FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Sectoral issues arising from the 292nd Session (March 2005) of the Governing Body

Introduction

1. At its 292nd Session (March 2005), the Governing Body approved three new action programmes (health services, telecommunications services and the public service), the continuation of some of the current action programmes (to be determined), and the holding of four sectoral meetings (chemicals, mining, transport and commerce). [1]

2. Activities in 2006-07 for two sectors (food and drink and mechanical and electrical engineering) were not agreed upon at the time, and the Office was requested to develop proposals through tripartite consultations. The topic for the action programme on telecommunications services and the topic for the meeting on commerce also needed to be developed.

3. The Governing Body also approved the holding of a post-MFA meeting [2] subject to further consultations on its purpose, size and composition, and the Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues took note of the Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Code and Voluntary Guidelines on Safety and Health on Fishing Vessels [3] pending the provision of further information with a view to taking a decision at its 293rd Session in June 2005.

4. Proposals with respect to the above items, developed after consultations, are set out below in four sections.

I.   Activities for two sectors

5. The Governing Body agreed that activities for the two remaining sectors for consideration in 2006-07 be developed through tripartite consultations and be presented to it for approval.

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[1] GB.292/13(Rev.), para. 28.

[2] GB.292/13(Rev.), para. 98.

[3] GB.292/13(Rev.), para. 68.

(a)   Food, drink, tobacco (meeting)

Background

6. Food chains worldwide function across a number of sectors: agriculture upstream, and catering, marketing and distribution downstream, as well as public health. All these fields often operate within closed circuits in terms of policy and regulation, but global production systems now open up new opportunities for organization and representation, requiring more policy coherence based on social dialogue.

Proposed action

7. A tripartite meeting would be held in Geneva in the last quarter of 2007 to discuss the impact of global food chains on employment, with emphasis on the need to strengthen social dialogue structures in order to achieve better policy coherence.

8. In addition to a background report prepared by the Office, participants and invited guests would be invited to present thematic papers for discussion. The Governing Body, at its November 2005 session, will be invited to agree on the length, size and output of the meeting.

9. At the beginning of the biennium, the feasibility and sustainability of a statistical database would be assessed by the tripartite constituents concerned.

(b)   Mechanical and electrical engineering (meeting)

Background

10. The WTO estimate that 70 per cent of world trade in office and telecommunications equipment in 2003 came from computers and semiconductors. However, computers and semiconductors were responsible for most of the slowdown in the growth of trade in the sector in recent years, as compared to consumer electronics and telecommunications equipment, which performed better. Nevertheless, by all accounts, chip manufacturing seems to be picking up in 2005 for record production in 2006-08. While the manufacture of electronic components, computer chips, LCD screens, etc. is concentrated in a handful of countries, increasingly countries in Asia and in Central and South America, and some of the transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe, are producing components and sub-components for final assembly and marketing in industrialized countries.

Proposed action

11. A short tripartite meeting would be held in Geneva in the first quarter of 2007 on electronic components for IT industries which could examine changing labour force requirements in a global economy. A number of points could be developed for discussion at the meeting on the basis of a background report looking at the shift in production between industrialized, developing and emerging economies; changing skill requirements; gender; age distribution; conditions of work; labour management relations; and production in industrial zones, among other issues. The Governing Body would be invited at its November 2005 session to agree on the length, size and output of the meeting.

12. The savings resulting from a shorter meeting could be used to continue the metal trades' database and collect information for inclusion in the report for the meeting.

II. Determination of topics for activities already selected

(a) Telecommunications services (action programme)

Background

13. The development of the Internet and mobile telephony, along with other new technologies, privatization and deregulation, has completely transformed the telecommunications industry in the past decade. Further changes are under way as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), mobile, public switched data network (PSDN), and public switched telephone network (PSTN) technologies are coexisting and beginning to converge in Next Generation Networks (NGNs). These developments imply that telecommunications enterprises will have to adapt rapidly to changes in their market, while their workforces will need to develop new competencies that can ensure their continued employability. Technological change is also likely to have a significant impact on employment, labour relations and work organization in telecommunications services.

Proposed action

14. An action programme on skills and employability in telecommunications services in selected countries will focus on countries where there is a favourable environment for social dialogue initiatives around skills training and employability in telecommunications services (for example, selected countries in West Africa or Eastern Europe). It will be centred on follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (Tunis, November 2005), on social dialogue, and on addressing skills transfer to Africa, among other issues. It will aim to assist ILO member States in their efforts to reduce the digital divide and promote social dialogue by focusing attention on issues around skills and employability in telecommunications services.

15. The action programme will comprise a programme of research, policy guidance and activities to promote training and social dialogue. The research component would focus on two main topics: competencies and employability. A survey of best practice among ILO member States with regard to skills and employability in telecommunications services would be undertaken. The ILO would offer technical assistance in the development of capacity building for the social partners to implement improvements at the national and enterprise levels. When restructuring or replacing retiring workers, special measures to ensure the interests of women workers, young workers and temporary workers would be included.

16. Social dialogue activities could be envisaged in two main areas: (a) national or subregional meetings on skills and employability, during which participants could exchange experiences and discuss specific challenges facing the subsector, review the roles of the social partners in implementing improvements in training and work organization, and identify opportunities for further action at the national or other levels; and (b) capacity building for the social partners to strengthen their participation in social dialogue.

(b) Commerce (meeting)

Background

17. In retail services, the customer has long been persuaded to undertake much of the work of distribution: selecting the goods from the shelves, carrying them to the checkout and then transporting them to their final destination. The introduction of even more advanced technologies is certain to accentuate this trend. Warehouse management systems with more functionality at lower cost, including vendor-managed inventory and scan-based trading, label printing and real-time inventory access are set to combine with in-store radio frequency identification (RFID) technologies to greatly enhance operations and productivity. Self-checkout systems are gaining acceptance and are set to be used by a growing number of major retailers around the world. In combination with the widespread introduction of these new technologies at all stages of the goods handling process, from logistics to checkout, retailers are adopting "lean staffing" strategies as part of cost-cutting procedures. These developments have implications for employment, work organization, skills requirements, working conditions and labour relations throughout the distribution chain.

Proposed action

18. A report analysing the benefits and costs for enterprises and workers from the greater use of advanced retail technologies would be prepared as the basis for discussions at a medium-sized tripartite meeting to be convened in Geneva in the second half of 2006. This meeting would have as its main objective the development of recommendations on ways to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders in the face of a changing employment landscape resulting from these trends.

19. The savings resulting from holding a smaller meeting could be used to support ILO constituents to follow up on the meeting's recommendations in 2007.

III. Post-MFA meeting
(Geneva, 24-26 October 2005)

20. At its 292nd Session, the Governing Body agreed to hold a Tripartite Meeting on Promoting Fair Globalization in Textiles and Clothing in a Post-MFA Environment. The purpose of the meeting will be to enable governments, employers and workers to discuss the consequences and trends associated with the end of the Multifibre Arrangement and to provide guidance to governments and employers' and workers' organizations on how to share strategies, lessons and experiences throughout the supply chain to allow the tripartite constituents to best adapt to changing circumstances and to identify ways to address them. The outcome of the discussions at the meeting and any recommendations would be provided to the Governing Body in a format which would best respond to the circumstances.

21. The Director-General proposes that this be a tripartite meeting lasting three days, with 45 participants, and that the following 15 Governments be invited to participate at the expense of the Office: Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, China, France, Haiti, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Mexico, Morocco, the Philippines, Romania, Turkey and the United States. Although the nomination of the Employer and Worker representatives should be made by the respective groups of the Governing Body, it is hoped that national tripartite delegations will be selected.

22. It is further proposed to place the following countries on a reserve list: Burkina Faso, Egypt, Dominican Republic, Italy, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. Nevertheless, all interested governments may attend as observers at their own expense.

23. Observers would be invited from the World Bank, the WTO, OECD, European Union, UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre, and the International Textiles and Clothing Bureau (ITCB), together with relevant sectoral international NGOs.

IV. Fishing sector

24. At its 292nd Session, the Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues had before it a paper [4] on the development of a Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Code and Voluntary Guidelines on Safety and Health on Fishing Vessels. The paper provided information on three publications that had been prepared by the FAO and the IMO, with the involvement of the ILO secretariat: the FAO/ILO/IMO *Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels, Part A, Safety and Health Practice for Skippers and Crews, 2005*; the FAO/ILO/IMO *Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels, Part B, Safety and Health Requirements for the Construction and Equipment of Fishing Vessels, 2005*; and the FAO/ILO/IMO *Voluntary Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessels, 2005*.

25. During the discussion of this paper, the Employer spokesperson said that such documents should be the result of a tripartite process, and that the Employers' group had not had sufficient time to review the over 500 pages of text. She expressed the wish that the decision on the approval of the documents be deferred to the 293rd Session (June 2005) of the Governing Body. The Worker spokesperson indicated that the Workers' group would make a public statement if the documents were published without the ILO logo.

26. In response to a request for clarification from the representative of the Government of Canada, a representative of the Director-General (Ms. Doumbia-Henry, Director of the International Labour Standards Department) said that the Code and Voluntary Guidelines were not binding and were intended as guidance to the sector. She indicated that the Office would contact the IMO and report to the Governing Body at its 293rd Session (June 2005) on this matter. In this regard, the Office notes that paragraph 1.1.1 of Part A of the Code provides that its purpose is "to provide information with a view to promoting the safety and health of crewmembers on board a fishing vessels", and that paragraph 1.1.2 provides that "this part of the Code may also serve as a guide to those concerned with framing measures for the improvement of safety and health on board fishing vessels but is not a substitute for national laws and regulations". It further notes that paragraph 1.1.1 of Part B of the Code provides that its purpose is "to provide information on the design, construction, and equipment of fishing vessels with a view to promoting the safety of fishing vessels and safety and health of the crew" and that the Code "is not a substitute for national laws and regulations nor is it a substitute for the provisions of international instruments in relation to safety of fishing vessels and crew although it may serve as a guide to those concerned with framing such national laws and regulations".

27. The three sets of documents are:

(a) the FAO/ILO/IMO *Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels, Part A, Safety and Health Practice for Skippers and Crews, 2005*;

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[4] GB.292/STM/4.

   (b)   the FAO/ILO/IMO *Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels, Part B, Safety and Health Requirements for the Construction and Equipment of Fishing Vessels, 2005*; and

   (c)   the FAO/ILO/IMO *Voluntary Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessels, 2005*.

28. ***The Officers of the Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues, having met, recommend that the Governing Body approve the activities for food, drink and tobacco, mechanical and electrical engineering, telecommunications services, and commerce, proposed in paragraphs 7, 11, 14 and 18; the composition, purpose and outcome of the post-MFA meeting as proposed in paragraphs 20 and 21; and the publication by the IMO of the three documents proposed in paragraph 27(a), (b) and (c).***

Geneva, 14 June 2005.

Point for decision: Paragraph 28.