



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

“Sustainable development and the future of work
in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy”
Notre Dame University’s Global Gateway, Rome

Welcome

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
2 May 2016

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy and on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, it is a great joy to open this Conference on “Sustainable development and the future of work”. Thank you to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and to Caritas Internationalis for working so hard with Justice and Peace as co-sponsors.

Allow me to welcome each and every participant, and to mention some delegations to give a sense of the breadth of our assembly:

- Close to a dozen workers who represent national organisations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and about the same number from the ILO.
- Members of Catholic-inspired organizations concerned with decent work, including Caritas Internationalis, Justice and Peace Germany, Kolping, the associations for Christian business leaders (UNIAPAC), the young workers organisations, Catholic, agricultural and rural youth movements in Europe (MIJARC), the International Young Christian Workers (JOCI-IYCW and CiJOC), and the International Secretariat for Catholic Engineers, Agronomists and Industry Officials (SIIAEC).
- We welcome Muslim participants from Morocco Egypt, and Ivory Coast, and also Coptic, and Armenian Orthodox representatives.
- Social institutes from India, Ivory Coast and Mexico; the Programme for Union and Social Leadership of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, led by Fr Carlos Accaputo; and a significant new group from the U.S.A., organized by Fr Clete Kiley.

Hearing the words of welcome conveys a sense of the global reach and depth of our gathering, a real blessing. On the one hand, we benefit from the I.L.O.'s traditional tripartite structure representing governments, employers, and workers and involving civil society. On the other, our meeting is "catholic" which essentially means universal. This cannot help but remind us of the frequent urging of Pope Francis to engage in *dialogue* as the indispensable means for the human family to face the great challenges of our time.

I. Celebrating

Yes, we are gathered to confront very serious challenges, and as we listen with solidarity we will certainly feel a real burden of injustices, indignities and suffering. But we are here to celebrate too:

In 2019, the I.L.O. will mark the centenary of its founding as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I.

The Preamble of the ILO constitution states, "Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice... And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled ..."¹

In 2017, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its establishment by Blessed Pope Paul VI. Vatican II explicitly requested that a body of the universal Church be established whose role would be "to stimulate the Catholic Community to foster development in needy regions and social justice among nations."² Pope Paul VI implemented this directive on 6 January 1967 by setting up "*Iustitia et Pax*" and, two months later, he stated that "the name of this commission, *Justice and Peace*, aptly describes its program and its goal."³

This year is the 125th anniversary of the first social encyclical, *Rerum novarum* (1891) of Pope Leo XIII. Pope Leo stressed the centrality of human dignity, stating that "to misuse [people] as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers - that is truly shameful and inhuman."

The Holy Father argued vigorously that workers were owed a just or living wage. This was not to be equated with the wage determined by the law of the marketplace. Rather, it

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/leg/download/constitution.pdf>

² Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 90.

³ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, § 5.

should obey “a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man.” Pope Leo went on to specify: “To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven.” The centrality of work has direct implications for justice in society.

The notion of a just wage is one of the most consistent and central themes of Catholic social teaching. Wages cannot be left solely to the whim of the market, but must be influenced by justice and equity—a wage that allows people to live a truly human life and fulfil family obligations. In the words of Pope Francis, it is one of the ways people “find meaning, a destiny, and to live with dignity, to ‘live well’.” This is just as important today as it was in 1891 and will be throughout the 21st century.

So the mission of Justice and Peace, the Constitution of the I.L.O. and the social teaching of the Church coincide in linking development, justice, sustainability and peace with decent work.

II. Work in our Common Home

Laudato si' is very much in the vision and tradition just outlined. It is fully in continuity with the major labour issues treated in Catholic Social Teaching from the beginning.

If you pick up *Laudato si'* and ask, “What’s at the heart of this Encyclical of 246 paragraphs?” -- you will happily discover that at the very centre are six paragraphs (LS §§ 124-129) entitled “The need to protect employment.” It’s as if to affirm that **decent and sustainable work** is **fundamental** to how we care for our common home. Work acquires its true character when it is decent and sustainable for workers, employers, governments, communities, and the environment. Such work is the means for developing and expressing every individual’s human dignity, and it participates in the ongoing creative work of God. To quote Pope Francis: “we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he himself inscribed in things” (§124). Unless decent work is sustainably provided for all, it will prove impossible to care for our common home. This may seem almost too simple to be true, but it is far too true to continue to be overlooked and violated!

Today we are living in the age of **sustainable development**. Last September, the leaders of the world endorsed the 17 Sustainable Developments Goals, which must guide and orient us over the next few decades. The basic idea behind sustainable development is that it is no longer sufficient to measure human progress in terms of economic growth and the accumulation of material wealth. True development must rest on three legs—

economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. And if one leg collapses, then the entire structure collapses.

This sustainable development agenda was endorsed by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*, and again at the United Nations last September when he opened the global summit that led to the endorsement of the goals. As he said in *Laudato si'*,

It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (LS §139)

Let me repeat, the idea of **work** is central to both sustainable development and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. SDG 8 calls for us to “promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.” In other words, a strong and vibrant economy is a “bottom up” economy, not a “top down” economy—it flows from the dignity of each individual who is able to participate in the common good and share in its benefits. The future of work, then, must be understood in this context of sustainable development and of the environment challenges that must be addressed throughout the world, no less in the North than in the South.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis dwells on this issue in the context of sustainability. He notes that when the focus is on profit alone, not only are the poor excluded, but our common home is degraded. This reflects the technocratic paradigm—the tendency to see nature as something to be manipulated, mastered and controlled, with no concern for its inherent value or limits. Business is central to the challenges, and it must transform if it is to play a constructive role. This starts with bearing the true “economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources”, which is a precondition for ethical behaviour. Pope Francis then calls for business to unleash its creativity and ingenuity to invest in sustainable business practices. This too is an aspect of the “work” that provides meaning, purpose, and fulfilment. After all, for a “noble” vocation, what could be nobler than saving the planet from human-induced ruin? More than anything else in this age of sustainable development, I believe that this will define the future of work.

Pope Francis has repeatedly warned against the temptation to reduce costs by replacing workers with advanced technology. The replacement of workers by technology raises grave ethical challenges because it elevates economic efficiency and productivity over human dignity. Pope Francis argues that in taking this path, “we end up working against ourselves”. As he puts it, “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term

financial gain, is bad business for society.” I would say that it is bad business for business too. It is – and will be – much better business to put technology at the service of the **common good**, and the common good includes decent work for everyone in our single common home.

III. Conclusion

Quoting the mission of Justice and Peace, the I.L.O. Constitution and especially the Social Teaching of the Church from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis, I have posed many questions for our Conference to tackle. What will be the answer – what will greatly help to construct the answer -- is the sort of **dialogue** which we look forward to during this conference, thanks to the broad and deep representation which the Conference enjoys and the fundamental values and beliefs that bring us together.

We draw great inspiration from Pope Francis. Yesterday at the *Regina Coeli*, the Holy Father blessed our deliberations on sustainable development and the more vulnerable forms of work. He expressed the hope we all share: that this gathering may raise the awareness of political authorities, leaders in the economic realm, and all civil society so as to promote a model of development that takes human dignity into account, while it fully respects the labour laws and environmental norms as well.

With these words of warm welcome, I ask God to bless our Conference abundantly with the gift and grace of dialogue.