

Opening Remarks by Mr. Oktavianto Pasaribu, the Deputy Director of the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific, and the ILO Country Office for Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, International Labour Organization (ILO)

Date: 11 December 2024

Event: National Labour Economic Conference 2024: Economic and Employment Recovery and the Path to LDC Graduation

Venue: Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra, Phnom Penh

Introduction

- H.E Mr. Heng Sour, Minister of Labour and Vocational Training
- Ms. Alissar Chaker, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme
- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests, and Colleagues

Introduction / Greetings

Arun Soursdei / Good morning.

It is my great honour to address you today at the National Labour Economic Conference 2024. I would like to extend my warmest greetings to all of you, including government representatives, policymakers, employers and workers representatives, academics, national and international organizations. I deeply appreciate the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) for organizing this important conference and for its unwavering commitment to advancing Cambodia's labour market.

I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY) phase 3 programme, which has been instrumental in making this conference possible.

Importance of the Conference

The theme of this year's conference, "Economic and Employment Recovery and the Path to LDC Graduation," is both timely and critical. Cambodia stands at a pivotal moment as it prepares for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. This transition presents both challenges and opportunities that must be carefully managed to ensure sustainable development and inclusive economic growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened work inequalities and exposed weaknesses in social-protection systems globally. For this reason, the UN Secretary-General launched the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, which aims to accelerate countries' efforts to create 400 million decent jobs and extend social protection coverage to 3.8 billion people worldwide who are currently excluded.

I congratulate the Royal Government of Cambodia for its high-level commitment and international leadership as a pathfinder country under this programme, and particularly thank His Excellency Minister and his team for their strong contribution to establishing the national roadmap for this strategic collaboration.

This conference provides a platform for us to discuss and strategize on how to navigate these challenges and leverage the opportunities that lie ahead.

ILO's Commitment to Decent Work Agenda

At the International Labour Organization (ILO), we are steadfast in our commitment to promoting decent work for all, including young people. The Decent Work Agenda, which focuses on creating jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialogue, fully aligns with the objectives of this conference.

We believe that decent work is the foundation for sustainable development and inclusive growth. It is through decent work that individuals can achieve their full potential, support their families, and contribute to their communities.

Key Issues and Objectives of the Conference

1) Labour Market Trends and Economic Policies

Understanding national and regional labour market dynamics and formulating inclusive, job-rich economic policies are crucial for Cambodia's development. We must ensure that our policies promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth through diversification and structural change, creating quality job opportunities in key growth sectors that support both workers and businesses.

2) Human Capital Development

Strategic human capital development is essential as Cambodia prepares for LDC graduation. Investing in skills development and lifelong learning, particularly for youth, women, and marginalized groups, will contribute to a better-skilled and future-proof workforce that can adapt to the shifting demands of industries and contribute to economic resilience while improving livelihoods

3) Active Labour Market Policies

Active labour market policies play a vital role in improving labour market outcomes, particularly when adjustments in the labour market are needed to support economic growth and diversification. Public employment services are key to supporting a smooth transition from education and training to the labour market and enhancing employability. We must focus on policies that foster innovation and promote effective active labour market programmes.

4) Skill System Development

Aligning skill system development with the anticipated transition through LDC graduation, alongside imperatives to raise skills levels and reduce inequalities will be equally critical in meeting the challenge of successful graduation. Collaborative dialogue and partnership between the private sector, policymakers, educational institutions and workers' organizations are vital in developing a more skilled and more productive workforce, that can respond to current labour market demand and meet the anticipated competitive conditions of post-LDC scenarios.

5) Social Security Systems

Robust social security systems are vital for providing a safety net for workers and their families. Comprehensive social protection measures, including healthcare, pensions and unemployment benefits, are essential to mitigate the risks faced by workers during economic transitions and to alleviate poverty.

6) Formalization of the Economy

With informality standing at 88% of the economy, addressing the challenges and the barriers faced by micro-small medium enterprises, self-employed workers and informal workers will be necessary to address Decent Work deficits. The implementation of the National Strategy for the Informal Economy Development stands to increase productivity for enterprises and facilitate a safer and equitable work for all workers in Cambodia.

Link to DEY's Objective

This conference also directly contributes to the objectives of the Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY) phase 3 programme. One of the key objectives of DEY phase 3 is to enhance youth access to labour market opportunities for decent and productive employment. By improving labour market information and enhancing active labour market programmes, we can better match young people with job opportunities that suit their skills and aspirations.

The discussions and insights generated here will play a crucial role in informing policies and programmes that support youth employment. By focusing on skill development, active labour market policies, and robust social security systems, we can create an environment where young people can thrive and contribute to Cambodia's economic growth.

ILO's Support and Collaboration

The ILO is proud to support this conference, supported by the SDC under the DEY phase 3 programme. Our ongoing initiatives in Cambodia aim to enhance employment policies, social protection, and vocational training. We are committed to working closely with the Cambodian government and other stakeholders to achieve the objectives of this conference.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this conference is a crucial step in shaping Cambodia's labour market policies and preparing Cambodia for LDC graduation and for achieving the goals under the Global Accelerator National Roadmap. Through open dialogue and collaboration, we can gain deeper insights into the topics focused on in this conference.

I am optimistic about the outcomes of this conference and the collective efforts towards economic and employment recovery. Together, we can promote decent work and inclusive growth in Cambodia.

Thank you very much His Excellency Minister and all, for your attention, and I look forward to our fruitful discussions.