

Governing Body

336th Session, Geneva, 22 June 2019

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Institutional Section

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FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General

Obituary

Mr Robert (Bob) Hawke

1. The Director-General announces with deep regret the death, on 16 May 2019, of Mr Robert James Lee (Bob) Hawke, Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, Workers' delegate to the International Labour Conference and former Worker member of the Governing Body.
2. Mr Hawke was born in 1929 in South Australia. In 1958 he took up an advocate's position at the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), which he would eventually preside for a decade (1970–80). In February 1983, he became Australia's 23rd Prime Minister, a post which he held until 1991. During that time, he remained true to his beliefs and his origins in the labour tradition and movement, he modernized the Australian economy and introduced significant social reforms. Among these reforms were important improvements in the school retention rates; the promotion of youth skills programmes; the positive transformation of workplace practices; the reintroduction of universal healthcare and the reform of the national social security systems. His policies led to an unprecedented period of job creation and economic growth in Australia. Mr Hawke was also skilful in defending various environmental causes nationally and internationally. As a committed internationalist, Mr Hawke abhorred any kind of prejudice and discrimination, in particular as it was embodied by apartheid in South Africa at the time. He was therefore very active and, eventually, instrumental in bringing an end to the apartheid regime through Commonwealth sanctions and other strong political measures.
3. Worker member of the Governing Body (1972–80) and Workers' delegate to a number of sessions of the International Labour Conference (1972–73 and 1977–79), Mr Hawke was a committed supporter of the global labour movement and of the ILO's activities. As a man who inspired profound affection and admiration, Mr Hawke will be remembered for his outstanding political skills, his great passion, courage and intellect, and his remarkable personal charm.

Draft decision

- 4. The Governing Body paid tribute to the memory of Mr Robert (Bob) Hawke and invited the Director-General to convey its condolences to the family of Mr Hawke, to the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and to the Government of Australia.*