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SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER, COMRADE R.G.  
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Mr President

Mr Director-General

Distinguished Delegates

Comrades and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me, Mr President, to express my deep appreciation of your kind invitation to me to address this august body of the 69th Session of the International Labour Conference. I am also moved by the very kind and generous remarks you have made about me and my country.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Government and People of Zimbabwe, I would like to thank the ILO and the City of Geneva for the hospitality extended to me and my Delegation. Permit me also, Mr President, to express my very warm congratulations to you <sup>upon</sup> ~~for~~ your own election as President of this Conference and to the Director-General, Mr Francis Blanchard, for his re-election to a third-term of office as Director-General of ILO. This election of the one and re-election of the other are a tribute to your wisdom, dedication and commitment.

to this Organization on the part of you both. I wish you every success as you grapple with your onerous task of steering this vital Organization through the difficulties and challenges that lie ahead.

Mr President, this is not my first visit to Geneva.

During the struggle for our independence I had occasion to come to Geneva for talks <sup>in 1976</sup> aimed at resolving the Constitutional and political problems that stood in the way of our country's advance to the sovereign independence that was, and is, our people's birthright. A conference attended by all factions in the so-called Rhodesian dispute was held in this City in the last three months of 1976. We of the liberation movement came to Geneva then with every intention of securing a just and honourable solution to the problems of our country. Unfortunately our adversaries, who had other ideas than our own, frustrated our positive efforts and the conference thus could not reach an accommodation.

Mr President, as I come to Geneva and to the ILO today as the Prime Minister of the free and democratic Republic of Zimbabwe, I cannot but recall with appreciation the part played by this historic city as a venue for a conference that sought to solve our problems without further loss of life and treasure. With good reason our

people have heard of Geneva and have talked of Geneva. While there may be a multitude of Geneva Conventions, our people only know of the Geneva where a conference was convened to try and achieve a peaceful resolution of the long-simmering so-called "Rhodesian problem." Although, as I have noted above, the conference was not successful, we learned many useful lessons from it and it thus marked a positive stage in the development of our liberation struggle.

As we took up arms to fight for our independence and for democracy, we were inspired and sustained by the conviction of that famed citizen of Geneva, Jean Jacques-Rousseau, who saw so clearly that all men were born free and that men and women were entitled to fundamental human rights and freedoms. When we were confronted by the reality of colonialism in its full nakedness, characterised by forced labour, discrimination in employment, exploitation and the denial of the most elementary rights of workers including those relating to collective bargaining, we could not but resort to the method of armed struggle as the mechanism and modality whereby the slave-master's chains holding our people in thrall would be broken.

For us, Mr. President, the issues were crystal clear -

the right of our people to self-determination was not negotiable. Yes, we could sit in negotiation with our adversaries here in Geneva and elsewhere. We did not reject the notion of negotiation as such. However, we insisted that any negotiations had to take, as a starting point, the fact that our people's desire for freedom and social justice for all without discrimination was paramount and could not be bargained away. So, when Rhodesian settler colonialism proved unreceptive to our call for genuine and serious negotiations, we fought it until we crushed it. But today we face a different, and perhaps even more taxing, challenge. It is the challenge to accelerate the development of our productive forces, to place on a new and higher level the socio-economic development of our country and thereby transform our people's lives for the better.

Mr. President, this aspect, self-evident though it may seem, needs to be underscored most emphatically. We in Zimbabwe hold it as a basic principle that the enhancement of the quality of life of the people in their collective totality is the central task of government. We believe that most governments, certainly those represented in this hall, readily accept this principle and seek to be guided by it in the formulation and realisation of their policies at home. Yet we, as members of an international community whose realities confront us daily, should go beyond the recognition of the importance of this principle at home by further embracing

it and according to its validity in respect of our mutual relations at the international level. Thus, whether the problem for which we seek solutions is that relating to the development of skills in the Third World, or the transference to it of requisite technology or whether the problem there is the prevalence of structural unemployment, we would expect that such matters are universally perceived as having as much a domestic as an international life before we can fully realise the goals of such institutions as this Organisation and its sister specialized agencies in the United Nations system.

May I, with your indulgence, Distinguished Delegates, briefly turn to the small steps we, in Zimbabwe, have taken in the field of labour relations since our independence just over three years ago. From the very outset, my Government was determined to transform labour relations by ensuring that the working conditions of our labour force were improved. We therefore set out to ensure the effective participation of our workers in the decision-making process at the work-place by promoting the formation of workers' committees, works councils and management committees in which workers are represented, and also by expanding our programmes for the education of workers and management. Our experience with these committees has been very encouraging and I am pleased to say this has contributed greatly to industrial peace and harmony. The creative dialogue

that we have unleashed between our workers and employers has already begun to bear fruit in respect of good industrial relations and higher levels of productivity. Workers and employers have already begun to see each other as partners in the production process rather than as inveterate antagonistic forces with nothing in common between them.

The progress we have made to-date in the field of labour relations is, of course, only a beginning. The road before us is long and arduous. How else could it be when we have only begun to undo the legacy of a philosophy and practice that deliberately aimed at the oppression and exploitation of man by man? In line with our objective of decisively transforming production relations, a new Industrial Relations Bill will be introduced in our Parliament this year. The Bill will repeal the Industrial Conciliation Act, a piece of legislation which was the cornerstone of the colonial exploitation of the black workers in Zimbabwe.

The main objective of our new Bill is the creation of greater democracy and greater equality at the place of work, and the extension of full recognition to the worker who, hitherto, has been relegated to an inferior status by the colonial system. The Bill will create the appropriate institutional framework in the context of which labour disputes can be resolved amicably and the tripartite

partners (workers, employers and government) can engage in free collective bargaining.

The introduction of this new Bill, let me repeat, is not exclusively motivated by our justifiable desire to remove the oppressive legal and institutional apparatus that we inherited from our colonial past. It is also - and just as importantly - inspired by our deep commitment to the cause of the worker. It is our firm conviction that the worker, being an absolutely indispensable and irreplaceable factor in the entire production process, be accorded a status fully commensurate with his role. We reject the notion, which itself had its origins in the emergence of capitalism and capitalist production relations, that the worker is a mere instrument of production the interests of which need only be given cognisance to the extent that this did not jeopardise the inherent mission of the system, namely, the extraction of surplus value.

It is because of our commitment to the cause of the working class and, I might add, the peasantry, that we have defined our ideological course and strategy of development as socialist. We see socialism as the only viable and valid moral and philosophical basis on the strength of whose principles a greater social equality can replace the present social imbalances and disparities inherited from the colonial system. Our objective is the creation of a just and

egalitarian society in which the development of the collective whole is the condition and prerequisite for the development of the individual parts. Notwithstanding our recognition of the oft-repeated Biblical precept that individual man, being made in the image of God, has an inherently special position in the order of creation; we nonetheless assert that in the sphere of social development man as a collective whole shall come before man the individual. We thus reject the philosophy of individualism and its materialisation in the acquisitiveness and exploitation that have marked the development of capitalism, leading to colonialism and imperialism as its servicing instruments. We reject capitalism because it is the philosophy of impoverishment. We cannot have the rich unless we also have the poor. We cannot have the landed class unless we also have the landless class.

When a few individuals or groups of individuals own our resources, the majority of the people stand deprived. Unequal ownership creates an immoral imbalance in incomes, leading to antagonism. Surely, it is a moral duty for our Societies to remedy this pervasive injustice of our system. We believe honestly that the only efficacious remedy is a socialist dosage. Only such remedy can effect a positive transformation of society by first transforming the worker from being a mere tool of the employer or entrepreneur, often at his mercy, into an owner of resources or means of production. This is our belief, in Zimbabwe.



Mr. President, we entertain no illusions about the obstacles and difficulties that lie in the way of our advance to the new society we seek to build. We realise that any change, especially deep-going, <sup>and</sup> fundamental, must come face to face with the resistance of the entrenched forces of the status quo. We realise, in other words, that historical development is neither unilinear nor immune to shocks and even reverses. Yet we in Zimbabwe have resolved to succeed in the necessary and urgent task of laying the foundation for our new and just social order. Indeed, we have resolved that the only option available to us is to succeed.

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates, as we brace ourselves and proceed to prosecute the task I have referred to, we cannot but be cognisant of the solidarity and help we have received and continue to receive from the international community. We fully appreciate this assistance and support which can only make our burden that much lighter and our prospects of success that much brighter.

Permit me, Mr. President, to acknowledge at this juncture the support we have received from the International Labour Office in all our endeavours. The support we received from ILO as a liberation movement, notably through the training of some of our young people at the International Centre for Vocational and Technical Training at Turin, will always be cherished by us.

Since independence the ILO has continued to be forthcoming with advice and technical assistance that we have found invaluable in the implementation of our programmes. To mention only a few activities, the Organisation has assisted my Government in:-

- the training of our Industrial Inspectors Officers;
- organising workshops and seminars on workers education and labour management; and
- designing, in collaboration with our officials, a programme of National Rehabilitation of the Disabled.

Soon some experts and United Nations volunteers will be going to Zimbabwe under ILO sponsorship to further assist with this latter project. ILO experts are also assisting us in developing a National Social Security System.

In the field of human resources development and employment, the Organisation sent experts to assist us with our first National Manpower Survey and current ILO employment team, in collaboration with Zimbabwean experts, is looking at ways of promoting employment in the informal sector.

I would like to say, Mr. President, that my Government, and indeed the Zimbabwean people as a whole, appreciate very much this positive and timely assistance during this transitional period in our development. We certainly hope

to continue to take full advantage of the wide experience and expertise the Organisation is able to offer.

The issues on the agenda of this Conference are of particular interest to us. We are pleased that the ILO has given priority to the issue of employment policy in the discussions scheduled for this session. Zimbabwe considers unemployment, especially the unemployment of young people, a most serious problem warranting immediate attention by governments everywhere. It is no longer - if it ever was - a theoretical problem of little practical consequence. It is, instead, a hard reality whose harsh consequences are like cancer, that eats at the very heart of so many societies, especially those in the developing world. We cannot, both as individual nations and as a community of nations, afford this scourge. We cannot, as Governments, seem to tolerate with equanimity a situation which condemns millions of young women and men to a life of misery and shame. Our task, our sacred mission, is immediately to devise effective solutions to the scandal of mass unemployment.

In Zimbabwe we believe that the peasant sector possesses great potential for employment especially in agriculture. Our policy therefore is to deploy substantial resources to that sector while simultaneously generating interest in self-help co-operative economic activities. We are also experimenting with employment creating public works

programmes in rural areas. Unfortunately, our country has been affected by a crippling drought for the second year running and this has rendered our efforts in promoting employment more difficult. In addition, we have not escaped the devastating effects of the international recession. As is well-known, the impact of the recession has been most severe on developing countries and we would urge the developed countries to join us and tackle with resolution the problems that afflict the world economy. Whether we wish it or not, our world is now one and we must therefore seek common solutions to common problems.

The other item on your agenda, Mr President, that is not only crucial but should be of interest and concern to us all is the question of apartheid. I must compliment the ILO for the work it has put into monitoring the application of the Organisation's declaration concerning South Africa's apartheid policy. I am sure the detailed information contained in the Director-General's Special Report has formed the basis of fruitful discussion resulting in a concrete programme of action against apartheid. As a Frontline state, we, together with our regional brothers, have unfortunately had to bear the brunt of South Africa's policy of aggression and destabilization in the region. Apart from several criminal incursions and acts of sabotage perpetrated in our own country, we recently witnessed an unwarranted, provocative and barbaric aerial bombing of a Maputo suburb in Mozambique by the South African Air Force, resulting in the maiming and killing of several innocent people. Let it also

not be forgotten that South Africa continues to occupy with impunity the southern part of Angola just as it continues to harass Lesotho with its well-manipulated and well-sponsored military attacks and acts of sabotage. These acts of banditry, which aim to neutralise our democratic development and principled support of the liberation struggle in southern Africa, will not deter us, Mr President, from supporting the legitimate struggle of the South African and Namibian people. Bombing Frontline States will not stop the tide of the struggle in South Africa. On the contrary, it will only inflame it.

In Namibia, South Africa is fighting a futile war which it cannot win. The recent history of the continent speaks for itself. We wholly support the resolute armed struggle spearheaded by SWAPO in Namibia. We also believe that the chances of a peaceful resolution of the problem have been unnecessarily dissipated by the manoeuvres of certain countries that seek to link the settlement of the Namibian question with the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. We have repeatedly pointed out that this linkage theory is both invalid and unacceptable to us of the Frontline States and, indeed, to the entirety of freedom-loving mankind. Instead, we believe that an internationally acceptable solution is possible under the U.N. Resolution 435, and more so now after the latest Security Council Resolution 532, recently given the total weight of Africa's support by the OAU summit just concluded in Addis Ababa. We believe these Resolutions offer the only genuinely just and fair basis on which the liberation of the long-oppressed Namibian people can be achieved without

the further needless loss of life and property.

Mr President, your Organisation has proclaimed the equality of all men and social justice for all. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II said in his address to this same Conference last year: "All the major problems of man in society are now world problems! They must be approached on a world wide scale." Nations will need to work together in the economic, social and political sphere in order to achieve peace and social progress. Your Organisation has endured the test of time, demonstrating the viability of the solidarity of Workers, Employers and Governments committed to a common purpose. The challenges that lie ahead for your Organisation, while daunting, are nonetheless capable of resolution if we face them with determination and unity. Zimbabwe is proud that, in furtherance of the objectives of ILO, she has ratified seven Conventions to date and is currently considering ratifying the eighth, namely Convention 98.

In concluding, permit me, Mr President, to add my voice to those who have welcomed the resumption of its seat by the People's Republic of China. This is indeed a historic occasion for not only does it herald the reassertion of its legitimate rights by the largest country in the world, it also brings into our midst the representatives of a country which has succeeded so well in dealing with the legacy of exploitation, mass poverty and

unemployment, bequeathed to it by the old order in that country. The international community in general and we of the Third World in particular have a great deal to learn from the experiences gained by the Chinese people in the last thirty-odd years of sustained and self-reliant socio-economic development. This great nation is thus a most welcome member of this vital Organisation. We are all the richer for its membership.

Once again, may I express my personal gratitude and that of my Government and the People of Zimbabwe to you and the leadership of ILO for the great honour you have done me by inviting me as one of your guest speakers.

Thank you!