



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



## **45th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

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### **REPORT OF THE XIII INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR**

#### **Report**

1. Since 1963, the ministers of labor of the Region of the Americas have been meeting periodically in the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) of the Organization of American States (OAS). This Conference is the Hemisphere's main forum for discussion and policy-making on labor matters.
2. The IACML has three advisory bodies: (a) the Permanent Technical Committee on Labor Matters (COTPAL); (b) the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE); and (c) the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL), in addition to a Permanent Technical Secretariat in charge of the OAS Unit for Social Development and Education. The IACML maintains a close working relationship with international institutions, especially PAHO.
3. The XIII Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) met from 24 to 26 September 2003 in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, concluding with the adoption of the Salvador Declaration and Plan of Action, which reinforced the policies on occupational health and safety.
4. Pursuant to Article 27 of its Regulations, the Conference consisted of a preparatory meeting, an opening session, four plenary sessions, and a closing session.
5. The preparatory meeting was chaired by Canada's Minister of Labor and Chair pro tempore of the XII IACML, who summarized the progress made since the XII Conference, which had laid the foundation for dealing more actively with the issue of occupational health and safety and fostered greater participation by worker and employer

groups, as well as international organizations such as PAHO, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations.

6. The Opening Session was chaired by Brazil's Minister of Labor and Employment and Chair pro tempore of the XIII IACML. In his remarks, he stated that work is essential to human dignity and that future labor negotiations should address social and labor policies in order to guarantee real protection for workers. This position was fully supported by the statements of the distinguished speakers in the Opening Session. The OAS Secretary General pointed out that protecting the basic rights of workers and promoting the principles of decent work make for stronger democracy and observe the spirit of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. He underscored the fact that hemispheric integration is producing major changes in our nations and that it is the responsibility of all to ensure that these changes result in better living and health conditions for workers.

7. The ILO Director-General highlighted the issues of unemployment—which he regarded as the most flagrant manifestation of social exclusion—and poverty as the greatest challenges of our time.

8. The first plenary session was held on 25 September 2003 to present the report of the XII IACML. The Minister of Labor and Employment of Brazil opened the session. The Director of the OAS Unit for Social Development and Education, in her capacity as Technical Secretary of the XII IACML, gave a presentation to the delegates on the permanent portfolio of consolidated programs in the field of labor. This portfolio includes programs in occupational health and safety, labor management, training and certification of labor competencies, and gender equity. The programs in this portfolio, developed through a joint OAS/PAHO effort, are both technically sound and sustainable.

9. The Chief of PAHO's Risk Assessment and Management Unit described the workers' health and safety situation and its link with economic development, democracy, equity, and human rights. She underscored the link among health, poverty reduction, and economic growth, which was recognized in the United Nations Millennium Declaration agreed upon by the Heads of State in 2000. She emphasized that the burden of disease in the developing countries, including workplace injuries and accidents, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, is a barrier to economic growth and must therefore be tackled head-on in any comprehensive development strategy. Recent studies show that the most competitive countries are also the most secure, given their strategies for disease prevention and the protection and promotion of workers' health. In light of this reality, PAHO, through a transnational multisectoral effort, has put together and implemented the Regional Plan on Workers' Health, adopted in Resolution CD41.R13 in 1999 by the 41st Directing Council. She noted that this Plan has been implemented in 24 countries to date, and its regional coverage is expected to continue expanding. Finally, she mentioned

the results of the numerous partnerships between PAHO and other international organizations, as well as civil society organizations, which play an important part in improving workers' health in the Americas.

10. The purpose of the second plenary session, which took place on 25 September 2003, was to discuss the current labor situation in the Hemisphere and the existing challenges.

11. The role of COSATE and CEATAL was strengthened under the XIII IACML with the joint Declaration of the two advisory bodies. The Declaration calls on the governments to make employment a central concern and a key element for the eradication of poverty and to create additional forums for dialogue between senior government officials/social representatives and international and regional financial institutions.

12. The third plenary session took place on 25 September 2003, at which the existing relationship between economic policies and labor policies was analyzed. It was emphasized that the economic transformation process has caused difficulties in the creation of decent work and that a labor policy should be at the core of both public and private economic decision-making processes. The mandates of the Summit of the Americas on labor issues were also presented and the importance that the IACML has in furthering the fulfillment of these mandates was mentioned. Finally, it was indicated that equitable growth in the Hemisphere depends on how the governments decide to face the issues of education, employment, income distribution, and economic growth. In short, there was agreement in stressing the importance of building intersectoral, comprehensive coordination between labor and economic policies in order to ensure equitable growth.

13. Concerning the role of CEATAL, the fourth plenary session focused a great deal of its attention on the issue of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This session mentioned a series of current OAS initiatives to promote CSR, as well as the work of the OAS with the private sector and the ministries to promote safe work environments that boost efficiency and cut costs due to fewer accidents and occupational illnesses.

14. The ministers of labor issued the Salvador Declaration, committing themselves to creating decent work, promoting productive employment, and improving the health conditions, education, social welfare, and well-being and quality of life of their peoples, with special emphasis on creating safe and healthy work environments.

15. The ministers voiced their concerns about the difficult economic situation prevailing in the countries of the Americas, the slowdown in worldwide economic growth, and the cutbacks in social investment, which have had a negative impact on the education, health, well-being, and quality of life of working people, their families, and

their communities. In many places, rising unemployment, deteriorating working conditions, and the shrinking purchasing power of wages have contributed to the widening of social and gender gaps.

16. The ministers focused on the population groups most affected by the economic crises—i.e., workers in the informal sector, working women and children, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older workers, migrants, and ethnic and religious minorities. The ministers agreed that steps should be taken to deal with each country's particular situation. These steps should include the drafting of national plans of action on decent work, with assistance from the ILO and the Healthy Workplace Initiative promoted by PAHO.

17. The ministers endorsed the idea of linking labor and social policies, especially policies in health and education geared to preventing accidents in the workplace and occupational illnesses and promoting the well-being and quality of life of workers, within the context of promoting the integrated development of human beings.

18. They also expressed the intention of intensifying dialogue and cooperation with regional and international organizations, such as PAHO, working in the fields of development and labor in the Americas.

19. With the object of taking action to meet the goals and commitments outlined above, the ministers of the Member States decided to implement the Plan of Action based on the Salvador Declaration; implementation is occurring through the two working groups created during the previous Conferences. These groups have the following functions:

- Working Group 1: Responsible for analyzing the social and labor dimensions of the Summit of the Americas process. This group exhaustively examines work- and labor-related globalization issues, focusing on the implications of integration and free trade and their subregional and regional processes in the Hemisphere. The Working Group is coordinated by Argentina's Ministry of Labor and the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Working Group 2: Responsible for promoting institution-building in the ministries of labor. It helps these agencies develop the capacity to respond to present and future work and labor challenges through harmonized horizontal cooperation with other entities in the social, health, and education sector. This Working Group is coordinated by the Ministers of Labor of Canada and El Salvador.

20. PAHO has participated in the discussions of the two Working Groups and provides support to help them achieve their objectives. The Organization has also made it clear that workers' health must be considered a universal right, a key factor in economic development, an agent for poverty reduction, and, hence, one of the pillars of sustainable human development. PAHO regards health and work as individual and collective goods that can and should interact in a positive manner, provided that they exist in the context of democracy, equity, and social justice.

21. The ministries of labor have an important role to play in implementing the Salvador Plan of Action, which includes creating opportunities for decent work, promoting productive employment, and improving working and living conditions.

22. In the Salvador Plan of Action, the ministers identified the following priority areas:

- Improving the effectiveness of systems for social protection in health;
- Monitoring occupational health and safety vis-à-vis subregional and regional integration;
- Interinstitutional strengthening of the ministries of labor through multidisciplinary interinstitutional approaches involving, inter alia, the ministries of health;
- Boosting the efficiency of policies and activities designed to promote decent work, improve working conditions, and encourage adherence to the labor principles contained in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; and
- Abolishing child labor and the sexual exploitation of adolescents.

23. In order to implement the Salvador Plan of Action, the ministers of labor and past, present, and future Chairs pro tempore of the XIII IACML (Brazil, Canada, and Mexico) drew up the XIII IACML activities schedule for the period 2004-2005.

24. In this context, PAHO and the OAS assumed the responsibility of promoting:

- The presentation of a report to the Directing Council of PAHO on workers' health activities to date deriving from the XII and XIII IACML.
- The identification of strategies by the ministers of health and labor that will make it possible to maximize the effectiveness and efficacy of activities for the solution of workers' health problems.

- A workshop on health and safety organized by the OAS, PAHO, and the Ministry of Labor of El Salvador for April 2004 in San Salvador, El Salvador.
- Planning of the III Hispanic Forum 2005 to discuss the occupational and environmental safety situation of workers in North America within the context of the Region's integration and reform processes.
- Participation in the XVII World Congress on Safety and Health at Work 2005.

25. The closing session was held on 26 September 2003. The first item taken up in this session was the election of the next Chair pro tempore and new member of the IACML troika. The delegations of Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Honduras expressed their support for the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare of Mexico, who assumed the mantle of Chair of the XIV IACML. The Minister of Mexico thanked the delegates for the nomination and the Ministers of Brazil and Canada for their exemplary efforts. He stated that the Conference represented an opportunity to achieve active collaboration among the ministries of labor to strengthen social dialogue between the delegates and international institutions such as PAHO. The Minister from Brazil, as Chair pro tempore of the XIII IACML, proposed the approval of the Salvador Declaration and Plan of Action and the OAS proposal to support them. The three documents were unanimously approved.

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