



Special Meeting of the Economic and Social Council

*The future of work: towards a productive, inclusive and sustainable
global society*

ECLAC Headquarters – Santiago, Chile

Presentation of key messages

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Statement by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN and vice-president of the ECOSOC

Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Let me congratulate you, Paula, for your wonderful hosting of this conference. And to you Minister, thank you for sending Paula to New York to provide us with such inspiration and leadership. It's deeply appreciated.

Colleagues, I just wanted to say a few words to try my best with the assistance of my friends from UN DESA and others involved in the conference to summarize the wonderful conclusions.

It's been an extraordinary time for us. Many of us spent our first day visiting a factory that was focusing on sustainability, on the circular economy, on leaving things better than what was found and creating a very efficient business with well-paying jobs at the same time. And I think it was a good way for us to start because we I think saw at firsthand how productive

employment and decent work can be a catalyst for the achievement of all the other SDGs.

Obstacles to the creation of decent work, put poverty eradication, and the reduction of inequality, and all of the SDGs at risk.

We are reminded that work is not a commodity. But it is a source of personal dignity, family stability and peaceful societies, as well as prosperous societies. It is a key pillar of strong social partnerships, but we can all agree that the future of work. Just like the future of our economies, the future of the natural world and the future of our societies is not predetermined.

The best way to predict the future, as we were told today by Mr. Somavia, is to invent it. And he's right. We must put our principles and the phrase that's found at the very beginning of the Charter, we, the peoples of the United Nations, we must put both principles and people at the heart of our decisions. Many of the emphasized how the current multiple crises, including COVID-19, climate change, growing conflicts and macroeconomic instability, have helped to turn the world upside down. These crises hit labour markets that are already fragile.

Informal employment has been stubbornly high in most developing countries for decades. Other forms of precarious work have been growing well before the current crises.

Ironically, we are also seeing a growth of precarious work in advanced economies as well. Managing transformations in the world of work requires a change in our thinking, and then a change in our actions.

The recognition that decent jobs will not be an automatic outcome of growth or of technological innovation, but that they require concerted action. A willingness to think more about the year 2100, a willingness to embrace what indigenous people in Canada call 7 generational thinking. Thinking long term, thinking deep into the future. As to how our actions have consequences. And yes, a move away from considering emerging technologies as an end to themselves and towards seeing them as a critical

means of improving people's well-being productivity and to achieving the SDGs.

If we do not rethink how we approach the world of work we risk accelerating and deepening existing inequalities. People at high risk of vulnerability in the labour market, as we heard today, women, young people, low skilled workers, persons with disabilities, migrants, older persons and indigenous peoples will pay the price if we do not act together.

There is broad agreement that we've heard today on the essential role that quality education, skills training play and adapting to the future work. An unrelenting focus on learning must be maintained. Lifelong education must be promoted, and social protection systems expanded to manage the technological revolution and a just and equitable transition towards green economies.

Extending more value and providing greater protection to care work that is currently undervalued, underpaid and undertrained can, in fact, create jobs and trigger new opportunities, particularly for women to participate in the labour market on terms that are equal and fair.

Preparing for the future of work now more than ever, also requires closing the digital divide. This divide cannot be separated from the energy transition, as much of the global population lacks electricity. Our means must meet the test of sustainability.

Let's make no mistake. Quality education, skills, training and access to digital technologies will not help workers find jobs or escape poverty if there are not enough decent jobs for everyone. We need to find a virtuous circle of economic, environmental and social policies that will meet the test of a sustainability that is deeply and widely shared in all of our societies and all of our countries.

While countries must do more in managing changes in the world of work, they can only be effective with international cooperation. The transformations that will shape the future of work respect no boundaries. We must emphasize that what local governments do matters. What national

governments do matters, but also what global institutions can do is to strengthen the processes that will ensure coherence and a much better execution of policy.

I also want to emphasize something, and we saw it today. We heard it today and yesterday, and we not only heard it, we saw it and we felt it – the participation of civil society is critical. It makes a difference. It's what also helps define what ECOSOC does. Because we do not believe that this is only a matter for nation states. It is also a matter for all of society working together.

We heard today about the – what – and also about the – how. I think that was a good way of putting it.

Our vision should be bold, but our means must be pragmatic, inventive and share best practices.

Throughout the three last three days, we've heard about Hernan Santa Cruz, and I think it's important for us to recognize those of us who are not Chilean – to say that if it were not for Hernan Santa Cruz we would not have the social rights component apart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And in fact, one of the great things about the Universal Declaration is that it does not make a distinction. Between individual rights and freedoms, which are critically important, and social rights which actually guarantee solidarity.

Finally, time is of the essence. We all understand this to make progress towards inclusive, sustainable societies rather than let our partnerships unravel, we must act now.

We have learned these last three days that social rights and obligations matter. Of course, freedom and equality are important, but so is solidarity. The practical expression of what it is that we owe each other, how we express gratitude for the gifts that have been bestowed on us. And our obligations to each other and the generations that are yet to be born.

Thank you, colleagues. Thank you very much for the opportunity.