League Secretary-General's address at the opening of the 51st Arab Labour Conference

19 April 2025

Your Excellency Dr. Mohamed Al-Zaouri,

Minister of Social Affairs and Labour of the Republic of Yemen,

Chairman of the 51st Session of the Arab Labour Conference,

Your Excellencies,

Heads and Members of the Participating Delegations Representing the Three Pillars of Production in the Arab Member States,

Your Excellency Mr. Gilbert F. Houngbo,

Director-General of the International Labour Organisation,

Your Excellency Mr. Fayez Al-Mutairi,

Director-General of the Arab Labour Organisation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to reiterate my heartfelt congratulations to the Arab Labour Organisation, its Director-General, and the Assistant Directors, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of its establishment, commemorated on 12 January. This pioneering organisation remains a cornerstone and a vital engine of joint Arab labour action. Since its founding in 1965, the Organisation has served as a leading model for representing the key constituents of the production process—workers, employers, and governments—while promoting the exchange of best practices and legislative frameworks governing labour relations throughout the Arab region. It has also contributed significantly to the development of trade union systems and principles that preserve the delicate yet indispensable balance between the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. In this context, I pay tribute to the Organisation for its unwavering efforts in advancing coordinated Arab action in this vital field. I also extend sincere appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt for its generous hosting of the Organisation and the continuous support it provides as the host country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are currently witnessing global conditions that are unprecedented in both their pace and magnitude. The international landscape is marked by volatility, deep systemic shifts, and a departure from familiar norms. Uncertainty now characterises the global economy. Convention has been upended, and rapid transformation has become the defining feature of our era.

It is evident that these far-reaching changes—whose full implications are still unfolding—will inevitably impact all nations, regardless of their wealth or development. Their repercussions will undoubtedly extend to labour markets across the globe. In this context, I believe that safeguarding the right to work and addressing unemployment will rise to the forefront of government priorities in the foreseeable future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The very nature of work is undergoing profound transformation. Certain jobs have faded or seen their relevance diminish, while others—particularly in the service and digital sectors—have surged to prominence. As history has shown, major technological shifts are often accompanied by disruptions in the labour market, some transient, others more enduring. This was clearly demonstrated during the transition from agrarian to industrial societies, a shift that brought with it significant upheaval and far-reaching social consequences. Today, we face a similar turning point—one that compels us to act with foresight and solidarity in adapting to the evolving world of work.

As the world undergoes a profound technological transformation—arguably broader in scope and potentially more perilous in its repercussions—it is only natural that such a shift will be accompanied by fundamental changes in the nature of work and employment. The accelerating integration of artificial intelligence technologies presents undeniable challenges to job security and employment rates, challenges that all stakeholders in labour and labour affairs must approach with vigilance and foresight. These technologies, now increasingly embedded across diverse sectors—from industry and services to healthcare, education, and beyond—are fundamentally reshaping production paradigms and the very fabric of human activity.

Preparedness for the unfolding technological revolution, which is already in motion, is not merely desirable but imperative. It is essential that we remain ever mindful of the human dimension—the cornerstone of the production process and the ultimate objective of any developmental endeavour. Defending the right to work has become an urgent necessity. Yet, long-term strategies must also encompass comprehensive approaches to managing the advent of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, particularly within the realm of digital transformation. This includes creating adaptable frameworks for redirecting the labour force towards new forms of employment, supported by robust retraining and capacity-building initiatives. In an era characterised by rapid change, adaptability and flexibility must become guiding principles in the formulation of labour policies.

Legislation and trade union structures across the Arab world must, without question, evolve in tandem with these sweeping transformations. Such evolution must be underpinned by open-mindedness, strategic foresight, and an unwavering commitment to safeguarding every individual’s right to decent work. Of particular urgency is the imperative to confront youth unemployment, a profound social and political challenge with far-reaching implications.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this regard—and in light of the genocidal war being waged against the Palestinian people, aimed at uprooting them from their land and obliterating their national identity—I must take a moment to express our deep appreciation for the sincere and commendable efforts of the International Labor Organisation (ILO), as well as its Arab counterpart. Their joint endeavours have culminated in the granting of observer state status to Palestine at the ILO on 4 November. We look forward with great anticipation to the adoption of a final resolution on this matter at the upcoming International Labour Conference in June, which, for the first time, will enable Palestine to enjoy full participation within all structures of the ILO. This year, Palestine will be represented by an official tripartite delegation comprising representatives of the government, employers, and workers.

Your Excellencies,

We have attentively reviewed the agenda and reports submitted to your notable conference and its accompanying events. I take this opportunity to commend the critical and timely issues they address, which bear a direct and profound impact on labour markets and workers’ conditions across the Arab region. Chief among these is the report of the Director-General of the Arab Labour Organisation, titled "Economic Diversification as a Path to Development: Promising Economies in Arab Countries." The report underscores the urgent need for structural reform, a shift away from overreliance on traditional sectors, and the expansion of productive capacities through strategic investments in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It further highlights the pivotal role of public-private partnerships in advancing economic transformation and affirms the value of social dialogue among key stakeholders to ensure a just and sustainable transition towards promising economic models.

We also extend our appreciation for the array of programmes and activities carried out by the organisation over the past year. These initiatives—ranging from training sessions and seminars to regional and international forums and conferences—reflect a commendable consideration of geographic diversity and thematic inclusivity. Moreover, we have reviewed the report on the draft Arab Entrepreneurship Strategy, as well as the item addressing the establishment of the organisation's constitutional and statutory bodies for the period 2025–2027, which includes the Board of Directors, the Financial and Administrative Control Authority, the Committee on Trade Union Freedoms at the Arab Labour Office, the Arab Women's Labour Affairs Committee, and the Committee of Legal Experts for the period 2025–2028. Of particular interest is the focus on integrated social policies and their role in poverty alleviation and economic inclusion, alongside the technical theme of “Economic Clusters: A Strategic Approach to Achieving Sustainable Development.”

In conclusion, I extend my sincere wishes for the success of this conference in fulfilling its agenda and achieving its noble objectives.

May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you.