



REMARKS BY DEPUTY SECRETARY PATRICK PIZZELLA
CENTENARY EVENT
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
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As Prepared For Delivery



It is a great pleasure to be here to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the International Labor Organization. On behalf of U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia, I would like to congratulate the ILO on its centenary. Earlier this year I had the opportunity to visit the ILO's home in Geneva to help celebrate its 100th year. Today brings me to its birthplace, just one mile down the road from our Department of Labor.

The first meeting of the International Conference started at 11:30 a.m. on October 29, 1919, when the U.S. Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, convened the assembly in this building, then known as the Pan American Union Building.

In his opening remarks, Secretary Wilson declared, "This institution represents the first concerted effort on the part of the nations of the earth to deal with the problems of labor in a comprehensive manner."

When that first Conference ended he said, "I am sure that I express your hopes, I am sure that I express the hopes of the peoples of all the world, that time may develop the fact that you have built well, that you have laid the foundation for a structure that will stand down through all the ages as the protector of the toilers of the world."

One hundred years have passed and I think we can say we built well on that foundation.

In the century since its creation, the ILO has made many important contributions to solutions, helping many nations develop sound and consistent labor laws and establishing standards that now serve as the basis for many legal frameworks and trade agreements around the world. Perhaps most significantly, the ILO has also been key to some of the most important multilateral work in the world:

- Fighting human trafficking;
- Fighting forced labor; and
- Fighting the exploitation of child labor.

In this area, the ILO has and will always have the United States as an active partner and supporter.

But none of this work would be possible without the free markets and prosperity that enable it.

Without a thriving economy, there are no businesses, no work, no workers. It is no coincidence that the countries with the greatest economic freedom and opportunity also have the safest working conditions, the healthiest workers, and the highest wages.

One of the best things we can do to support workers across the world is to continue to advocate for greater economic freedom because the best thing for workers is a strong economy that provides family-sustaining jobs.

Now, allow me to abandon my modesty for a moment, but I think this is an important point. In the United States, under the leadership of President Trump, we have seen strong economic

growth that has driven down unemployment to record lows – including record lows for African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, veterans, and women.

In October 2019, the unemployment rate stood at 3.6 percent. We had 7 million job openings, marking the 19th straight month in which there were more job openings than job seekers.

Wages are increasing. It's never been a better time to be a worker in America!

The American workplace has never been safer, worker injuries and fatalities on a per capita basis have never been lower.

These *labor* accomplishments were achieved by enacting President Trump's agenda of economic freedom that reduced burdensome regulations and taxes, and recognized that everyone, companies and workers, wins when property rights are respected, individual liberty is respected, and the government plays a modest and limited role in the economy. However, it is important to remember that free and fair markets, after all, need rules, ideally simple ones.

And the United States is absolutely committed to ensuring the rules are followed. In the area of international trade, this is of paramount importance, and the ILO's work in this space is critical, because labor abuses not only harm workers, they threaten nations, companies, and workers who *do* play by the rules. That is unacceptable.

Our goal is a level playing field across countries. As President Trump has forcefully stated that "The United States and our trading partners benefit greatly from free, fair, balanced, and reciprocal trade," and this administration has worked vigorously to make that goal a reality.

On November 30, 2018, the United States, Mexico, and Canada signed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to modernize the 24-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement.

The agreement includes a labor chapter that brings labor obligations into the core of the agreement and makes them fully enforceable.

These are the strongest labor provisions of any trade agreement and mark an important step forward in our effort to level the playing field.

The labor provisions and obligations in the USMCA are drawn directly from the ILO's body of principles and standards. The text of the agreement is unambiguous.

The agreement calls on the parties to "affirm their obligations as members of the ILO," and stipulates that all parties maintain in law, regulation, and practice, the four core components of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

The United States is proud that Director-General Ryder said the USMCA has "the most comprehensive labor chapter that [he has] seen" in any trade agreement. Once the USMCA is

ratified, President Trump will be responsible for, on a global scale, the most pro-labor treaty we've seen this century.

For trade agreements to be free and fair they must also be effectively enforced. It is only through rigorous monitoring and enforcement of labor laws that we know that our commitments to workers are upheld.

That is true if we are discussing regional agreements, such as the USMCA, bilateral free trade agreements, or international agreements.

The ILO is invaluable in this area. Across the world, the ILO has helped countries on every continent build up the capabilities of their labor ministries or other relevant departments. The United States has directly supported ILO programs and projects that help teach, build, and maintain enforcement mechanisms around the world.

We will continue to look to the ILO to help provide the tools and guidance that enable effective enforcement. Doing so will not only help advance free and fair trade, but will help us all take a giant step toward achieving the goals for which this organization was created.

It is worth mentioning that U.S. support for the ILO has always been bipartisan. The first American to become a Director-General, John Winant, was a former Republican Governor of New Hampshire, who was eventually appointed by a Democrat, Franklin Roosevelt, as Ambassador to Great Britain during World War II.

The ILO was forced to leave its Geneva headquarters in 1941 but the great leaders did not forget the need for an ILO. In August 1941, with continental Europe occupied and war clouds descending around the world, President Roosevelt met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on a ship in the treacherous Atlantic waters. In that darkest hour the two leaders issued the Atlantic Charter, a declaration of common principles that envisioned a better future for the world.

Point five stated, "they [the President and the Prime Minister] desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security."

I think it is fair to say that the modern history of the United States' engagement with the ILO starts with Ronald Reagan. As a former President of a labor union, he saw in the ILO an important tool for helping to form free trade unions in unfree countries, and his administration strongly backed measures that helped bring Poland's Solidarity Union into a leadership role in creating a freer world and ending the Cold War.

As we celebrate the ILO's 100 anniversary, I would also recall that the Berlin Wall, which divided Germany, and separated freedom and capitalism on one side, and oppression and communism on the other, was torn down just over 30 years ago on November 9, 1989.

That was just two years after Ronald Reagan stated the phrase that was heard around the world, “tear down this wall!” If you get a chance today, I would urge you, if you haven’t already seen it, to visit the Victims of Communism Memorial, which is just a few blocks away from where we are gathered today. The memorial is a salute to the more than 100 million victims of communism and advocates for the freedom and independence of all captive nations and peoples.

In the past two decades, both Democrat and Republican administrations have supported the ILO’s campaigns to end child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.

On many anniversaries and birthdays, we tend to look back. But to the credit of the Director-General, in this 100th year, we are all looking forward.

The ILO devoted considerable effort this year to examining the “Future of Work” – the possible effects on workers and the workplace of technological change, changes in the organization of work, and the ongoing challenges facing developing countries. While I understand the concerns some people have as we look to the future, I think that history shows clearly that new innovations and new technologies create more prosperity, more and better jobs for workers and, and better lives for the great majority of people.

Together with our friends, allies, and partners, we are focusing on the future, promoting economic freedom, and building durable partnerships and agreements, and the ILO has a crucial role to play in facilitating and shaping that future.

Thank you.