

**WELCOMING ADDRESS AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE 3RD AFRICAN REGIONAL
CONGRESS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS ASSOCIATION
HOSTED BY IRasa**

Manfred Weiss

President of the IIRA



Welcome

It is indeed the special privilege of IRasa to be hosting this significant international conference here. In 1966 the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA) was established in response to the growing need to develop and exchange knowledge in industrial relations at the international level, providing the academic and the practitioner with a forum for discussion and research. The aims of the IIRA are of purely scientific character, without regard to political, philosophic or religious considerations. In the meantime the IIRA has succeeded in establishing more than forty national associations. Individual and institutional members of more than hundred countries have joined the international association.

In its continuous effort to promote the study and the progress of industrial relations the organization of Congresses is of utmost importance. In intervals of three years World Congresses take place where scholars and practitioners of industrial relations from all over the world find a global forum for the exchange of ideas. However, it has turned out that the organization of World Congresses is by far not enough to meet the goals of the IIRA. The socio-economic conditions in different parts of the world are too diverse to be taken sufficiently into account in a global discussion on a World Congress. Therefore there is an urgent need for focusing on the regional peculiarities of problems arising in the area of industrial relations. This insight has led to the establishment of Regional Congresses which in the meantime have become a well established tradition of the IIRA. These Regional Congresses take place in the periods between two World Congresses. The results developed in these Regional Congresses of course are an important input for the debates in the World Congresses and vice versa. After the 6th European Regional Congress held last June in Oslo, the 4th Asian Regional Congress held last November in Manila and before the upcoming 4th Regional Congress of the Americas to be held in Toronto next June we now have the great pleasure to attend the 3rd African Regional Congress to be held in the splendid location of Spier Estate in Stellenbosch / South Africa. For a long time it would have been unthinkable that an African Regional Congress could be hosted by South Africa. The new era after overcoming apartheid has made it possible. South Africa not only has restructured its political and constitutional system but also its system of labour law and industrial relations. This country's development demonstrates impressively what is meant by the reference to "The African Renaissance" in the general Congress theme.

The Industrial Relations Association of South Africa (IRASA) has done a marvellous job in preparing this Congress. It will take place in an environment and under conditions which will be most favourable for the debates.

Africa perhaps more than any other region of the world is facing challenges to be met in the context of industrial relations. The degree of unemployment and poverty still is by far too high. Job activities in the informal sector still lack protection. The standards governing employment in the formal sector in many areas still are very unsatisfying. Educational and training facilities still are of only marginal range. Social security systems still are lacking to a great extent. Collective representation of workers still is underdeveloped. These are only a few examples of the challenges to be met and thereby of the topics to be discussed during this 3rd African Regional Congress. And of course the focus of the debates also will be on the question whether globalization is promoting the solution of these problems in the African context or whether it is making it more difficult. There are unfortunately many indications for the latter one. There also will be a need to discuss whether and how the problems of industrial relations and employment can be resolved in an environment where the danger of diseases, in particular AIDS, is growing and where ethnic conflicts still are rather the rule than the exception.

Special attention will be given to the fact that the countries of Southern Africa, still one of the poorest regions of the world, make an attempt to join forces and to jointly develop the region. The project of this Southern African Development Community (SADC) covers a population of about 200 million. The territory of SADC in spite of the present poverty is one of the most promising developing regions in the world in terms of economic potential. There is reason for optimism. But the steps to be taken are to be evaluated carefully. The 3rd African Regional Congress will offer an excellent opportunity to discuss this issue and to reflect whether lessons can be drawn from other regional arrangements as are the European Union, MERCOSUR, NAFTA or APEC. And of course one of the questions to be dealt with will be whether SADC has the potential to become a model for Africa as a whole.

The above sketched items for discussion demonstrate what is expecting us under the label "Employment Relations in a Changing World: The African Renaissance". On behalf of the IIRA I would like to thank the organizers, in particular Rhodé van Rensburg and Maggie Holtzhausen, for their admirable effort in making this Congress an intellectually fruitful and socially unforgettable event. I wish all the participants of the 3rd African Regional Congress stimulating debates and enjoyable stay at Spier Estate.

MANFRED WEISS
President of the IIRA

1940 born in Tuttlingen (Germany). Graduated in Law at the University of Freiburg (Germany) in 1964. Research fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Society of the California University in Berkeley (California/USA) from 1965 to 1966. From 1970 to 1972 Assistant Professor and from 1972 to 1974 Associate Professor at the Law School of the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt. Since 1974 full professor for labour law and civil law, first (from 1974 to 1977) at the Law School of the University in Hamburg and then (since 1977) at the Law School of the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt.

- Visiting professor at the law schools of the Catholic University in Leuven/Belgium (1984), of the University Paris-Nanterre/France (1985, 1992 and 1994), of the University in Strasbourg/France(1987), of the Sorbonne in Paris (1993, 1994 and 1996), of the University Montesquieu Bordeaux/France (1996 and 1999), of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia/USA (1987, 1988 and 1991), of the University of Florida in Gainesville/USA (1989), of the New York University (1997 and 2001)
- Dean of the Law School of the J.W. Goethe University from 1989 to 1990
- President of the German Association of Industrial Relations from 1990 to 1995
- President of the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA) since 2000. Member of the executive committee of the IIRA from 1989 to 1995
- Deputy President of the German Law Association since 1998. Member of the executive committee of the German Law Association since 1990
- Co-editor of the International Labour Law reports, German author of the International Encyclopedia on Labour Law and Industrial Relations and German correspondent of the United States' Academy of Arbitrators
- Faculty member of the International Seminar on Comparative Labour Law and Social Security in Szeged (Hungary) since 1986, of the Summer School in Comparative Industrial Relations in Bologna (Italy) since 1991, of the International Seminar on Comparative Labour Law in Bordeaux/France since 2000 and of the summer school at the European University in Budapest (Hungary) since 2000
- Consultant to the International Labour Organisation: continuous collaboration and missions in Zambia (1983 and 1985), SriLanka (1984), Sudan (1987), Trinidad (1988), Hungary (1991), Southkorea (1991), Poland (1991), Bulgaria (1992) and South Africa (1994)
- Consultant to the EEC Commission since 1986
- Consultant to different Governments abroad (among others to South Africa in elaborating the Labor Relations Act)
- Numerous publications on comparative, international, European and German employment and labour law , on civil law as well as on sociology of law

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Rhodé van Rensburg

President: IRasa

5 March 2002



Welcome

It is indeed the special privilege of IRasa to be hosting this significant international conference here in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Manfred Weiss, IIRA President, Tayo Fashoyin of the ILO and IIRA, honoured guests and delegates, it is my great honour, as President of IRasa, to be welcoming you here this evening at the start of our three day conference.

Many of you have travelled a long way to be here; many of you have spent months preparing the papers that will be presented and discussed here. I know that among such an august body, we will be treated to scintillating new ideas, and sound suggestions for the way forward in a new world of international labour and economic relations, and for Africa's role in this frequently frightening new world of ours. We all look forward with great anticipation to the papers, the discussion that will follow, and the challenge that will go with each of us into our own spheres of work and endeavour as we return from the conference.

We have three days together to make a difference; let's tackle that particular challenge with determination and enthusiasm.

Africa is an exciting continent!

The theme that brings us together for the next few days is Employment Relations in a Changing World: The African Renaissance.

On the first score, I am sure there is not one delegate present today who has not been battling courageously to operate effectively in our rapidly changing environment. The changes escalated by paradigm shifts in technology, globalisation and world economic problems, have all been overtaken by the events of 11 September 2001. This will go down in history as one of the seminal events of our times. I was going to say that not even the best scenario planner in the world could have foreseen such an event, but then I was immediately reminded that South Africa's own Clem Sunter, scenario planner and chairman of the Anglo American's Chairman's Fund, has done just this.

In his book 'The Mind of a Fox' subtitled 'Scenario Planning in Action', he tells that in the first part of 2001, he and his co-author wrote to President Bush warning him that the key uncertainty during his tenure would be a terrorist threat to a Western city!

What this tells us, apart from the fact that scenario planners work with research and trends that should not be ignored, is that here at the tip of Africa, apparently distant from great world powers, minds are at work to grapple with the serious challenges that face the human race in the 21st century.

I do not find this surprising – I believe that Africa is a continent with hidden reservoirs of knowledge and potential just waiting to be re-discovered and untapped *by its own people*, as significant players in the global environment. Much has been written and said about this revival of ancient wisdom and culture, and of our critical role in this movement. This of course brings us to the second part of the equation in our theme, the African renaissance.

However, there are many harbingers of doom and gloom, who focus entirely on the wars, the disease, the poverty and unemployment. With Africa leading the world's AIDS statistics, and one in three people on the continent unemployed, we can perhaps understand, if not forgive, the pessimism. But in every possible facet of life on this planet, Africa has its own excitement to offer, and its own contribution to make. Here there is evidence of an ancient history, extending to the very dawn of mankind. Here the bones that lie buried in the earth, on our seashores, in the mountains and plains, bear testimony to dynamic endeavour, brave struggles, and renewal of hope as surely as the red desert sun rises again in the morning.

Like that desert sun, life in Africa is sometimes hard and demanding; sometimes cruel and crushing. But I believe that there is enough courage and potential here for us also to remember the morning dew on the grasslands, the sunshine on our beaches, the thriving enterprise of people in the market places, and the hum of sophisticated business activity in our cities.

Charles Darwin, author of 'On the Origin of Species', wrote that 'It is ...probable that our early progenitors lived on the African continent...' At the time, there was a cry of heresy from Victorian society. The cradle of man must surely lie in Asia or Europe, somewhere, where the first written records of human society had their origin, they said. It was only in 1924 that a fossil skull, with features intermediate between ape and human, was discovered in the northern Cape. The Taung skull, as it was known, gave the name of *Australopithecus africanus* to its race, and was older than any other similar hominid fossil ever found. It lived here, on southern African shores, between one and three million years ago.

In 1947 this discovery was followed by the thrilling find of 'Mrs Ples', or an adult female specimen of *Plesianthropus tranvaalensis* at Sterkfontein in Gauteng province, South Africa. The discovery of Mrs Ples by Dr Robert Broom proved that a species of man existed on the African continent millions of years ago.

Since then the discoveries have been thick and fast. There have been important fossil finds close to Sterkfontein, the very recent discovery of an even more ancient fossil footprint on South Africa's west coast, (just a stone's throw from here), and only a few months ago the discovery at Blombos Cave near Arniston on the south coast of pottery shards with ochre markings that would seem to predate any other evidence of human art yet found. This slab of ochre, engraved with abstract designs 77, 000 years old, has been described by the South African Museum as 'the world's oldest art object'.

From the pyramids and engineering of ancient Egypt, the temples of West Africa, the rock art of north and southern Africa, the criss-crossing of ancient trade routes and the mining and smelting of ores and the production of metal alloys that took place aeons ago, to the advanced construction methods of great Zimbabwe and Timbuktu, and an ancient African university in Mali, Africa is a continent of rich testimony to man's ingenuity, art, culture and expertise. These, and African traditional medicine, are only a few of Africa's great achievements.

But we do not need to look only to the past to realise Africa's potential. This in itself would be self-defeating. What of the present, and the future, and the great leaders that can show the world that indeed out of division and strife, genocide and catastrophe, a world vision for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction can emerge? In the true spirit of 'ubuntu' or African humanism, leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Kofi Annan, have shown the world that even in the midst of war and devastation and unspeakable human suffering, the human spirit can rise to great heights of humanitarian endeavour and renewed determination.

Indeed, in the field of human and international relations, South Africa has in recent years been a key global player in mediation processes. Nelson Mandela led the way in showing South Africa and the world that even in dire circumstances, discussion and negotiation are a far better way than brutality and bloodshed. Consequently, our own African leaders, including people such as Justice Richard Goldstone and Cyril Ramaphosa, have mediated in international disputes and have showcased South Africa's own process as a means of achieving not only truth and reconciliation, but also peace and reconciliation.

As labour relations practitioners, there are many pertinent lessons that we can take from these inspiring examples of modern leadership. It is within this uniquely African value system of ubuntu that South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki has reached out to the rest of the continent and said 'Let us make this Africa's century, the century of the African Renaissance.' He has followed his first proposals with his exciting vision for 'New Partnerships in African Development'. Just one month ago he was in New York for the World Economic Forum inspiring renewed commitment to African investment and doubly renewed efforts to shorten the gap between the 'rich old millions' of the west and the 'poor young billions' of the developing nations. It was here that the phrase 'Vuk'uzenzele' was coined; the phrase that has become the South African government's call to all of its people to become involved in regeneration and enterprise, to arise and act.

It is this kind of enlightened vision that we need to bring to the unique problems of Africa, the labour relations, the unemployment, the poverty, and skills shortage. The paternalism and discrimination of the past, which has had a detrimental effect on all aspects of labour relations in Africa, compound these problems. We cannot, dare not, minimise them. What we can do however is to welcome and encourage empowering solutions. And there are many heartening stories of new initiatives in Africa.

Not far from here, for example, in the Paarl valley, is a wine farm called Klein Begin. The loose English translation is New Beginnings, the label under which its wines are marketed. It is one of the first black-owned wine farms in South Africa, and it has come a long way. The original land was donated by advocate Alan Nelson to farm staff who helped him transform a neighbouring and badly neglected wine farm. The workers picked up at Klein Begin where the previous owner had left things. There was intense media interest in this new black venture, and its maiden vintage was snapped up.

There are equally encouraging and various ventures elsewhere in South Africa where the workers share in the profits. Near here in the Elgin valley, an area resplendent in forested mountain slopes, apple blossom, vines and roses, are a number of employee ownership ventures. Thandi is one such well-documented project, a joint venture between De Rust Estates and Safcol, a South African forestry company, and their employees. The objective is not only employee ownership, but also socio-economic upliftment of persons from previously disadvantaged communities, by providing them with land and homes, start-up capital, expertise in fruit farming and winemaking, and educational opportunities. Thandi's maiden vintage sold well off the shelves of UK supermarket store Tesco in 1999, and was followed by larger volume sales in 2000. It is clear that sound economic principles and profitability are the basis of this empowerment initiative.

On the subject of employee ownership and its practicalities, we look forward with great interest to El-Khider Ali Musa's paper, with particular reference to practices in the Sudan.

The challenge of this conference

Which brings me to why we are here now – at this conference, we need to find new perspectives, to develop new thinking, to exchange fundamentally worthwhile ideas. That, ladies and gentlemen, I believe is our truly exciting challenge.

Can we do it? Can we leave here feeling that this conference has not been, as so many are, mere hot air that will evaporate with the first shower of winter rain? The answer to that will lie in our determination and ability to really make a difference. Our field is after all industrial relations, which if nothing else has to deal with human relations first and foremost. Let our deliberations and actions in our sphere of work be based soundly on humanitarian principles that take cognisance of the fact that 'We sought workers, but human beings came instead.' Let our practices be such that the workers, likewise, will bring their hearts and minds to the workplace, and not only their bodies. Let our ideas be steeped in the African approach to consensus-building and integrative problem-solving.

While we need to bring to our discussions the collective wisdom of our global experience, we need to look to Africa itself for the context and scope of the solutions. As Prof Marius Olivier will tell us at this conference, in all our labour relations projects and proposals on this continent, we need to look to a programme of regional integration, collective self-reliance and interdependence of African states. To do so would be to act in conjunction with the prevailing spirit of the plan for new African development partnerships. It is this kind of thinking that is reflected in the words of Kofi Annan at the recent World Economic Forum, when he said 'All these issues (referring to the increasing divide between the rich and the poor) can no longer be settled in the private conclaves of the rich and powerful. The developing countries have as big a stake as anyone in the future of the world economy.'

We look forward with interest to Professor Segun Matanmi's paper on the particular subject of African management styles, with special reference to Nigeria, and how they relate to cross-national patterns in Africa. Doreen Munyati Nyamukapa's paper on labour movements in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe will, I am confident, add further focus to the subject. With the many pressing labour problems that beset the continent concurrently with aspirations to an African Renaissance, it is heartening that our speakers at this conference indeed represent both a continental and a global perspective. We are fortunate to have in our midst delegates from as far afield as Egypt, from west and central African countries, and a number from the SADC region, not to mention those from Europe and elsewhere.

It is Mark Anstey's paper that will ask us to examine the logistics, the aims and practicalities of the African Renaissance, and the implications this will have for the social actors in labour relations systems in Africa.

We all know well the words of the English poet, John Donne, who said 'No man is an island, entire unto himself', that also call us to joint effort and concentrated input in shared enterprise. What we can achieve together is certainly far more than the sum of our individual labours. It is with this knowledge firmly in mind that I call for stronger ties between the ILO and ourselves. Such a link, firmly forged and regularly tested, can only better serve our aim of improving labour standards in a globalising world.

Conclusion

It is also in this spirit that I invite you all to enjoy this conference, to take the fruits of its deliberations with you into new areas of work, and to make new and lasting friendships here on this African soil. Someone once said to me 'The problem with life is that you only discover half way through that it's a do-it-yourself-job.' The same applies to this conference – you will get out of it as much as you put in, and I know that you are all here to participate as fully as possible.

It was Pliny the Elder who wrote in the first century AD: 'Africa always offers something new'. It is my sincere hope, ladies and gentlemen, that this will be your personal experience of the conference, and that it will be our joint experience of future African labour relations strategies and outcomes.

I thank you.