

# HOUNGBO for ILO



**GILBERT F. HOUNGBO**

Candidate of Togo for the post of Director-General of the International Labour Office  
(ILO)

[www.houngboforilo.com](http://www.houngboforilo.com)

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## For a **NEW GLOBAL SOCIAL CONTRACT**

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Our time is marked by economic and social crises that have been unfolding over the past few years, further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The warning signs have been numerous: **worsening inequalities, the global environmental crisis, demographic transformation**, the rise of "**de-globalization**" movements and the recurrence of **economic crises**.

Major **challenges also persist in the areas covered by the ILO's mandate**: 152 million children worldwide are obliged to work, while 68 million youths who want to work cannot find a job; women earn less than men in the same job or occupation and more than half of the global labour force must seek out a living in the informal economy, without rights, protection and voice. Those dynamics induce **fear of the future, including fear of change, especially in the context of digital and technological transformations**. Social justice is endangered, locally, nationally and globally, and so are peace and stability.

At the same time, major opportunities have emerged. **The expansion of the digital economy and the progress in artificial intelligence** have opened up prospects for millions of people. Yet the general impression is that of an overall worrying state of play. Moreover, States – more needed than ever – face colossal challenges, such as the growing heterogeneity of forms of employment and work, and the financing of social protection systems.

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## **MY VISION**

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My vision for the ILO is anchored in the opening words of the ILO Constitution: *'whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice'*. **Progress made in last decades in terms of social justice must be preserved and protected, while the global solutions to new challenges and opportunities must be centred around human, environmental, economic and societal values**. In short, a new global social contract is required.

The ILO, by virtue of its founding principles of social justice and tripartism, with emancipatory work at the heart of its mission, is uniquely placed to bring about this social contract. I cherish the ambition of leading the ILO with a new impetus, to reposition it at the heart of the global social architecture and to mitigate the risk of its stature's erosion. To achieve this, **I propose an ambitious global social justice programme, comprised of five key components**.

## A MODERNISED NORMATIVE SYSTEM

The ILO's corpus of conventions, protocols and recommendations, backed by its supervisory system, have shaped labour laws around the world. However, the current body of standards remains insufficient and inadequate to support the quest for social justice in a rapidly changing world of work, characterized by eroding employment relationships in the gig and platform economies, the rapid digitization and automation, and the undeniable impact of climate change on jobs and livelihoods. The multiplication of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria within companies and investment funds are a tangible proof of a "normative" demand by the very game of market forces.

The impact of Covid-19 on societies and economies has exposed the interconnectedness and fragility of global supply chains. On the other hand, the pandemic has accelerated the rise of the digital economy, whose manifestations, such as tele-working, may require appropriate labour standards, yet to be developed.

If elected, I will strengthen the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group, with the objectives of examining the current body of standards in light of the profound changes taking place in the world of work, identifying gaps arising from those very changes, and developing proposals accordingly.

## DECENT WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Decent Work Agenda (DWA) is critical to achieve social justice through a combination of jobs, protection, rights and dialogue. I believe that a human-centred approach to development and recovery, as called for in the ILO Centenary Declaration and Resolution, requires the four pillars of DWA to be adapted to the needs and aspirations of those groups that encounter the greatest decent work and social justice deficits, in particular:

- Own-account workers, micro-entrepreneurs and employees in the informal economy;
- Owners of small businesses in the formal economy;
- Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET);
- Workers in the platform economy;
- Women and girls, particularly in the rural sector;
- Victims of child labour and of forced labour;
- Migrant and domestic workers;
- People living in fragile states and situations.

The human-centred approach to development shall give a renewed impetus to ILO's development cooperation programme, which, as Director-General, I would greatly expand, and firmly anchor in the Conclusions of the 2018 General ILC Discussion on Development Cooperation and the provisions of the ILO-wide Strategy for Institutional Capacity Development, adopted by the GB in 2019.

## A GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITION

The commitment of the entire multilateral system is required to win the struggle against inequality, exclusion and marginalization. Fortunately, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a widely supported multilateral framework. On that basis, I propose the foundation of a Global Coalition for Social Justice, which would bring together the ILO, UN agencies, International Financial Institutions, civil society, development partners, multinationals and private foundations, the academia and other stakeholders. The Coalition would pursue the overarching goal of ensuring that social justice is prioritized in national and global policymaking, in development cooperation, and in financial, trade and investment agreements. The Coalition could pioneer:

- The setting up of a standing socially sustainable anti-crisis framework jointly with the IMF and the World Bank, to ensure that the institutional support programmes, particularly in time of crisis, fully integrate social justice dimensions. This initiative could be critical for debt-stressed countries and countries with limited fiscal space;
- A programme for universal social protection, based on the concept of the Social Protection Floor, with a special attention to universal health care and to the possibility of an evidence-based minimum living income for all;
- An initiative supporting enterprises in the transition to a green economy and to a digital economy;
- A joint initiative with WTO for socially fair trade;
- The creation, within the ILO, of a support programme for countries negotiating social measures under trade and investment agreements;
- A joint initiative with the Green Climate Fund for Green transition and Climate Finance gap reduction for SMEs.

## RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICIES

I fully recognize the importance of research. The ILO must become the global centre of excellence for research on all issues related to the world of work, including through the compilation, analysis and dissemination of related statistics. The Office must be fully capable of providing governments, employers and workers with up-to-date information and data, as a prerequisite for adopting measures enhancing social justice. To this end, I would consider the creation of a centre for the evaluation of public policies concerning employment, working conditions and social protection. It is indeed crucial not to limit ILO's work to denouncing imbalances but to be able to come up with concrete proposals aimed at promotion of decent work and sustainable enterprises.

# GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The 1986 amendment of the ILO Constitution is a landmark to ensure a more equitable representation in ILO's Governing Body. As Director-General, I will deploy significant efforts to obtain the necessary ratification for the amendment to enter into force.

With regard to the Office, I will, if elected, ensure greater results-based management and cost-effectiveness including through flexible working arrangements, full digitization of workflows and documents, and the substitution of substantial travels with virtual meetings.

I will review the organizational structure of the ILO in light of the overarching goal of social justice and ensure that the Office can rely on a team of competent, highly qualified and strongly motivated professionals. I will give special focus to societal diversity, gender balance and inclusion, particularly at the middle and senior management level. I will work towards the full integration of budgetary and extra-budgetary resources, including the harmonization of the statutes of regular budget and development cooperation staff.

I will pay particular attention to ILO's field operations and decentralization. I intend to ensure significant increase in the presence of Social Economists on the ground, in order to raise the capacity of the ILO to support member States in the incorporation of social justice into integrated development plans. All efforts will be deployed to uphold the Zero Tolerance with regard to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH), as well as workplace harassment. I will ensure at the ILO the same level of transparency that I have implemented at IFAD and work on the development of an Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) framework covering all ILO operations.



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# MY CANDIDACY



I was born and raised in rural Togo, where I experienced the deprivation and humiliation that extreme poverty brings about. I experienced first-hand the absence of social justice and decent work.

From Togo I moved to Canada, where I completed my studies and worked in the private sector before entering the UN system. These life experiences made me familiar with both worlds: the South and the North, situations of abject poverty and of relative wealth, work in the informal and in the formal economy, employment in the private and the public sectors, and the role as both a recipient and a provider of development assistance.

At United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), I demonstrated commitment and produced results. Within a couple of years, I was promoted to Comptroller's post. Subsequently, I became Director of Finance, then Chief of Staff and finally Assistant Secretary General & Director for Africa. UNDP broadened my horizon and sharpened my ability to lead multilateral development initiatives and negotiations in a multicultural environment.

I was then called by the Government of Togo to serve as the country's Prime Minister – a role that requires the capacity to establish consensus between different line ministries, negotiate with political opposition parties and build multi-stakeholder partnerships with private investors and development partners.

At the ILO, I served as Deputy-Director General in charge of Field Operations, development cooperation portfolio, multilateral engagement and the Turin Training Centre. Shortly after having assumed this position in March 2013, Director-General Guy Ryder asked me to coordinate the ILO's response to the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh. I succeeded in bringing all parties together to sign an accord, which improved the working conditions in the garment industry and provided compensation for the victims.

In February 2017, I was elected President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and was re-elected for a second term in February 2021. At IFAD, I introduced innovative financial instruments accompanied by a strong credit rating allowing the Fund to boost its programmes for the poorest rural communities. I successfully led the 10th and the 11th replenishment negotiation, oversaw a massive expansion of IFAD's field presence, and the subsequent decentralization of human resources and operations.

My desire to return to the ILO stems from my drive to contribute to social justice everywhere. I believe that no other agency is currently equipped with such a noble and relevant mandate. As Director-General, I will do my utmost to translate this mandate into inclusive progress for the current and future generations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Hanungo', with a horizontal line drawn through it.