

Interviews

Spotlight Interview with Antonio Cruciani, the resident representative of the ILO working on the issue of reconstruction.

13 June 2011: We have to change the system. This would be the labour revolution. With 93% of workers dependent on the informal economy, Antonio Cruciani, reconstruction specialist and resident ILO representative in Haiti, sees promoting a culture of decent work and the provision of social protection as top priorities.

How do you start to press for the agenda of Decent Work in a country like Haiti?

What you have to do is not the usual way we normally do things. If we go to Nigeria, Uruguay, Guadalupe, we start talking about decent work, salaries, freedom of association, conditions at work, etc. But here the method is to start creating the culture of decent work. The difficulty of start talking about labour rights is that there is no work. If you talk about salaries, there is no money to share. What we are trying to do together, with the ITUC and the ILO, are various things. If you want, you can visualise three main pillars of the strategy to achieve decent work. First of all, the pillar of employment.

We must facilitate the creation of work in the reconstruction with the creation of employment in the public and private sector. Don't forget the private sector here means the formal sector, which is a very small group. Because 93% of workers are in the informal economy. So you have to think of what do you do with them. For that you need to be creative and inventive. Then you have the limits of economic growth. You don't have many skilled people because the vocational training system practically doesn't exist. In any case, even when there was an education system 20 years ago, the people didn't find jobs after leaving school, so they migrated to Europe, Canada or the US. This is another obstacle to the reconstruction. We need to work on institutional building, political reform and policy reform. You have to change the system. This would be the labour revolution.

This must be the second pillar.

Yes, it's creating the conditions of work. How do you improve the level of institutions, the culture of decent work, and then if there are some contentious issue, to have a labour tribunal that can be an arbitrator. All these things actually exist on paper but they don't work. The second pillar is creating the institutions for the decent work. Creating the culture for the decent work.

Then the third pillar is the social protection. Social protection here is only for formal workers, namely, the public employees, the textile factories and other industries. No more than 7% of the active population. So you have 93% of workers that don't have any social protection. This is our problem, as the ILO we have to work on it.

So again this is a problem related to the question of the informal economy.

Yes, we need to find solutions not just for the workers of the formal sector, but particularly for the 93% of the people that are in the informal economy. This is another challenge that you have in order to create a social protection and for decent work.

But when you think in terms of social protection, also the employers will be very keen to have a system that in some way the public sector transfers some money to do the social protection, for workers. They would like to have an education that is free, a health system that is more or less subsidised. Therefore, they would be prepared to have a social protection system, a public sector that helps the workers. So their salaries would be spent on consumption.

What I'm saying is very important for us because we found out that there is an identity of vision that is the same among workers and employers. This is where we are working. Trying to work on a common ground.

What about the third member of the tripartite dialogue?

The problem here is that you don't have visionary people in government. They couldn't drive the international community to what could be done in this country. Don't forget. We are

talking about the international community like it was one entity. But it's made up of eight or ten major governments, the UN, the World Bank, the IMF, the EU, and thousands of NGO's. That is also a problem, because you have a lot of shooting strength, but it is not going to the same objective. If there were a government that could drive these several forces, you would have the possibility of consensus over some key areas.

During the next weeks we are trying to do a thematic round table, bringing together government, different ministries, trade unions, employers, to have a discussion about this. You don't read about labour issues and employment in the newspaper, on the radio or TV that there is a debate on this. But what we are doing is to put the labour issues on the table.

The authorities have not hitherto managed to channel the aid towards clear priorities. Don't forget either that we talk about the international community as if it were a single entity, yet it groups eight or ten major governments, the World Bank, the IMF, the EU and thousands of NGOs. This diversity is also a source of problems, as it encompasses a multitude of standpoints geared towards different objectives. An authority is needed that could direct these different aims to ensure that a consensus is reached on a number of key matters. We are, in fact, trying to get the issue of decent work firmly on the agenda.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates.