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Request for the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the seventy-fourth session

Observer status for the International Trade Union Confederation in the General Assembly

Letter dated 16 August 2019 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations and the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We have the honour to request, in accordance with rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion of an additional item entitled "Observer status for the International Trade Union Confederation in the General Assembly" in the agenda of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The International Trade Union Confederation represents one of the three constituents of the International Labour Organization. The others are the International Organization of Employers and the member States. We would also like to refer to the parallel request for observer status for the International Organization of Employers that we have also submitted ([A/74/291](#)).

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum (annex I) is attached in support of the aforementioned request, as are a letter from the Director General of the International Labour Organization (annex II) and a draft resolution (annex III).

We have the honour to request that the present letter and its annexes be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Anne **Gueguen**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

(Signed) Jürgen **Schulz**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

(Signed) Rauf Alp **Denktaş**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations



Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

1. Historical background and mission

The International Trade Union Confederation's primary mission since 2006 has been the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions. The Confederation was formed in 2006 following the merger of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour.

Its main areas of activity include the following: (a) promotion of workers' rights and decent work; (b) promotion of equality and non-discrimination, dignity and justice for all; (c) promotion of sustainable development, peace and democracy; (d) support for economic and social policies that ensure economic well-being for all and the advancement of global governance; (e) work for the elimination of modern slavery; and (f) campaigning for the just distribution of economic wealth with universal social protection, minimum living wages and collective bargaining.

The global network of the International Trade Union Confederation directly improves people's lives by working to ensure that economic prosperity benefits all. It is the sole representative of workers to the International Labour Organization (ILO). Furthermore, it is known across the United Nations system, the Group of 20 and in the context of other forums, as set out in sections 3 to 6 below.

The International Trade Union Confederation cooperates with the European Trade Union Confederation, including through the Pan-European Regional Council.

At its March 2019 session, the ILO Governing Body welcomed the objective of the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers to be granted observer status in the General Assembly. The ILO Governing Body is composed of 56 titular members (28 Governments, 14 employers and 14 workers) and 66 deputy members (28 Governments, 19 employers and 19 workers).

2. Membership and organizational structure

The International Trade Union Confederation, which is based in Brussels, is the world's largest trade union federation. Today, it represents 207 million workers through its 331 affiliated organizations in 163 countries. It has three main regional organizations: the Asia-Pacific Regional Organization, the American Regional Organization and the African Regional Organization. The supreme authority of the organization is the World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation, which ordinarily meets every four years, although the majority of the members of the General Council of the Confederation can call for the holding of extraordinary congresses. The members of the General Council as well as the General Secretary and the auditors are elected by the participants at the World Congress. The current General Secretary of the Confederation is Sharan Burrow.

3. Relations with United Nations agencies: International Labour Organization

The International Trade Union Confederation is the secretariat of the Workers' Group in the ILO governance structures and tripartite bodies and therefore represents

one of the three constituents of ILO, one of the oldest specialized United Nations agencies, with 187 member States. This is exceptional within the United Nations system.

ILO is the only tripartite United Nations agency that brings together government, employer and worker representatives to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes aimed at promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all and promoting, inter alia, Sustainable Development Goal 8 (on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all).

For 100 years, ILO has promoted rights at work, encouraged productive employment and decent work opportunities, enhanced social protection and strengthened social dialogue on work-related issues. In its everyday operation, ILO gives an equal voice to workers, employers and governments to ensure that the views of the social partners are closely reflected in labour standards and in shaping policies and programmes.

Trade unions, which are represented by the International Trade Union Confederation at ILO, are key civil society institutions in most democratic countries. In a rapidly globalizing world, the challenge of securing decent work, safe conditions of work, living wages, basic social security, gender equality and fair income distribution calls for better global governance and universal application and enforcement of international labour standards.

Since its creation, ILO has been regarded by trade unions as an essential institution for promoting the protection of workers through global social dialogue and standard-setting, and trade unions seek to ensure that workers' views are reflected in ILO instruments.

Because of the importance of tripartism, ILO has made the ratification and implementation of the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) a priority. Furthermore, the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization has stressed the key role of this instrument (together with the other three Governance (Priority) Conventions, No. 81, No. 122 and No. 129) from the viewpoint of governance.

Consequently, the international labour standards, without exception, are formulated, applied and supervised through a tripartite structure. The tripartite approach to adopting standards ensures that they have broad support from all ILO constituents.

Up until the present time, ILO has adopted 190 conventions and 206 recommendations, most of which are up to date. All of the conventions and recommendations were established in a tripartite manner and were adopted by a majority vote of International Organization of Employers representatives, International Trade Union Confederation representatives and government representatives of the member States.

In 1998, the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work was adopted by the ILO constituents (employers and workers, under the leadership and with the support of the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation, respectively, and member States). The Declaration, which was initiated by the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation, commits member States to respect and promote principles and rights in the following four categories: (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; (b) the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; (c) the abolition of child labour; and (d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

One central component of the ILO supervisory system is the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards, which examines the report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations each year. It is a permanent tripartite body of the legislative body of ILO, the International Labour Conference. It offers the representatives of governments, employers and workers the opportunity to undertake a joint examination of the manner in which States comply with their obligations deriving from the conventions and recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference. Following the technical and independent examination of government reports on their compliance with ILO conventions and recommendations carried out by the Committee of Experts, it is the employers' and workers' delegates to the conference, under the leadership and with the support of the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation, who select 24 cases that will be examined before the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards. Furthermore, the employers' vice-chairperson, who is traditionally a Vice-President of the International Organization of Employers, and the workers' vice-chairperson, led and supported by the International Trade Union Confederation, are responsible for formulating the conclusions on the cases in the format of requests directed to governments. In the context of the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards, the social partners play an indispensable role for the core of the ILO supervisory system.

In sum, the International Trade Union Confederation is highly engaged in global governance, contributing directly and indirectly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, full and productive employment, decent work and economic growth, fair migration policies, climate change mitigation, conflict prevention, peace and security, among other issues.

4. Role within the repositioning of the United Nations development system

Like the other members of the United Nations development system, ILO has an important role to fulfil within the repositioning of the United Nations development system, as laid out in General Assembly resolution [72/279](#). The reform of the United Nations development system calls for a stronger role for trade unions in the United Nations system. This includes the International Trade Union Confederation, which, as a constituent of ILO, is well placed to make a significant contribution to this goal and to improve the accountability, efficiency and coherence of the United Nations development system.

The overarching aim of the reform of the United Nations development system includes the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as also reflected in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. To successfully implement the Goals, the United Nations must work with the representative employers' and workers' federations, which are critical agents in influencing local policy. These organizations play a key role in the negotiation and implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda at the United Nations and at the country level. In order to adapt to these requirements, ILO in 2018 took measures to implement this overarching goal and to adapt its development cooperation to the achievement of the Goals. The International Trade Union Confederation provided significant support for this decision and serves as a main actor in the implementation progress on the ground. Also, workers' and employers' organizations often join efforts through social dialogue and partnership, which are key for social stability and democracy.

4.1. Activities within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group

ILO is a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and is actively involved in the implementation of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) and the United Nations development reform process. Being part of the tripartite structure, the International Trade Union Confederation helps to shape the ILO position within the Group.

4.2. Activities within the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) elevated the position of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (formerly the United Nations Development Assistance Framework) to become the most important planning and implementation instrument for the United Nations development system response to national needs and priorities in countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and thereby provide a contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. According to the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the United Nations country teams are mandated to support Member States in four interlinked areas: (a) sustainable development; (b) human rights; (c) peace and democracy; and (d) natural disaster prevention and response capability (resilience). This mandate involves supporting Member States in respecting, promoting, implementing and reporting on their obligations and commitments under the international norms and standards that the United Nations system upholds, including human rights instruments and international labour standards. The normative work that ILO undertakes within its mandate to support ILO members in complying with and reporting on international labour conventions and recommendations is fundamental to anchoring the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework inside the norms and standards of the United Nations.

For example, the workplan in the framework of a specific United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework on inclusive growth and decent work could include ILO support on implementing ratified international labour conventions based on comments and decisions of the supervisory mechanisms, including the conclusions of the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference. Pursuing the normative agenda and the universal values that bind the United Nations must continue to be a priority of collective United Nations action at the country level, including through the engagement of the resident coordinators. Consequently, the social partners and ILO are closely interlinked in the process and will actively contribute to the good functioning of the new framework process.

In his letter dated 7 November 2018, addressed to the Director General of ILO, the Secretary-General stated his conviction that the reform process would lead to greater inter-agency cross-fertilization in support of the development priorities of countries, in turn expanding opportunities for the specific skill sets of specialized agencies such as ILO.

The close link between the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the ILO decent work country programme needs to be stressed. Such programmes follow two objectives: (a) promotion of decent work as a key component of national development strategies; and (b) the organization of ILO knowledge, instruments, advocacy and cooperation at the service of tripartite constituents. The programme is conducted within a results-based framework in order to advance the decent work agenda within the fields of comparative advantage of ILO.

Tripartism and social dialogue, and hence the voices of workers and employers, are central to the planning and implementation of a coherent and integrated ILO programme. Decent work country programmes are the distinct ILO contribution to United Nations country programmes and constitute one of the main instruments to better integrate regular budget and extrabudgetary technical cooperation.

5. Relations with United Nations agencies and United Nations processes

The International Trade Union Confederation is deeply involved in and contributes to the work of the United Nations.

5.1. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

Through its mandate, that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice, ILO, as well as the International Trade Union Confederation in its role as one of its constituents, are crucial to promoting and advancing the entire 2030 Agenda and touch upon all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The decent work agenda is a driver of sustainable development and as such helps to advance many of the Goals. As a consequence, the International Trade Union Confederation has proven to be a reliable partner in activities essential to the achievement of the Goals. Furthermore, ILO development cooperation is now based on the promotion of the 2030 Agenda.

The elaboration and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals constitute strategic priorities for the International Trade Union Confederation, which contributed to the elaboration of the 2030 Agenda through the post-2015 process, taking part in the deliberations of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The Confederation is fully involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the following ways:

- Delivering country reports on the Goals by members to monitor progress on the Goals on a yearly basis
- Supporting the participation of its regional organizations and national affiliates in the United Nations regional forums on the Goals
- Participating in the thematic and ministerial discussions and reviews of the high-level political forum (including preparatory expert group meetings)
- Producing evidence and showcasing the contribution of trade unions to the 2030 Agenda, as well as policy papers, such as the thematic submission to the high-level political forum on a yearly basis

The International Trade Union Confederation is an organizing partner of the workers and trade unions major group, which currently co-chairs the coordination mechanism for major groups and other stakeholders with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.¹

5.2. Economic and Social Council

In the context of the work of the Economic and Social Council, the International Trade Union Confederation received consultative status in 2007. Consequently, the

¹ See: www.ituc-csi.org/2030Agenda.

organization, in addition to its role as a member of ILO, is very familiar with the United Nations system and has had long-standing experience in the international diplomatic context.

5.3. Global Forum on Migration and Development and Global Compact for Migration

Within the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the International Trade Union Confederation organized the voices of trade unions worldwide. The Council of Global Unions underlines the need to guarantee migrants their social and human rights and to set up regulatory frameworks that respect their fundamental rights regardless of their status.

Within the framework of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, one representative of the International Trade Union Confederation spoke at United Nations Headquarters in New York in July 2018. The thematic debate was focused on the enhancement of public-private dialogue to rethink labour migration policies and international skills mobility.

With the participation of the International Trade Union Confederation and the World Employment Confederation, ILO has launched a fair recruitment initiative, which is aimed at preventing human trafficking, promoting safe migration and reducing the costs of labour mobility.

5.4. Human Rights Council (Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights)

The International Trade Union Confederation provides important worker perspectives in the many policy initiatives and forums held in the Human Rights Council. As a tripartite member of ILO and with previous experience in addressing human and labour rights challenges in the world of work globally, the organization helps to link the work of ILO with that of the Human Rights Council.

The International Trade Union Confederation ensures that workers' voices are heard and reflected in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Confederation believes that it is the responsibility of companies, as part of the due diligence expected of them, to prevent and mitigate impacts on human rights, including workers' rights. The organization actively advocates their interests throughout the process.

The International Trade Union Confederation will continue its work with all stakeholders to see that the recommendations published in the framework of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are put into practice.

5.5. United Nations Global Compact

The International Trade Union Confederation, as an international organization, has been a crucial partner throughout the elaboration of the United Nations Global Compact. The General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow, is currently a member of the Global Compact Board.

5.6. Other engagement with the United Nations

Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up

The International Trade Union Confederation leads the engagement of trade unions in the Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up on a yearly basis, bringing delegations, contributing to the deliberations and bringing the perspectives of trade unions and workers into the negotiations on relevant documents.

United Nations climate agenda

The International Trade Union Confederation is actively engaged, together with its affiliates, in the United Nations climate agenda, such as the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the twenty-first Conference of the Parties, at which the Paris Agreement on climate change was adopted, and the twenty-fourth Conference of the Parties, held in Poland, at which the parties adopted the Silesia Declaration: Solidarity and Just Transition.

Trade and development (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)

The ITU International Trade Union Confederation participates in the conferences and related official hearings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and participates in its Trade and Development Commission as an observer.

Commission on the Status of Women

The International Trade Union Confederation regularly participates in the annual two-week session of the Commission on the Status of Women, representing trade unions in high-level panels, and in policy work with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Commission on Sustainable Development. The organization was also represented on the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

6. Activities with Governments and international governmental organizations

6.1. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

The International Trade Union Confederation has close relations with global union federations and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

6.2. Group of 20 and Group of Seven

The International Trade Union Confederation represents the core outreach group to the Group of 20 and the Group of Seven in terms of workers' representation. Among other common activities, together with the International Organization of Employers, it has developed, implemented and delivered on bipartite and tripartite agreements in the context of the Group of 20 and the Group of Seven.

In June 2019, for the first time, the Group of Seven agreed on a joint statement with international social partners, the International Organization of Employers/Business and Industry Advisory Committee to OECD and the

International Trade Union Confederation/Trade Union Advisory Committee to OECD, with a focus on: (a) strengthening coherence of the actions of international organizations and respect for international labour standards; (b) extending access to social protection; (c) adapting labour market institutions and promoting skills development in the new world of work; and (d) closing the gender employment, participation and pay gaps.

7. Reasons for seeking observer status for the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation

The International Trade Union Confederation contributes to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals through its results-oriented membership, including a concrete impact on the ground. By granting the organization the observer status in the General Assembly, the United Nations system will strengthen its credibility as a multilateral body aimed at finding solutions through partnerships with workers' representatives. Together with the International Organization of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation can serve as a proactive bridge between the United Nations and the world of work, at a time when the United Nations is looking to expand partnerships.

More concretely, the organization can prospectively further, as it has already furthered, as laid down in the examples above, the attainment of the goals of the United Nations, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, through the following approaches: (a) helping the United Nations to understand how trade unions function and the most effective outreach avenues; (b) contributing extensive knowledge and experience on different aspects of the world of work to United Nations initiatives and programmes; (c) assisting trade unions to address fundamental labour human rights violations and challenges; and (d) bringing the global voices of trade unions to global debates and dialogue on sustainable development, migration, climate change, gender empowerment, youth integration and conflict prevention.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the International Trade Union Confederation shares the same goal, namely to provide a better and sustainable future for all human beings, which is also often the goal of workers. As such, their voices are well represented by the International Trade Union Confederation, which is an organization that internationally coordinates the voices of workers around the globe.

Furthermore, the reform of the United Nations development system calls for the stronger representation of workers in the United Nations system. The International Trade Union Confederation will contribute significantly to the aim of improving the accountability, efficiency and coherence of the United Nations development system, including by providing a valuable challenge function.

In this regard, the contribution of the International Trade Union Confederation to the decision-making process of ILO has to be mentioned once more. As international social partners, the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation represent 50 per cent of the eligible voters within ILO, and their voices have been indispensable for the consent and contribution of ILO to the United Nations reform process. In his letter, mentioned above, the Secretary-General thanked all ILO tripartite constituents for their collaboration.

Finally, the International Trade Union Confederation, owing to its long-standing membership and continuously excellent representation of workers at ILO, is best

equipped to involve their voices in United Nations forums. The General Assembly is a crucial focal point where the organization could contribute with its policymaking expertise in the context of trade unions in all regions of the world.

While the requests for observer status for both the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation are submitted separately, to conform with the formal requirements of United Nations proceedings, both requests are intrinsically linked and are submitted so as to be granted observer status simultaneously. Indeed, to continue to be effective, both organizations need to continue to be able to act jointly at the global level.

8. Conclusion

The International Trade Union Confederation and its member federations represent the consolidated voice of unions throughout the process of shaping United Nations policy. The above elaborated connections between the international representative of workers federations and the United Nations has made it evident that, for the successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, considering the expertise of the organization is crucial. As a representative of workers federations, it is, above all, critical in influencing local policy. It plays a key role in the negotiations, implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda at the United Nations and at the country level. Furthermore, workers' organizations often join with employers' organizations through social dialogue and partnership, which are key for social stability and democracy.

As the representative of workers within ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation, together with the employers' representative, the International Organization of Employers, represent 50 per cent of the eligible voters and hence are crucial to the decision-making process at ILO, a specialized United Nations agency. Being part of the tripartite structure of ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation can, in addition to working to fulfil the ILO mandate, determine the position of ILO within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. It is the intention of the organization to use the momentum and to support the United Nations in the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Simultaneously, the organization will intensify its communications and strengthen its efficient and effective working relations with the United Nations.

Annex II

Letter dated 12 July 2019 from the Director General of the International Labour Organization

On behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO), I would like to express my support for the request by the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation for observer status in the General Assembly.

The International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation have a long-standing role in representing the interests of workers' and employers' organizations in the tripartite governance structure of ILO and have contributed directly to the development of international labour standards and the promotion of decent work for all. Their membership includes more than 207 million workers and 50 million businesses, respectively, in more than 150 countries.

Both institutions are influential players in the multilateral world, at the United Nations as well as in the Group of 20, the Group of Seven and other forums. They are strongly committed to advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation are founding partners and members of the Board of the United Nations Global Compact. They represent workers' and employers' organizations at the Human Rights Council and have played a fundamental role in the elaboration of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. They have also contributed to the negotiations with respect to the Global Compact on Migration and are core stakeholders in the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

We are confident that, by granting observer status in the General Assembly to both the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation, Member States will be taking an important step to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation. It will allow for greater participation of business and workers in the development of global policies and standards while helping to rally millions of stakeholders behind the implementation of internationally agreed outcomes.

In the context of the reform of the United Nations development system, it would be extremely valuable to count on the contributions of national trade unions and employers' organizations affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers, respectively, working together with United Nations country teams, to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through partnerships and social dialogue.

Such observer status would also allow for a more coherent, consistent and legitimate participation of workers and employers in areas where enhancing private sector engagement is most urgent, including climate change, gender empowerment, youth promotion and sustainable peace.

For all of these reasons, I hope that you will be in a position to lend support to the request for observer status for the International Organization of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation in the General Assembly.

(Signed) **Guy Ryder**
Director General of the International Labour Organization

Annex III

Draft resolution

Observer status for the International Trade Union Confederation

The General Assembly,

Wishing to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the International Trade Union Confederation,

1. *Decides* to invite the International Trade Union Confederation to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;
 2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the action necessary to implement the present resolution.
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