During the final period of the Second World War, the United Nations coalition began working on the shaping of the new, post-war order and on creating a more effective system of universal security, which also included cooperation in a series of specialised areas. Early in 1944, the International Labour Organisation joined these efforts, particularly as regards the economic reconstruction of the states ravaged by the war and their mutual relationships in the field of labour legislation and social issues. A subsequent International Labour Conference debated those matters in Philadelphia from 20 April until 12 May 1944. Against the backdrop of the pending finale of the World War, the delegates were to address the issues of the organisation of the post-war world, the role to be performed by the ILO in its reconstruction and the protection of hired workers in the process.

The declaration adopted at the conference has passed into history as the Declaration of Philadelphia. It was conceived in the form of a collection of guidelines indicating the directions of reform postulated for the organisation in terms of its tasks and objectives in the post-war world. At the same time, it provided directions for the domestic labour and social security legislation expected by the organisation in the member states. The document was subsequently included into the ILO statute as its inseparable part and has remained in force ever since.

Despite the passage of time, the Declaration of Philadelphia continues to be recognised as a document of immense significance. Its key aspects were, and have remained, its social dimension, the very progressive direction for modifications of the ILO’s tasks and objectives and its accordance of a priority to the pursuit of universal full employment and social justice, irrespective of nationality, race, creed or sex.