

27 November 2012 – Geneva

**Statement from Mr Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General,
on the occasion of
the launch of the Pacific Growth and Employment Project
delivered on his behalf by**

Mr David Lamotte, Director, ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries

Honourable Minister(s), representatives from ACTU and ACCI, social partners from Pacific Island Countries, friends and colleagues,

It is my pleasure to ask David Lamotte, our ILO Director for Pacific Island Countries, to read to you this statement of support on my behalf.

The Pacific Growth and Employment Project you are launching today is an important component of the Australian Government - ILO Partnership Agreement (2010-2015). This partnership has been producing tangible results in promoting employment and decent work opportunities for women and men across the Asia-Pacific region. In keeping with the ILO's inclusive, tripartite structure, the Australian Government - ILO Partnership Agreement was developed in consultation with the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

I therefore take this opportunity to acknowledge the foresight and wisdom of all those involved in developing and implementing this Partnership Agreement back in 2010 and, in particular, the Australian Government for their contributions and sustained commitment to it.

The fact that this project is being launched today, funded by the Australian Government, but with the work on the ground carried out, cooperatively, by the ACTU and the ACCI, is a reaffirmation of the importance of the tripartite system. The Pacific Growth and Employment Project is a perfect example of how social dialogue has led to united action between the government and the Australian social partners to help achieve decent work through building capacity that will lead to opportunities for employers and workers in the Pacific. And I am certain that this spirit of cooperation, dialogue and partnership will characterize the collaboration with the Pacific Island counterparts.

As you know so well the Pacific is a region like no other, for its sheer geographical size, diversity, and challenges. It comprises three major cultural groups – Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian spread over a massive expanse of ocean presenting a staggering diversity of cultures, natural resource endowments, and economic and industrial growth prospects – from small atoll nations to sizeable resource-rich economies.

For all of this diversity, beauty and potential, one important common characteristic is evident - there are simply not enough jobs for its growing number of young women and men. Young people who represent around 20 per cent of the Pacific population are up to six times more likely to be unemployed than adults. In some Pacific Island Countries, around half of the young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed with young women facing even higher rates of unemployment.

Pacific leaders and key groups have reaffirmed their political commitment to tackling the region's youth employment challenge. Statements made at the 42nd Pacific Islands Forum in Auckland, New Zealand, in September 2011, explicitly recognised the need for the development of a regional framework for youth employment.

Of course, the Pacific is not alone in facing the youth employment challenge; it is a global challenge calling for urgent action. The economic costs of youth unemployment as well as its potential social impacts are widely recognized across continents and oceans. Practical action leading to more decent jobs for young people is urgently needed.

The activities of the Pacific Growth and Employment Project will develop new ways of addressing this challenge. It will support industry led action plans that enhance economic growth, deliver skills development and employment opportunities for youth, and sustainable and decent jobs for local workers. The ILO, as the implementing partner, will work closely with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) who will manage the project. Together, these two social partners bring industry-links and the practical experience and perspective of their networks in the region that will generate new and realistic insights into how to improve employment outcomes. I take this opportunity to acknowledge their joint-initiative, their efforts and commitment to bring this project to fruition and its successful implementation. The initial sectors selected and countries participating – transport and tourism in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu –are encouraging signs that together we are on course to help improve the prospects of employers and the working lives of people in those sectors.

The ILO's work in the Pacific indeed covers a wide range of areas including: labour migration; the elimination of child labour; promotion of gender equality; labour law reform; protecting seafarers; labour market statistics; occupational safety and health; HIV/AIDS in the workplace; youth employment; and entrepreneurship development. The Pacific Growth and Employment Project is a new and exciting contribution to this growing portfolio of work.

The ILO is highly committed to working with our Pacific Island member States to advance decent work goals. As this project, and the Australian Government – ILO Partnership Agreement continues its forward momentum, I can assure you that our technical specialists are available to provide all possible support from our Headquarters, from our Regional Office and Decent Work Team in Bangkok and of course from our Office for Pacific Island Countries based in Suva.

In closing, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Australian Government, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, my ILO colleagues and all others involved in developing, launching and now implementing this project. I thank the Pacific Island countries and counterparts who will be partners in this initiative.

I will certainly be following progress with keen interest and look forward to successful outcomes of this innovative and important project.

Guy Ryder
Director-General
International Labour Organization