

ILO launches World Commission on Globalisation

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has launched an 18-month project to investigate the social aspects of globalisation.

A high-level commission headed up by the Finnish President Tardier Halogen and Tanzanian President Benjamin Kappa will spearhead the project. The commission will be tasked with the responsibility of investigating amongst other issues, the impact of globalisation on employment, decent work, poverty reduction, economic growth and development. This could lead to a focus on trade, liberalisation of capital markets and the role of multinational corporations.

At the launch of this project, ILO director-general Juan Somavia said the aim 'was to use the process of globalisation as a resource to reduce poverty and unemployment to foster growth and sustainable development'. Somavia went on to say that the commission was an 'unprecedented effort to promote international dialogue on ideas to make globalisation more inclusive.' Globalisation, he said, 'had been an instrument for progress for some but for others it had exacerbated inequalities and insecurity.'

Under the new leadership of Somavia, the ILO has attempted to reclaim ground lost during the early to mid-1990s as globalisation (and the prominence of the World Trade Organization) gained momentum. He initiated closer working ties with the World Bank which has led to

*Cosatu general secretary
Zwelinzima Vavi will form part
of a high-level international
team, which is set to look at the
social consequences of
globalisation. Liv Tørres and
Reneé Grawitzky report on
this development.*

a number of collaborative efforts (together with the International Monetary Fund) to promote poverty reduction strategies in developing countries.

Decent work

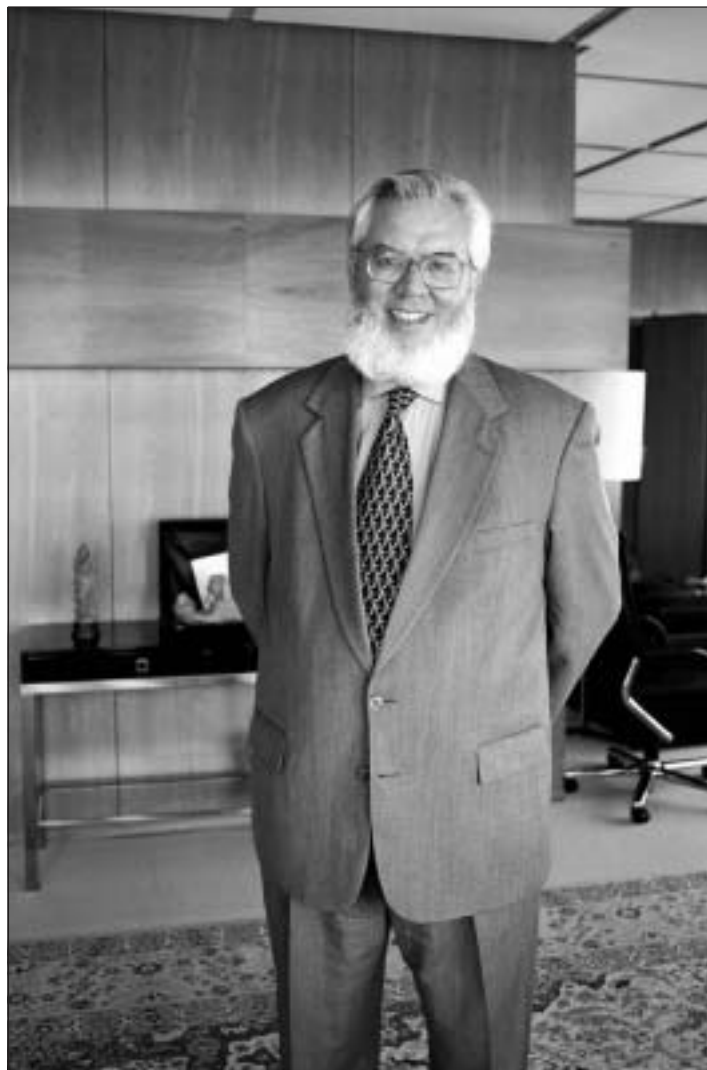
During his first ILO conference in June 1999, Somavia introduced the concept of 'Decent work', which is built around four strategic objectives: fundamental rights and principles at work, employment, social protection, and social dialogue. The organising theme for the 2002-2003 period is accordingly to put the decent work agenda into practice.¹ Statements so far would indicate that to make the decent work concept operational Somavia favours advocacy, persuasion and working with countries, 'by building on the social floor' established by the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

In line with his focus on dialogue and advocacy, Somavia convened a special meeting of the ILO Working Party on the Social Dimensions of Globalisation in June 2001. The meeting discussed a proposal for strengthening the Working Party, including the possibility of setting up an inter-institutional World Commission on the social dimensions of globalisation.

The meeting was notable for the fact that a range of developing countries including Brazil, Chile, South Africa and Burkina Faso supported the setting-up of a commission (as did the European Union, US and Canada, as had been expected).

The ILO Workers' Group argued that a World Commission should undertake a useful body of research on the social consequences of globalisation and the role of the various institutions (such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank) in supporting or undermining respect for core labour standards. Furthermore, they argued that such a commission should include several prominent trade union leaders among its members, and had to conclude its work by the time of the 2003 ILO Conference.

The commission, which comprises leading trade unionists (such as Vavi),



ILO director-general Juan Somavia

employer representatives, academics, economists (Joseph Stiglitz) and politicians, will have to report back to the ILO governing body in March 2003. The commission's findings will form the basis for Somavia's report to the June 2003 International Labour Conference.

Endnotes

¹ *This is to be done by promotion and realisation of standards; securing decent employment and income, enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection, strengthening tripartism and social dialogue and crosscutting activities.*