



**Message from Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
International Day of the World's Indigenous People
(9 August 2005)**

On this [International Day](#) I wish to re-affirm the ILO's commitment to helping to secure a better future for indigenous and tribal peoples around the world.

The ILO's mandate is founded on the concept of social justice. Its application is still tragically lacking in the lives of many of the world's indigenous and tribal peoples. Often marginalized, they commonly remain subject to forced labour and other forms of labour exploitation, discrimination in access to training and employment, and other ills that accompany their marginal status.

Yet none of this is inevitable. The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People has been launched and can serve as the focus for renewal of commitment and action. The upcoming review of progress made in fulfilling the commitments contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the internationally agreed development goals, as well as other development initiatives, are further avenues through which the international community can mobilize action in support of indigenous and tribal peoples.

Although ratification of the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) has been low, the Convention is serving as a policy framework for many countries that have not yet ratified it. International development cooperation agencies are also using it to shape their assistance.

The ILO has found continuing abuses against indigenous and tribal peoples but there is also evidence of progress. Countries are increasingly acknowledging their multi-cultural nature and are providing for indigenous rights in law and regulation. The UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – in which the ILO has taken an active role since its inception – is making progress towards mainstreaming these issues into the work of the international system. And international organizations are paying greater attention to dialogue with indigenous and tribal peoples and integrating their concerns in the planning and implementation of development activities – key components of Convention No. 169.

The International Labour Office will continue to promote the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples in and through the world of work as the basis of strategies for social inclusion and poverty reduction.