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GENEVA (ILO News) – The Decent Work Agenda is critical to stemming a potential “human tsunami of frustration” over the devastating effects of poverty, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Portia Simpson Miller, said today in an address to government, employer and worker delegates to the annual Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

“We have an obligation to address the issue of poverty in a meaningful way, or face the prospect of being caught up in the devastating wake of a human tsunami of frustration, rage and rebellion”, said Ms. Simpson Miller in her address to the International Labour Conference, adding that to confront this challenge, the search for Decent Work “is not a choice, it is a global imperative”.

Jamaica’s first woman Prime Minister and a former Minister of Labour added that the Decent Work Agenda “begins with the clear conviction that people must be at the centre of national development” and described it as “a critical pathway to creating a world that serves every man, woman and child”.

“I urge all the members of this assembly and leaders everywhere to join in this urgent mission, to eradicate poverty and misery”, she said.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia warmly welcomed the former Labour Minister as “one of our own” and recalled her participation in the Organization as “a passionate spokesperson for dignity and social justice”.

Mr. Somavia said that Jamaica is a country “open to the world, welcoming people, business and investment”, and praised the Prime Minister for being “at the heart of the challenge of tackling inequalities

that can tear societies apart, making sure that markets serve people and not the other way around”.

Ms. Simpson Miller said the path to decent and productive work faced many obstacles, including the effects of international terrorism, the negative aspects of globalization, tense and strained relationships among countries and within countries, armed conflicts, HIV/AIDS, rising oil prices and global warming.

“Yet even in the face of such daunting challenges we must continue on the journey with a strong sense of purpose.” The Decent Work Agenda, she said, “must be reflected in labour relations, community development, public and private partnerships and relations with our global neighbours. However, for lasting success at the national level, the principles of justice and equity must also apply to international relations and rules”.

“International rules need to ensure that all countries, no matter how small, have economic and trade opportunities that are fair and just”, added the Prime Minister.

Ms. Simpson Miller also referred to the importance of job creation and the experience of Jamaica, noting “we have placed economic growth with jobs at the heart of our economic plan. As a consequence, we are experiencing the lowest rate of unemployment in recent history”. But, she added, “we are still not where we want to be.”

“Economic activity must drive the creation of jobs as jobless growth is not a viable option”, the Prime Minister said. She stressed the need for the informal economy “to contribute to the decent work objectives”, and considered that greater emphasis must be directed to this area, including support for the development of micro, small- and medium-sized sustainable enterprises.

Ms. Simpson Miller recalled the words of poet and singer Bob Marley when he sang “cold ground was my bed last night and rock stone was my pillow too”, and told the ILO delegates that “the goal of my government is to ensure that no Jamaican will live that life in the future”.