



**Message by Mr. Juan Somavia,
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
World AIDS Day
(1 December 2006)**

On this World AIDS Day we are all called upon to account for what we have done to keep the promise and stop AIDS.

Through the combined efforts of many, there has been some progress but HIV/AIDS is still taking a heavy toll – we estimate that some 36.3 million working-age women and men are living with HIV/AIDS. Many lose their jobs; enterprises lose their workers; children are assuming the responsibilities of adults, denied the opportunity of a better future and becoming more vulnerable to abuse including through child labour. The human loss is incalculable. The financial and economic cost is huge. These losses are all the more regrettable because the course of the epidemic is not predetermined – we can stop AIDS.

In the world of work, non discrimination – a fundamental right at work – must be the keystone of our response. By applying the principle of non discrimination at work we open up critical avenues for prevention, treatment, care and support through the workplace.

Good practices around the world show what can be done – for example, awareness raising, encouragement of voluntary testing and counselling on a confidential basis, provision of low-cost antiretroviral drugs and referral services and support structures for families and communities.

Expanded access to treatment brings new hope to workers and their families especially in resource-poor environments. Across the world we are starting to see that we can tackle the fear, stigma and prejudice associated for so long with AIDS. Workplaces are increasingly leading this change and workers living with HIV and AIDS are becoming more empowered, living and working in dignity.

We must reduce and eliminate the remaining obstacles that stand between workers living with HIV/AIDS and their aspirations for decent work and a decent life.

The ILO, founded on the tripartite representation of governments, employers and workers, is committed to promoting national and workplace policies that can significantly reduce the economic and human cost of HIV/AIDS.

We are guided by the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS, internationally recognized as the reference for workplace action.

We are partners in the concerted and collective United Nations action through the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

And the UN must lead by example through workplace policy and action on HIV/AIDS. The ILO is committed to doing so.

Our goal is clear – to ensure that work and the workplace are in the frontline of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Today we re-commit to joining together to keep the promise and stop AIDS.

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