



Speech by

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President of the Republic

on the occasion

of the

“ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work”

Monday 21st August 2017

Geneva

Honourable Mr. Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden,

Mr. Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO

Excellencies,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to extend my gratitude to the Director-General for inviting me to co-chair, with His Excellency the Prime Minister of Sweden, the Global Commission on the Future of Work, one of the major Initiatives to mark ILO's centenary.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the world of work is in a state of flux, changing as never before, driven by inexorable forces that are impacting manufacturing and trade, global supply chains and the digitalisation of the global economy to name just a few.

We are also witnessing increasing job losses globally since the economic crisis in 2008. It is an undeniable fact that many jobs of today will be automated tomorrow, with profound consequences for people, particularly youth who will face shrinking job opportunities.

In this context, the Future of Work Initiative is a unique opportunity for us to catalyse a constructive, participatory dialogue and to gather the evidence and harness the global expertise needed to address the emerging trends and shape the transformations occurring in the world of work.

But as we look to the future we must do so from a range of perspectives and situations that place the well-being of people at the front and centre of the agenda.

I commend the ILO for reaching out to each country and each region. I also congratulate the different stakeholders including tripartite constituents, international organizations, research institutions, and civil society for their robust engagement in the consultations that have taken place so far.

The inclusive and participatory approach adopted by the ILO is in line with its mandate to advance social justice as well as consistent with the spirit and principle of “Leaving No One Behind” enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me share with you why I enthusiastically accepted the Director-General's invitation and to be part of this pioneering initiative.

First of all, it stems from a deep personal and professional interest in what the future of work holds for our youth both on the African continent and beyond.

It is presently unclear how we can best secure a job-led future while at the same time creating new jobs and new forms of employment that can harness the creative energies of young people.

The applications of artificial intelligence, rising automation, rise of the gig economy and Internet of Things are all leading to transformations of the world of work as we know it today. Our key challenge is to balance these powerful forces based on the principles of balanced development, inclusion and sustainability.

As a female scientist and academic, I strongly believe that the first response to address concerns about the impact of technology breakthroughs on the future of work, will be to encourage more students,

especially girls and young women, to study the fields known as “S.T.E.M” – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics”.

By nature young educated people are optimists with regard to the relation between new and emerging technologies and the world of work as they potentially stand to benefit the most.

Secondly I am convinced that we will only be able to manage transformations successfully if we keep the interests of people, at the forefront of our efforts.

In Mauritius, which has undergone rapid transformation since its independence, from an agriculture based economy by diversifying into the manufacturing, tourism, financial services sectors and now successfully transitioning to a services-based economy, we have always considered human capital to be our most valuable asset.

It is important to think about labour market policies and reforms holistically and innovatively. A worker who has worked his or her whole life in agriculture cannot simply be shifted to another industry as one sector declines and the other rises. Public policies must be geared towards

igniting innovation, building skills and empowering people to perform at their best.

For instance, as Mauritius became less dependent on the sugar cane industry, a voluntary retirement scheme was implemented which included support measures in terms of cash payment, land allocations, housing loans at preferential rates, training for younger workers and counselling.

More recently, Mauritius has introduced the workfare programme for workers who have lost jobs. The programme provides support for job placement, skills training or support for creating a Small and Medium Enterprise – thereby effectively preventing the worker from falling into poverty traps.

We remain committed to the creation of decent jobs and we are moving towards the introduction of a National Minimum Wage.

Thirdly, we also recognize that the megatrends identified by ILO cannot be addressed in isolation.

For many countries, and especially a Small Island Developing State like Mauritius, climate change is one such challenge that not only would affect

the future of work but also adversely impact our current way of life and future generations.

Mauritius has started the shift towards environmental sustainability and aims to increase green jobs to 10% of our workforce by 2020 but this shift requires new types of jobs, skills and technology that cannot be sourced nationally.

It is more than ever necessary to sustain the political will to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement and to engage on the path to low-carbon and climate-resilient development within the framework of decent work.

Through the work of the Global Commission I hope we can shed light on these issues and help member countries to chart pathways towards a just transition that places people at the front and centre of our global effort.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would be remiss if I did not mention one of the defining megatrends of our time – Migration. Forced migration has been the subject of intense debate, one that has frequently shed more heat than light on global conversations.

As a Small Island Developing State, Mauritius has however always tried to harness migration and Diasporas as a positive force for development and as an inevitable consequence of globalisation.

Fourthly Mauritius like many other countries will have to confront the demographic challenge of an ageing population. Mauritius has an ageing population and due to a combination of different factors including falling fertility rates and increased migration, may see its population declining as from 2022 i.e. in 5 years. This would have serious implications for the future of work in our small country.

Creating jobs for youth is one of the most pressing challenges facing many countries. Our challenge is to increase youth employability by shaping policies, programs and projects that can help youth adapt nimbly to the constantly changing world of work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The changing realities of the world of work are affecting different countries differently and we are witnessing the meaning of work being

defined in ways that were unknown before. For example, in the new gig or freelance economy, are we discussing employees or contractors?

How these issues will play out will matter hugely for securing job-led, inclusive growth in emerging economies.

This is best illustrated through the views expressed in the national dialogues where for some countries, work was seen as a matter of survival, whereas for another state, owing to technological progress, work would simply be a matter of choice, only performed for reasons of self-fulfilment not survival.

The Global Commission has a mandate of guiding and shaping the work on the future of work initiative in the context of different cultures and attitudes towards work through dialogue, in-depth discussions and other participatory activities, which will pave the way for the Centenary Session of the International Labour Conference in 2019.

On our way to a new future world of work, I fervently hope that we will tackle forcefully the abhorrent practices of child labour and human

trafficking as relics of the past and collectively end gender inequality in the work place for the benefit of all.

I strongly encourage all countries and stakeholders to come up with comprehensive recommendations and novel ideas on how to address the opportunities and challenges of the future of work.

We can accomplish this by “putting people first”, by recognising that labour is more than simply a commodity in the labour market in the spirit of the ILO Constitution, or even just a factor of production.

This work is about human beings who have aspirations for themselves, their families and their communities. Our time for action is now.

Thank you.