

Opening Remarks for Mr. Raul Henriquez at the International Workshop on Combatting Inequalities in the World of Work

Date: 31 May 2024

Location: Abidjan, Ivory Coast

With protocol duly served, I humbly request the Chair of this esteemed gathering to allow me briefly, as outlined in the program of this international workshop, to address the audience in my capacity as Director/Secretary General of the Social Economic Council of Curaçao (SER), which also holds the presidency of AICESIS.

Bonjour à tous!

It is a profound honor for me to participate in this crucial workshop on the role of social dialogue and its institutions in combating inequalities in the world of work. As a representative of the Presiding Council of AICESIS and its Board, I am privileged to address such a distinguished assembly.

Firstly, I extend my deepest gratitude to our gracious hosts, the President of the Council of Ivory Coast, the Honorable Mr. Aka Aouele, and his dedicated and professional technical staff, especially my esteemed colleagues, Mr. Claude Kouadio, Secretary General of the Ivorian CESEC, and my respected colleague and dear friend, Mr. Alain Mennan. Since our extraordinary virtual Board Meeting on March 1st, where we decided that the forthcoming Hybrid Board Meeting would be held in Abidjan, combined with an

international workshop with the active participation of the International Labour Organization (ILO), we have been in continuous contact, meticulously preparing for this event. The Board of AICESIS expressed its profound gratitude for this gesture of solidarity and hospitality. Our hosts' exceptional hospitality and organizational efforts have made this event possible. We are fortunate to convene in a country rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty. As an Ivorian saying goes, "He who has no hospitality is not worth a handshake." This reflects the warmth and generosity of the Ivorian people, which we are privileged to experience.

Our journey, since the SER of Curaçao assumed the presidency of AICESIS during the hybrid meeting of the General Assembly of AICESIS on November 1st, 2023, in Moscow, hosted by the Civic Chamber of the Russian

Federation, has been marked by significant challenges and milestones aimed at addressing inequalities in the world of work. Our comprehensive Presidency's roadmap on broad and inclusive growth, adopted by the General Assembly, includes several key initiatives.

Last November, the joint ILO-AICESIS conference in Athens laid the foundation for our current efforts. The Athens Declaration has provided us with a strategic framework to combat inequalities, emphasizing partnerships at national, regional, and multilateral levels.

Inequalities persist significantly among various groups, including gender disparities and wage gaps. Globally, women earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, with the gap widening for women of color, immigrant

women, and mothers, who face additional barriers in the labor market. This gender pay gap remains substantial even after accounting for factors like education and experience, indicating the deep-rooted nature of occupational segregation and discrimination.

Moreover, migrants and refugees face numerous challenges that exacerbate inequalities. They often experience barriers to accessing healthcare, employment, and social services, which are further complicated by language differences, cultural barriers, and discrimination. For instance, migrant children, particularly those in urban areas, face significant health disparities compared to their non-migrant peers, influenced by socioeconomic factors and parental education levels.

In the labor market, migrants and minority ethnic groups are more likely to accept unfavorable working conditions and are disproportionately represented in lower-paying jobs, amplifying economic disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted these inequities, with minority workers facing greater employment instability and health risks.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that include improving access to healthcare, ensuring fair labor practices, and fostering inclusive policies that consider the unique challenges faced by underprivileged and migrant populations. By building on the frameworks established by initiatives like the Athens Declaration, we can work towards reducing these pervasive inequalities and promoting a more equitable and inclusive society.

Dear colleagues, esteemed guests,

Since we assumed the presidency of this prestigious and renowned international association, we have established platforms for sharing experiences and best practices. The sessions in Athens and subsequent workshops provided critical insights into how different countries are addressing inequalities in their labor markets.

Through various research initiatives, including a comprehensive questionnaire and a notable webinar on February 19, 2024, we have gathered critical data and insights that are instrumental in shaping our strategies to combat inequalities in the world of work. Our findings

revealed significant wage disparities between genders, inadequate social protection for informal workers, and limited access to vocational training for marginalized groups. These efforts have highlighted diverse challenges and innovative solutions implemented globally. The webinar, organized under the leadership of the SER of Curaçao as Chair of AICESIS, convened representatives from various Economic and Social Councils worldwide. Discussions centered on critical issues such as inter-regional cooperation, ensuring meticulous implementation of the current Presidential Roadmap within the ambit of all member entities, emphasizing tailored interventions to uplift vulnerable sectors within our societies to ensure the inclusivity of economic advancement initiatives and the quintessential role of scientific research in our journey

towards broad-based prosperity and societal upliftment. Scholarly inquiry in fostering economic development and social equity was a significant highlight of the webinar, where members were urged to actively participate in research to articulate a sustainability index for AICESIS, affirming our position as an essential contributor to the international discourse on this matter.

Our focus has also been on strengthening the capacity of national institutions. By facilitating the exchange of information and providing tools and programs of support, starting within our region of Latin America and the Caribbean, AICESIS aims to empower these institutions to develop and implement integrated strategies to combat inequalities. We will continue this ambitious endeavor during our presidency.

A critical component of our efforts has been the robust cooperation agreement between AICESIS and the ILO. Established in 2005 and renewed in 2018, this partnership underscores our shared commitment to tackling social and labor challenges through collective expertise and coordinated actions. This agreement aligns our objectives with the framework of the UN 2030 Agenda and focuses on institutionalized social dialogue, tripartism, and the promotion of participatory democracy.

This collaboration has been instrumental in advancing the Decent Work Agenda, which aims to improve economic and working conditions globally. The ILO, with its unique tripartite structure, brings together governments, employers, and workers to set international labor standards, develop policies, and devise programs that promote decent

work for all. This partnership has enabled AICESIS to leverage the ILO's extensive resources and expertise, enhancing our ability to address the multifaceted challenges of inequality in the world of work.

An exemplary manifestation of this collaboration was the involvement of the ILO during the meetings and workshops of the regional network of Economic and Social Councils (ESC) and Similar Institutions (SI) of Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place three weeks ago in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on May 9 and 10. These sessions, organized with the cooperation of our esteemed colleagues and friends from the ESC of Spain, focused on three current and shared-interest issues: social dialogue as a tool for strengthening democracy and addressing current challenges in the Ibero-American region; the contribution of

institutionalized social dialogue to public policies; and sustainability and climate change. Additionally, the collaboration among Economic and Social Councils and other institutions within the Ibero-American space was discussed.

Later this year, we are poised to renew our cooperation agreement with the ILO. This renewal signifies our continued commitment to this fruitful partnership. In preparation, we have submitted a detailed paper outlining our achievements and identifying areas for enhancement. This renewal will pave the way for future collaborative endeavors aimed at strengthening social dialogue and promoting sustainable development. We look forward to building on our successes and addressing new challenges with the same dedication and vigor.

Permit me, Honorable Mr. President of AICESIS, dear colleagues, and esteemed guests, to share some preliminary key findings from the recently conducted questionnaire, which gathered comprehensive data from 30 national Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions worldwide. The questionnaire aimed to understand how institutions align with the concept of "Broad & Inclusive Growth" as defined in Curaçao's Presidency Roadmap of AICESIS. Here are some noteworthy insights:

- Most institutions reported strong alignment with the theme of "Broad and Inclusive Growth," emphasizing socio-cultural and spatial-ecological factors alongside financial and economic dimensions.

- Common challenges identified include limited financial resources, resistance to policy reforms, lack of stakeholder engagement, and insufficient data or research. These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions and collaborative efforts.
- Institutions have set specific objectives such as increasing diversity among dialogue participants, promoting equal access to dialogue platforms for underrepresented groups, and incorporating a wide range of socioeconomic perspectives.
- Measurable indicators established to track progress include the number and diversity of participants in dialogues, the frequency and quality of policy recommendations made, and changes in

socioeconomic equality metrics. Recognizing the diversity of regions, the questionnaire allowed for regional customization in responses, capturing unique challenges and opportunities across different geographic areas.

In alignment with the ILO's global campaign "This Way to Social Justice," our focus as an international association remains on crucial areas such as decent job creation, universal social protection, education and lifelong learning, protection of workers' rights, gender equality, and fair globalization. These efforts are essential as high levels of inequality continue to pose significant human and economic costs, threatening progress on the UN's Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). As ILO Director-General Gilbert F. Houngbo stated, "The depth, breadth, and repercussions of contemporary inequalities necessitate a comprehensive approach focusing on both distribution and redistribution mechanisms and policies."

As we engage in these discussions, I encourage each of you to actively participate, share your experiences, and consider how the best practices presented today can be adapted to your regional and national contexts. Whether it is implementing inclusive hiring practices, developing policies that protect gig economy workers, or ensuring fair wages for all, our collective wisdom and collaboration are our greatest assets in this fight against inequalities. Let us leverage our shared knowledge to create tangible impacts on the ground, ensuring that no worker is left behind.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all participants for your dedication and commitment. Let us use this opportunity to forge stronger partnerships, learn from each other, and advance our shared goal of creating a fair and equitable world of work. Forging stronger partnerships is vital, not only because it aligns with SDG 17, which emphasizes the importance of revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development, but also as a powerful means to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of all SDGs. Strengthened partnerships foster inclusive solutions that are crucial for addressing complex global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

Thank you.