, inclusive and decent work. It is part of our human identity, necessary for our human development, and vital for the future of the planet. Therefore, while I commend the work the ILO has done in the last century, I encourage all who serve the institution to continue to address the issue of work in all its complexities. We need people and institutions that defend the dignity of workers, the dignity of everyone’s work, and the wellbeing of the earth, our common home!

May God bless you all!

From the Vatican, 10 June 2019

[1] Cf. International Labour Organization, *ILO Constitution* (1919), Preamble.

[2] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 128: AAS 107 (2015), 808.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, 273.

[5] Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 231: AAS 107 (2015), 937-938.

[6] Cf. *ibid.*, 67: AAS 107 (2015), 873-874.

[7] St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 7: AAS 73 (1981), 592-594.

[8] Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 276.

[9] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 203: AAS 105 (2013), 1105.

[10] Cf. *ibid.*, 204: AAS 105 (2013), 1105-1106.

[11] Cf. *ibid.*, 205: AAS 105 (2013), 1106.

[12] See, among others, the project: *The Future of Work, Labour After Laudato Si'*.

[13] *Laudato Si'*, 53: AAS 107 (2015), 868.

[14] Cf. *ibid.*, 16, 91, 117, 138, 240: AAS 107 (2015), 854-855, 883-884, 894, 902-903, 941-942.

[15] Cf. *Discurso a los participantes en el encuentro mundial de movimientos populares*, 5 November 2016.

[16] *Laudato Si'*, 93: AAS 107 (2015), 884-885.

[17] *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

[18] Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 283.

[19] *Laudato Si'*, 93: AAS 107 (2015), 884-885.

[20] Cf. *Carta a los participantes en la Conferencia Internacional "De la Populorum Progressio a la Laudato Si'"*, 23 November 2017.

[21] *Laudato Si'*, 18: AAS 107 (2015), 854.

[22] Cf. *ibid.*, 12: AAS 107 (2015), 852.

[23] Cf. *ibid.*, 102-114: AAS 107 (2015), 887-893.

[24] Cf. J. Manyika, "Technology, Jobs, and the Future of Work", McKinsey Global Institute Report prepared for the Global Forum *Fortune-Time*, Vatican City, December 2016.

[25] Although the number of employed children aged 5 to 14 is decreasing, this is happening at a too slow pace. With still more than 100 million children working, it is improbable that we can meet the target of ending child labor in all its forms by 2025. Moreover, although the global unemployment rate has gone down, more than 170 million people are still unemployed. Furthermore, women, persons with disabilities and young people (ages 15-24) continue to be much less likely to be in employment (e.g. one in five young people are not in employment, education or training). Cf. International Labor Organization, *World Employment Outlook – Trends 2019* (13 February 2019).

[26] International Labor Organization, *World Day Against Child Labour Theme* (12 June 2019).

[27] Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (25 March 2019), 270.

[28] Cf. *ibid.*, 271; *Laudato Si'*, 4, 106, 109, 149, 166 : AAS 107 (2015), 848, 889-890, 891, 907, 913-914.

[29] *Laudato Si'*, 13: AAS 107 (2015), 852.

[30] *Ibid.*, 159: AAS 107 (2015), 911.

[31] Cf. *Carta a los participantes en la Conferencia Internacional "De la Populorum Progressio a la Laudato Si'"*, 23 November 2017.