

**REMARKS BY
UNITED STATES ASSOCIATE DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY OF
LABOR
ERIC BIEL
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Good afternoon and thank you for the honor of addressing this distinguished body. I would like to thank the Director-General for the opportunity to address an issue that is central to the ILO and indeed the whole global community – namely, how we can work collaboratively to eliminate poverty.

Ending poverty is an urgent challenge facing every member state. In the United States, nearly 50 million people live in poverty. This includes 30% of families with a female head of household and a disproportionate number of people from racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and persons with disabilities. High and rising inequality has led some to prosper while many millions more have seen their standard of living stagnate or even decline.

Of course, it is not only the unemployed who live in poverty. Millions of people work hard, often in difficult circumstances, for wages that barely enable them to get by in temporary, seasonal, or other irregular jobs. They do not enjoy benefits, steady work, predictable schedules, or the prospect of a career ladder. Moreover, many in poverty are not reached by social protection programs for which they qualify but face barriers in accessing.

The realities are daunting, but we cannot and must not accept them as permanent. As the Director-General highlighted in his report, we need not only more, but better jobs to reverse these trends. Labor, employment and social protection policies can make an enormous and measurable difference in the lives of our people. Policy counts. Good policies, effectively implemented, can end poverty.

That recognition underpins President Obama's commitment to creating broadly shared prosperity through a series of initiatives, includes a proposed increase in the U.S. minimum wage, the expansion of overtime protections, and the extension of quality education and skills training to vulnerable youth and other disadvantaged workers. It also underpins social protection programs like the Affordable Care Act, which has broadly expanded the provision of health care in the United States, and which, according to a Brookings Institution study, "may do more to change the income distribution than any other recently enacted law."

That same belief must inspire action at the global level. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a comprehensive and multifaceted vision for ending poverty in our time. The promotion of Decent Work is essential for achieving that vision. As the Director-General notes in his report, the 2030 Development Agenda “embodies to a remarkable degree the essentials of the Decent Work Agenda.”

The United States welcomes the Director-General’s blueprint for ILO engagement with its constituents and the United Nations system in support of the 2030 Agenda. We agree that the ILO, with its unique tripartite structure and expertise, is uniquely placed to play a central role in assisting countries to achieve the Agenda’s aims by (1) providing advice, (2) setting and supervising standards, (3) promoting and advising countries on employment and social protection programs that directly fight poverty, and (4) building sound labor and employment institutions.

Realizing the ambitious goals of the SDGs and the ILO’s Ending Poverty Initiative will require concerted action at the national level and strong coordination within the ILO and across the UN system as a whole. We look forward to working with all of you to meet these goals to combat poverty, rising inequality and poor working conditions by promoting decent work for all, and not just for a few.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.