

## **Virtuous circle of sustainable growth**

*Address by Phil O'Reilly CEO Business NZ  
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I wish to congratulate the Director General on his reports to this meeting. Those who were at the 13<sup>th</sup> Asian Regional Meeting may recall that there was significant discussion about the format of the report for that meeting. It is pleasing that the ILO has taken on board those concerns and developed three very sound documents analysing the region and its challenges and opportunities.

The first conclusion of that conference was that all member states develop, through tripartite processes, a national plan of action for decent work. That recommendation has now been adopted by the whole ILO under the name 'decent work country programs.' So the Asia Pacific reality was accepted – namely, that decent work, to be successful, must play out at a national level, taking into account national circumstances.

Business New Zealand has been active in assisting to develop New Zealand's decent work country program and has assisted the ILO to spread the country program approach. For example, earlier this year we held a workshop for representatives of employer organisations in the Pacific at which representatives of New Zealand's Government and unions were also present.

Participants recognised the need for an integrated approach to decent work country programs and therefore topics considered ranged from tax reform, through changes in health care systems, to employment law.

In New Zealand the social partners may express strong and differing views in open conversation with Government and each other. But this does not get in the way of constructive dialogue on a much more regular basis. New Zealand is better for it.

Our own ways of working are unique to us of course, based on our culture and history. Others will do it differently and that must be allowed to happen for social dialogue to be truly effective.

That same truism applies in a wider sense. The 'Asia' defined by this meeting is massive and exceptionally diverse. The individual concerns of the players in each country will necessarily be very different. But there are some common strands.

The most significant strand of commonality, from an employer's perspective, to achieve decent work is the need to ensure successful businesses. It is only through ensuring successful businesses that we will ever get sustainable job growth and that we will ever get sustainable national success with all that this entails including social protection and enhanced opportunities for individual and community achievement.

The Government's role is clear. Ensure first and foremost that the prerequisites exist for quality investment, including the rule of law and good governance; effective and appropriate labour legislation, free trade and assistance in skills development and entrepreneurship.

Equally important is a commitment to good quality and reliable labour market statistics for internal and international comparative purposes so as to better enable the national players and international institutions such as the ILO to take a fact-based approach to developing Decent Work Country programs.

But we need not slavishly follow just one path in this task. There are many roads that can be followed. And it is here that the ILO can play a critical and changing role to assist countries achieve their objectives - recognising that in order to do so they should not be limited by 'one size fits all' solutions. The Director General spoke eloquently yesterday of the 'Asian Century.' I take that to mean that we are not talking of the American or the European Centuries of the past. If that is so then this new century must be supported and enhanced by new and relevant structures and approaches.

Decent work for all is a concept we can wholeheartedly endorse. But in doing so we would argue that decent work depends first and foremost on healthy enterprises. The challenge of this conference should be to help understand how that virtuous circle might best be achieved in each member State of our region.