



G20 High-level conference on the social dimension of globalisation

Paris, 23 May 2011

Speech of mr. Henk Kamp, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment of The Netherlands

Intervention for Roundtable 3 on Promoting respect for Fundamental Rights at Work

Our host, president Sarkozy, gave a clear signal when he urged the G20-states to ratify the eight ILO-conventions on the fundamental labour rights. I support this call.

We all are ILO-members and we all promised to respect, promote and realize these conventions and thus the core standards freedom of association, no forced labour, no child labor and no discrimination at work, including gender discrimination.

The core labour standards not only protect workers rights. They also level the global playing field for companies. Wage levels may be lower in the new economies, but not due to child labour or because unions are not allowed to play their role.

Companies are aware of the risks to their reputation. Consumers expect to buy products made under decent working conditions. So do governments, they are major consumers too.

The Netherlands, the number 7 trade-country in the world, supports the inclusion of labour clauses in trade agreements. In a growing number of EU-bilateral trade agreements these clauses are included. A good example is the trade agreement between the EU and South Korea. It also has a mediation procedure in case of any alleged violation of the labour clause.

Of course it is not only about the EU and South Korea. Labour clauses are included in ever more trade agreements. And it is not only about trade agreements. Over the past decades we have seen many interesting initiatives - such as specific programs - that seek to reconcile trade policies with ILO-fundamental principles. Though the aims of the different initiatives are the same - the implementation of labour standards - their methods are not. According to the Netherlands it would therefore be useful if the G20 would urge a joint ILO-WTO study on the methodology and effectiveness of



existing initiatives. Such a study would also strengthen the cooperation between ILO and WTO.

Fundamental labour norms are firmly embedded in Dutch foreign policy, trade policy and development aid. Let me give you an example of policy coherence at national level. Together, the government and the business community finance the activities of the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative. One of its new projects concerns the electronics sector in China's Pearl River Delta. Multinationals like Philips and Dell and the Dutch Trade Union Confederation FNV are working with the local authorities in China to help factories meet ILO labour standards. The Dutch government is supporting this initiative with both funding and economic diplomacy. In my view, this is how business, civil society and governments should be working together to improve the lives of workers in the global production chain.

Thank you.