

G8 Labour and Employment Ministers Meeting

Niigata, May 11-13, 2008

Chair's Conclusions

1. Labour and Employment Ministers from the G8 countries and the European Union Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities met in Niigata from May 11 to 13, 2008, together with the Director-General of the ILO and Secretary-General of the OECD, to discuss the theme "Seeking the Best Balance for a Resilient and Sustainable Society". Labour Ministers from Indonesia and Thailand were invited as guests and were encouraged to share the results with their regional partner countries through the ASEAN and ASEM labour ministers' meetings, over which they preside this year. In preparation for the meeting, consultations with representatives of the social partners were held on May 11.
2. Based on proposals from the chair country, Japan, reflecting the achievements of the Dresden Meeting in 2007, and considering linkage with other ministerial meetings, we, the G8 Labour and Employment Ministers, held discussions on the following three themes. We trust that our conclusions will strengthen the social dimension of globalisation focusing on increasing society's resilience, sustainability and global balance.

- **Enabling Well-Balanced Lives in Harmony with Increased Longevity** (individual level)
- **The Contribution of Labour Market and Employment Policies to Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Workers and Areas** (society level)
- **The Contribution of the G8 Members to the Challenges to Global Sustainability** (global society level)

3. During our discussions, we agreed that our countries share significant challenges.

Addressing the social dimension of globalisation

- Average income levels and living standards in the G8 countries remain high in this age of globalisation although the reduction of wages' participation in National Income in some countries needs to be addressed. Therefore, we must continue to sustain the environment that has made these achievements possible, while also addressing the income disparities and the situation of those regions within our economies that have been unable to take advantage of the benefits of globalisation and therefore need our support.

Current economic situation and its impact on employment

- Sound macroeconomic growth and sound functioning of financial markets have impacts on good labour market prospects.

The current economic slowdown and financial instability are matters of concern with regard to the possible negative impact on employment. Our governments have the responsibility of working together to help restore conditions conducive to sustainable economic growth, strengthened labour market and employment policies, and social cohesion.

Ministers' role toward sustainable economic growth and employment

- As Labour and Employment Ministers we have a specific responsibility to ensure the development and growth of a skilled and resilient workforce in our countries that is responsive to the needs of the global economy. We also recognise the importance of facilitating an inclusive labour market, combining security and flexibility, that promotes employment opportunities for workers and is responsive to their individual needs and circumstances.

Addressing these challenges

- We should address these challenges by promoting a society where individuals have flexibility and choice in the way they balance their work with their lives, taking into account increasing longevity.

4. Social partners, government and labour institutions have important roles to play. Corporate Social Responsibility can also contribute.

Enabling Well-Balanced Lives in Harmony with Increased Longevity

5. Increased life expectancy, rising beyond age 80 in some countries is having a major impact on labour markets and workers' lives. In order to enable people to enjoy fulfilling lives and achieve their full human potential, employment and labour market policies should promote:

- Better work-life balance
- Safe and healthy working lives and secure post-working lives
- Lifelong learning and career development

These measures should take account of the needs of individuals, employers and society as a whole and reflect the differing attitudes and practices with regard to retirement in each country.

6. We agreed that a range of employment and labour market policies and programmes are needed to achieve a good lifelong balance between work and private commitments. These include measures to:

Better work-life balance

- promote appropriate diversity in forms of employment and in working arrangements in our respective countries appropriate to workers at each stage of life, through a package approach combining flexibility and adequate labour market security, as agreed in Dresden.
- help facilitate job mobility and transitions throughout the lifecycle.
- encourage family friendly policies and promote opportunities for voluntary flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, flexible working hours, telecommuting as well as other alternative work arrangements, which may help to achieve a better work-life balance for both male and female workers at different stages of their careers.

Safe and healthy working lives and secure post-working lives

- improve compliance with occupational safety and health laws and regulations, and improve awareness and knowledge of job-related stress and other occupational health and safety issues. This is also beneficial for healthy post-working life.

Lifelong learning and career development

- in the context of a lifecycle approach, facilitate effective life-long employability and adaptability to change, including

through career counselling opportunities, career development, skills upgrading and lifelong learning.

In developing the above measures particular attention should be paid to reducing barriers, especially gender-related, and providing equal opportunities for all workers.

The Contribution of Labour Market and Employment Policies to Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Workers and Areas

7. We agree that labour market and employment policies should support vulnerable workers and economic development in depressed areas. They also should ensure that individuals can fully participate in the labour market and thereby realise a resilient and sustainable society.
8. Globalisation and technological change offer the world economy potential opportunities for more wealth, growth, employment and better lives for people. At the same time, they can entail disparities and adjustment difficulties in labour markets. This has resulted in dislocations and increased insecurity for a number of workers and slower or negative economic growth in some areas.
9. It is important to promote local development and job creation by facilitating the effective use of local resources and policies to

respond to local needs and circumstances. In doing so, it is also important to obtain active participation by not only national governments but also by local governments, authorities, social partners and other stakeholders, research bodies, venture capital firms, human resources development agencies and non-profit organisations.

10. Governments working with the social partners and other stakeholders should create an environment and conditions that contribute to regional economic growth, high employment, and broadly-shared prosperity. Special efforts are needed to assist vulnerable groups to overcome obstacles in finding jobs.
11. We highlight that active labour market policies, well-designed unemployment benefits systems and public employment services, as well as effective lifelong learning policies contribute to promoting participation in the labour market and to the removal of impediments in job seeking to promote activation, as endorsed in Dresden (2007) as well as in the restated OECD Jobs Strategy.
12. In view of these considerations:
 - it is important for governments to strengthen labour market supply and demand matching through well-coordinated job placement, unemployment benefits and active labour market services, and maintain the system nationwide.
 - we agree to work with local authorities/governments, social

partners and other stakeholders to support local job creation initiatives. We also agree that public employment services and training agencies should offer appropriate support to job seekers and contribute to the better matching of supply and demand locally.

- we reaffirm the importance of ensuring human resources development opportunities for all, including effective skills development and training programmes that meet labour market needs. These include programmes that (i) integrate vulnerable groups into skills development systems, (ii) improve assessment systems of occupational skills, and (iii) further upgrade career counselling functions and career education to support individual career development.

The Contribution of the G8 Members to the Challenges to Global Sustainability

13. Recognising our membership in the global society, we declare our intent to contribute to addressing employment and social challenges arising from environmental concerns and issues in order to realise a resilient and sustainable society. It is not only to enrich our own countries but also to promote a more harmonious global society. In view of this, the G8 countries should share experiences and promote dialogue on these challenges with developing countries and emerging economies inter alia through appropriate international fora.