

**Committee/Council: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee**

**Issue: Establishing global minimum working condition standards**

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**Position: Co-Chair**

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## Introduction

*“Unlimited exploitation of cheap labor-power is the sole foundation of their power to compete”- Karl Marx*

Nowadays, the age of globalization has rendered the economies of our world totally interlinked. The labor market is no longer regional or national, as more and more workers have the tendency to seek opportunities outside the limited boundaries of their countries. At the same time, the phenomenon of international investments and capital's transmission among states has become the norm. In such an occurrence of the international labor market, it is imperative to take into consideration the already established minimum working condition standards, as well as inaugurate a new era of better administration of workers across the globe. Arguably, minimum working condition standards are capable of improving peoples' lives and dignity and contributing to the development of people as human beings. Consequently, the international community should be committed to ensuring fair treatment for every worker through the establishment of decent working conditions, thus paving the way for the punishment of employers or companies which violate the fundamental and inalienable human rights.

We have observed that in recent years action has been taken by international agencies to deal with the issue. Nonetheless, more efforts are needed to succeed the utmost results. Many conventions have been signed, thus creating a global framework of labor standards and providing governments with guidelines and policies which have been adopted in national legislations and promote safety in the workplace. Almost all member states have agreed on the aforementioned framework, yet it is not observed that they comply with that. The UN needs to take into consideration the gaps in both legislation and compliance and create at least the appropriate international legal framework which will make first and foremost countries and afterward individual employers compromise with the regulations.

We should not neglect the fact that UN acknowledges that crucial issue. In the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, one of the issues which ought to be tackled is the question of decent working conditions and employment. UN claims that by

achieving the 17 goals in 2030, the member states will have contributed to the total transformation of our world. We are undoubtedly able to understand the importance of the establishment of global minimum working condition standards.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Labor market

The market in which employers look and compete for workers and in which workers look and compete for employment. In other words, in the labor market employers try to find the best workers while simultaneously workers strive to find the most satisfying and lucrative job. (As defined by the *Collins Dictionary* and the *Economic times*)

### Working conditions

The conditions in which an individual or staff works, including but not limited to such things as amenities, physical environment, stress and noise levels, the degree of safety or danger, and the like. (As defined by the *Business Dictionary*)

### Decent work

It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. (As defined by the *International Labor Organization*)

### International labor standards

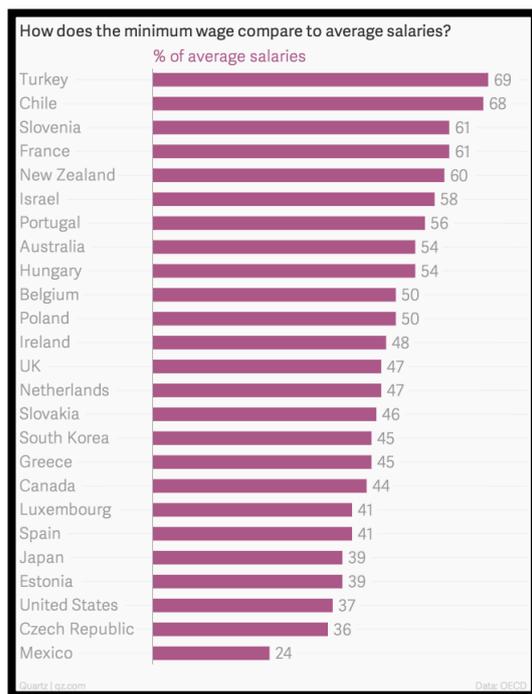
Such standards are legal instruments which define basic minimum working standards. They are drawn up by representatives of governments, employers, and workers so as to represent the work-related principles of the major actors in the global economy. (As defined by the *International Labor Organization*)

## Background Information

It would be useful for the delegates to bear in mind some remarkable areas of attention related to corporate social responsibility and human rights.

### Wages

International Human Rights stress out the importance of having an adequate standard of living. The International Labor Organization is committed to making all member states adopt minimum wage policies which are capable of providing the workers not only with basic needs such as housing, water, food, and clothing, but



also an amount of money at their disposal. Other goods such as health care, education, pension, and insurance should be covered by the minimum wage. Furthermore, employers need to cater for the attribution of wages in a timely manner, most commonly in monthly basis. Some economists and sociologists have claimed that the reduction of wages and the respective reduction of prices in the economy may trigger moral loss amongst the workers who can hesitate to trust their employers, thus undermining the working disposition and being counterproductive. So, the purpose of the minimum wage seems to be not

only the protection of all workers against overwhelmingly low pay but also the protection of enterprises' productivity and quality. ILO has the tendency to implement minimum wage as a policy for the elimination of poverty and the coverage of basic needs in the most vulnerable and socially deprived people. Moreover, we need to remember the fact that minimum wages may vary between all countries, as their economies are not the same. Consequently, the level of the minimum wage is a combination of the governments' policy, as well as the maintenance of workers in adequate standards of living. International agencies function as supervisors to ensure that human rights are not violated in such combinations. Last but not least, at the left side of the page, the delegates can observe the comparison between minimum wage and average salaries in 34 relatively rich and developed countries of the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development. The data were published in 2014.

### Working time

One of the older concerns of the labor legislation seems to be the regulation of working time. The international community has recognized the fact that working long and excessive hours poses a notable menace to workers' health and their families. Taking into consideration the above, the ILO decided to establish the regulative framework which entails limited work and adequate rest periods for workers, thus ensuring both productivity and quality. It is commonly known that in many developing countries rest periods are not provided to workers at all. Subsequently, workers undergo a subversive exploitation which tends to infringe on their rudimentary human rights.

## Occupational safety and health

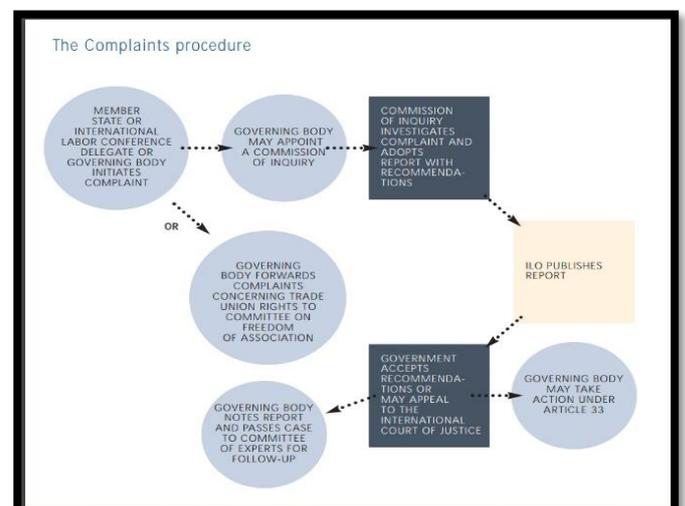
The ILO constitutional principles are predestined to promote both safe and healthy working environment. Specifically, it is provided that *“the protection of the worker against sickness, disease, and injury arising out of employment”* is a fundamental prerequisite for social justice. However, the reality is more than desperate. More than 2.3 million people die each year due to occupational accidents or work-related diseases according to ILO statistics. The violation of ILO conventions seems to happen continuously, not only in developing states but also in developed ones. Actually, national legislations are not in compliance with international laws and do not have the means to impose remarkable sanctions and punishments to deviant employers who do not compromise with the codes of conduct and the relevant rules. To make matters worse, the international jurisdictional gap and the absence of ratification by some states has adversely contributed to the total deterioration of the issue.

The International Labor Organization has discerned some subjects that are covered by the international labor standards. Apart from the aforementioned areas, delegates will need to bear in mind such subjects which are extremely important for the establishment of minimum working conditions. There are briefly pertained all the crucial subjects directly stemming from the ILO data and documents.

Freedom of association	Migrant workers
Forced labor	Domestic workers
Child labor	Social security
Labor administration	Employment security
Employment policy	Vocational guidance and training
Employment promotion	Equality of opportunity and treatment
Social policy	Maternity protection

## The Complaints Procedure

ILO conventions have some elements of the supranational legislation. In fact, ILO conventions have supranational jurisdiction only in case of ratification by a state and ratification is not compulsory. Otherwise, ILO has not legislative power and it is not capable of making states comply with its regulations. In the case of





## International Trade Union Confederation

*“Labor unions are the leading force for democratization and progress”*

-Noam Chomsky

In 2006, after the merger of some independent trade unions, the ITUC finally created. Its principal aims are *“the promotion of workers’ rights and interests through the cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning, and advocacy within the major global institutions”*<sup>1</sup>. The Union caters not only for workers’ dignity, justice, and safety at work but also for the society in general. The fair distribution of wealth among nations and people and the access to public goods for all are acts that bring away its humanitarian purposes and work. Arguably, the Union is able to provide the so-called *“Solidarity Funds”*, which are destined to support the development and practice of independent and democratic unionism, as well as assist victims of repression or acts that are not in accordance with the nonnegotiable freedoms.

## China

The People’s Republic of China is commonly known across the globe for its poor working conditions and the great violations of corporate social responsibility. The Chinese government has established new labor laws, thus ostensibly providing workers with greater rights. Yet, such efforts did not arrange the safety status of workers in the workplace. The statistics demonstrate that almost 200 people died per day in their workplace due to accidental causes in 2012. Furthermore, other investigation sheds light on diseases triggered during the building of skyscrapers and infrastructure in China. Lung disease and other respiratory illnesses from dust have killed the quarter of the workers and the remaining is currently suffering. Apart from the absence of protection in the workplace, low wages and the prohibition of independent trade unions do not let workers defend their fundamental rights and make a living. Many such tragic paradigms constitute literally a scourge in the Chinese labor market and the international community should be committed to dealing with them for the total protection of the workers in the most populous state in the world.

## Cambodia

According to allegations stemming from both the Human Rights Watch and the International Trade Union Confederation, the Kingdom of Cambodia seems to be one of the worst places to work. Many well-known clothing brands have garment factories located in Cambodia. The HRW places emphasis on the fact that the situation has aggravated so much, that elements of modern slavery can be observed. The criminally abusive conditions in Cambodia’s factories give the opportunity

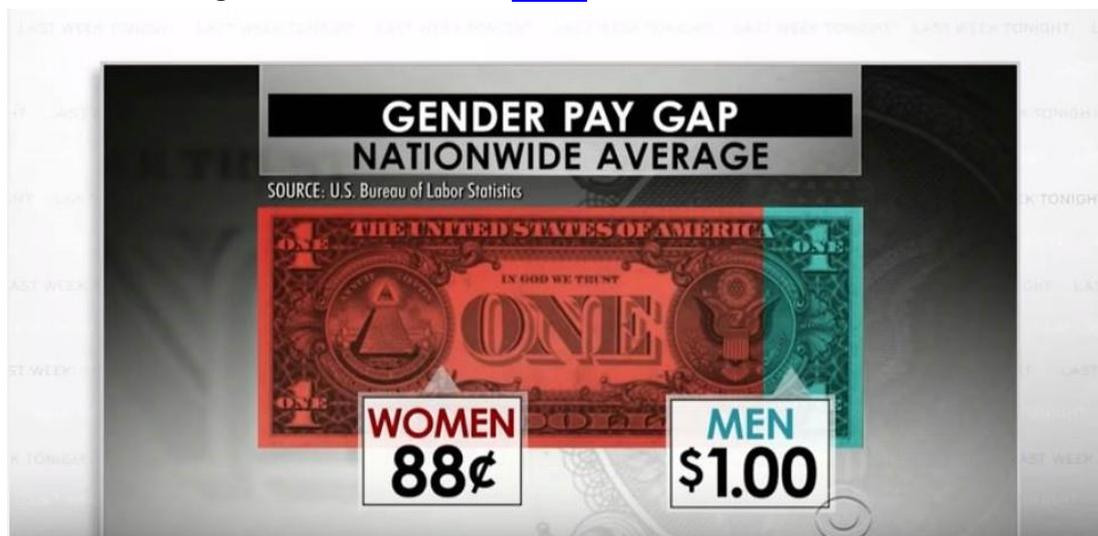
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ituc-csi.org/>

window to employers to make a profit and provide themselves with beneficial advantages while infringing on basic human rights. Actually, reports from HRW claim that factories hire children and women who are visibly pregnant and have the tendency to take advantage of their economic deprivation. The ITUC emphasizes on the fact that national legislation in Cambodia spells out some labor rights, notwithstanding workers are treated by employers as slaves with no rights and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair and abusive practices.

### The United States of America

Generally, the USA is founded on the principle that good, honest, hard work is rewarded. Punctuality of workers ~~is~~ highly appreciated and money can be easily made by skillful employees. Although, bosses are capable of firing employees deemed no longer necessary and there is no protection and security for such occurrences. The legal minimum salary is \$7 per hour, yet average salaries may range from \$8 to \$12 per hour depending on the work's title. The fact that in most cases there is insurance and medical care for workers renders the USA labor market a relatively safe workplace for the workforce of 139.4 million people. Notwithstanding, the American labor market seems to be a demanding place to work for women. Gender pay gap is really widespread and sometimes it constitutes a notable obstacle for a woman to find a lucrative job. This means that a woman in the United States is paid 88 cents for every dollar paid to a man, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Wage gap can be negatively larger for women of color who face much greater discrimination. \_\_\_\_\_



### European Union

The European Law provides all members of the European Union with regulations concerning working conditions. Many such regulations include *“working time, part-time, and fixed-term work, temporary workers, and the posting of workers”*. EU supports the importance of all these areas in order to ensure the high levels of employment and social cohesion throughout its borders. Additionally, European

treaties define minimum working conditions that ought to be respected by the member states. The Commission is committed to putting forward legislative proposals to the Parliament and the Council, as well as encouraging social partners to advance legal labor documents in order to succeed better implementation.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May 1, 1886	On May 1, 1886, Chicago workers made the city the center of the national movement for an eight-hour day. It was the beginning of the “ <i>May Day</i> ”, the international workers’ holiday
1919	The International Labor Organization was formed
1920	The World Confederation of Labor was founded
1949	The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was founded after the split within the World Federation of Trade Unions
May 1968	In France, the student movement developed into a general nationwide strike
1995	The World Trade Organization was founded to regulate international trade and promote fair trade agreements
2006	The International Trade Union Confederation was founded after the merger of the ICFTU and WCL and other independent unions

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No.29)

This fundamental convention outlaws any form of compulsory and forced labor, which is defined as “*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily*”. At the same time, it is provided the appropriate framework for the punishment of states that have ratified the convention, yet they do not comply with its regulations.

- [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C029](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029)

### Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No.87)

This fundamental convention supports the right of workers and employers to establish and join organizations of their own choice, as well as, *“draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities and to formulate their programs”*.

- [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CO\\_DE:C087](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CO_DE:C087)

### Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No.100)

This convention establishes the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.

- [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CO\\_DE:C100](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CO_DE:C100)

### Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No.138)

This convention sets the general minimum age for admission to work 15 years (13 for light work). Although, some regulations are pertained and exceptions may be possible in cases of economic deprivation and educational insufficiency.

- [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CO\\_DE:C138](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CO_DE:C138)

### Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155) and its Protocol of 2002

The convention provides the governments with a coherent national occupational safety and health policy, as well as guidelines to take action in order to promote decent working conditions within enterprises. The policies need to be developed by taking into account national practices and conditions.

- [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CO\\_DE:C155](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CO_DE:C155)
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## **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

UN struggled from the very first years of its creation to establish global minimum working condition standards. Since the creation of the International Labor Organization, many conventions have been signed and ratified by many member

states. The specialized agency of the UN which is competent for labor standards has provided the international community with many regulations, conventions, recommendations, and guidelines in order to render controversial labor problems nonexistent. Many fundamental conventions constitute an integral part of the ILO efforts to deal with the issue. Nevertheless, violations of such conventions are more than usual in the daily working life. Both national and multinational companies infringe on human rights and refrain from respecting international rules. For the purpose of neutralizing the issue, ILO has established a supervisory system, which is capable of promoting and applying properly international labor standards. Actually, there are two types of supervisory mechanisms. Initially, there is a regular system of supervision which periodically examines reports submitted by member states concerning measures that have been taken to implement ratified conventions. Secondly, special procedures can be used and consist of the complaints procedure and the representation procedure of general application. Delegates need also to bear in mind the general surveys conducted by ILO, the provision of technical assistance and training to member states and the general constitutional principles. Such efforts assist ILO to supervise that ratified conventions are implemented, yet until now it is not feasible to succeed the optimum results. Many violations continue to happen on a daily basis and the already established labor rights are not respected. Delegates will need to come up with more solutions as far as labor standards are concerned and their implementation.

## **Possible Solutions**

The humanitarian approach to the issue of labor standards has decisively taught us that the current situation tends to convert into an exploitation of socially and economically deprived people who do their best to secure basic goods. Member states are convinced that such exploitation doesn't comply with the purposes and principles of their organization. Consequently, immediate actions ought to be taken in order to tackle the issue of minimum working conditions.

To begin with, the delegates will need to create resolutions that regulate minimum working conditions, as well as bear in mind the already established standards by the ILO. It would be useful to pass a resolution with an overwhelming majority in order to ensure that most member states compromise with the rules and could possibly ratify the ILO conventions in the foreseeable future.

Secondly, the delegates may reevaluate the current supervisory system of ILO in order to ensure better application of labor standards, especially in developing countries.

Furthermore, it is advisable to raise public awareness concerning the negative aspect of the issue, thus motivating more agencies and individuals to be engaged.

Moreover, the delegates may pay attention to the fact that the establishment of trade unions may be capable of offering plenty advantages to the issue. Actually,

better representation in both national and international level will bring about significant results and it will give the opportunity to workers to better defend their rights. Needless to say, that such effort will contribute to a multidimensional fight against exploitation and attention should also be paid to developing countries where there is a greater violation of labor laws.

Lastly, it would be useful to impose sanctions and punishments to countries which have ratified the conventions and do not compromise with them. Such efforts could possibly be press national governments to supervise companies that operate in their designated territories in order to dissuade violations of labor laws. This pressure should also be put on multinational companies which violate minimum working conditions and have converted working into a great exploitation of humans' nature.

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