



**Statement by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of Philadelphia
(Geneva, 10 May 2004)**

Sixty years ago today, the International Labour Conference met during the waning days of World War II to define a new set of aims and purposes for the ILO. In an expression of belief in the statement from the ILO Constitution that “lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice,” tripartite delegates from 49 member States took a decision that would not only ensure the survival of the ILO into the 21st century but also define the social parameters of what today we call globalization and interdependence.

Looking back, it is clear that our forebears were very much ahead of their time. The Declaration of Philadelphia allowed the ILO to become the only remnant of the League of Nations to survive the World War and become a part of the League’s successor, the United Nations.

The Declaration of Philadelphia established that labour is not a commodity. That freedom of expression and association are essential to sustained progress. That poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere. And that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.”

These principles are as relevant today as they were 60 years ago. The ILO continues to embrace the vision of the Declaration of Philadelphia and its central message – that social progress cannot be achieved solely by social policies. This has been reaffirmed by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. This Commission, established by the ILO and comprising heads of states, employers and workers representatives, policy-makers and academics, and other social actors from all walks of life – has essentially urged the ILO to fulfill the promise of that historic mandate. It calls for a stronger ethical framework to deal with the challenges of globalization. It urges the ILO to fully implement its integrated economic and social mandate given by the Declaration of Philadelphia to evaluate economic policies in the light of their impact on social and labour policies. And it reminds us that the ILO has been, and will remain, an ever-evolving organization, redefining and revitalizing itself throughout history when the need to signal a shift in political direction is clear.

This revitalization is made possible by the ILO’s unique tripartite system. The partnership of workers, employers and governments has been key to every major development in the history of the ILO. Today it remains the foundation of the ILO’s relevance in the changing world of work. Through tripartism, the ILO will continue to capitalize on those precious moments in history when opportunities are there to be grasped. Tripartism provides the strength and the vision to identify such opportunities, and the courage to take the necessary decisions.

Five years ago, we agreed that “decent work” should become the organizing concept of the ILO’s activities. What is clear is that our pursuit of decent work is consistent with the goals identified by the framers of the Declaration of Philadelphia. The World Commission has taken us further along this path by confirming that decent work is essential to achieving a fair globalization that creates opportunities for all. It calls for decent work to become a global goal to be pursued by every country and the international community through the objectives of employment and enterprise creation, workers’ rights, social protection and social dialogue.

I can think of no better way for us to celebrate this 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of Philadelphia than by recommitting ourselves to the realization of this mandate in the 21st century.
