



## 112<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference Plenary - Discussion on the report of the ILO's Director General

*Speaker: Valerie Bichelmeier, Vice-President*

My organisation, Make Mothers Matter (MMM), congratulates the Director General for his report, and very much appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

The following statement is supported by the Global Coalition for Social Protection floors, of which MMM is a member.

We fully agree that a new social contract is urgently needed at a time when we are facing multiple crises and ever greater challenges. It is clear however that a new social contract requires bold structural transformations.

The report rightly questions the ability of our current economic system and “its narrow and exclusive goals of financial and price stability” to deliver social justice. It also acknowledges that “the usual fixes are not likely to work, and [that] we will need to adapt our policies and institutions and come to a new understanding of our responsibilities to each other”.

We at MMM couldn't agree more. A new social contract must be embedded into systemic transformations, beginning with the economy. It is time to redefine what we call development and progress, move away from the GDP growth narrative, and repurpose our economic systems and policy-making, so that the economy first serves the long-term wellbeing of people and the planet, and supports the work of caring for each other and for our natural environment.

Whether you call it human-centred economics – as proposed by M. Samans of the ILO, a human rights-based economy - as advocated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>1</sup>, or a wellbeing economy, which is a path that a few countries have already embraced<sup>2</sup>, we urgently need an economy which is in the service of life and sustainable and inclusive wellbeing for all – the basis of social justice.

The report also stresses the need to address “gender disparities in the provision of social protection” – these disparities being connected to women's lower labour force participation and their mainly informal work, which in turn is rooted in the unequal sharing of caregiving work and responsibilities.

It fails however to recognise that Care should be a collective responsibility, and that the new social contract should support a more equitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, first between men and women, but also across society.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/04/statement-un-human-rights-chief-human-rights-economy>

<sup>2</sup> Those governments include Canada, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales (WEGo): <https://weall.org/wego>

Women have long shouldered the majority of both paid and unpaid care work. The resulting costs in terms of lost income and opportunities, all too often translates in poverty, especially in old age. The care gap is at the root of the gender labour force participation gap, the gender pay gap, the pension gaps, not to mention women's glass ceiling to access decision making positions. Women who are mothers suffer specific discriminations and challenges – a “motherhood penalty”, which is at the root of social and economic injustice for many.

We particularly commend and support the report's recommendation that the social contract needs to ensure access to and the provision of essential services and universal access to social protection, and call for urgent implementation of social protection floors worldwide.

As a major stakeholder, the private sector must also take its share of responsibilities and costs by providing support to employees having caregiving responsibilities, in particular parents. This will not only positively impact those employees and society in the long term, but it will also benefit companies themselves through talent retention, employees' loyalty and attracting new talent.

As part of the necessary systemic transformation, a paradigm shift is therefore also needed in the world of work, from families, mothers in particular, adapting to companies, to companies adapting to families and the realities of care.

In summary, we are calling for a social contract that kickstarts a care society<sup>3</sup>, where the value of care work, whether paid or unpaid, is recognized as valuable and essential work, adequately supported and fairly distributed. This is everyone's responsibility. We at MMM will continue doing our bit. We ask that you join us in this endeavour.

I will end with a quote from Tim Jackson, an ecological economist. He said: “without care we are nothing, our progress is nothing. Without care there is no economy”. A new social contract simply cannot ignore care.

### About Make Mothers Matter

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) believes in the power of mothers to make the world a better place, advocating for their recognition and support as changemakers. Created in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with no political or religious affiliations, transparently voicing the concerns of mothers at the highest level: the European Union, UNESCO and the United Nations (general consultative status).

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<sup>3</sup> The Care society is promoted by the *Buenos Aires Commitment*, which were adopted by ECLAC governments at the end the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in Buenos Aires, 7–11 November 2022. More information on <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>