

## **ILO Director-General Hounbo calls for collective action in the Arab states to address growing challenges in the world of work**

Gilbert F. Hounbo made his statement at this year's Arab Labour Conference in Baghdad, where he invited stakeholders in the region to join the Global Coalition for Social Justice.

BAGHDAD (ILO News) – The mounting challenges facing the world of work in the Arab region can only be addressed through concerted joint efforts and multilateral partnerships, including the Global Coalition for Social Justice, ILO Director-General Gilbert F. Hounbo told attendees at this year's Arab Labour Conference (ALC) in Baghdad.

"It is only by working towards a common vision that can we rise to the challenges facing the world of work today, seize opportunities, and advance towards a future with social justice for all," Hounbo told delegates during the ALC opening session.

The Global Coalition is an ILO-led initiative to foster multilateral cooperation, strengthen social justice globally and accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has brought together more than 200 partners so far, including governments, worker and employer organizations and civil society, including numerous partners from the Arab region.

Extending the invitation to other Arab stakeholders to join the Coalition, Hounbo announced: "This month, the League of Arab States decided to join the Coalition, an addition I am proud of and deem to be a historic feat for the ILO, the Arab world and social justice worldwide."

Hounbo participated in the opening session of the ALC, convened by the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) under the auspices of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shaya'a Al Sudani, along with a delegation of senior ILO officials including Regional Director for Arab States Ruba Jaradat.

During his address at the opening session, the Director-General expressed his profound concern at the renewed conflict in Occupied Palestinian Territory and the impact it is having on Palestinian workers and employers, as well as potential spill-over effects on the economies of neighbouring countries.

"In the last six months, tens of thousands in Gaza have lost their lives or been injured, hundreds of thousands have been displaced, and millions now face hunger, poverty, and disease," Hounbo said. "The conflict has also led to the loss

of livelihoods and jobs in Gaza and the West Bank, and risks destabilizing many economies in the region.”

To help address the labour market impact of the war, the ILO has embarked on an Emergency Response Programme for which it has launched a USD20 million appeal. Hounghbo noted to delegates that the ILO response has so far benefitted over 9,000 Gazan workers stranded in the West Bank, and it has allowed the ILO to collect data on the war’s impact on the Palestinian labour market to further help inform the agency’s response. The ILO has also partnered with the United Nations Development Programme to launch an Emergency Employment Scheme in Gaza to deliver jobs and critical health and municipal services.

In his address to the conference, the Director-General also stressed the critical role of the Arab region in the global transition towards a low-carbon economy and the potential that it holds for the region.

“By investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency, we can pave the way for a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future for the Arab world,” he said, noting that the Arab region could create ten million new jobs by 2050 through decarbonization and green industrial growth.

This year’s ALC included Arab Labour Organization Director-General Fayez Al Mutairi’s report to the conference on the impact of the technological revolution on human resources. Hounghbo said the conference was a valuable opportunity to both tackle the complex issues facing the region, including the impact of AI and technology on the world of work, and celebrate key achievements in the Arab world and.

On the sidelines of the conference, Hounghbo met with League of Arab States Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, ALO Director-General Al Mutairi, and Arab government, worker and employer representatives to discuss decent work challenges and opportunities across the region.

Hounghbo attended the ALC, held in Baghdad from 27 April to 4 May, as part of his first official visit to Iraq, where he is scheduled to meet Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, and national employer and worker representatives.