



**Message by Juan Somavia,
Director-General of the International Labour Office,
on the occasion of
International Day for the World's Indigenous People
(9 August 2006)**

On this International Day, the ILO re-affirms its commitment to promoting respect for the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples and their social and economic inclusion in and through the world of work.

Wherever they live, indigenous and tribal peoples are nearly always the most disadvantaged and excluded groups. Our research has found that they are much more vulnerable to forced labour, trafficking and employment discrimination than others. And their lands and livelihoods are under threat almost everywhere.

We welcome the draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples approved by the Human Rights Council at its first session, as a milestone in the international promotion of the human rights of indigenous peoples. This reflects in no small measure, the mobilization of indigenous and tribal peoples themselves for whom the Declaration will be an important tool in claiming their rights. We look forward to its adoption by the General Assembly.

The Declaration will also complement the concrete legal obligations associated with the ratification by States of the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), the only such international Convention.

The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005–2014) is an opportunity for us all to focus on action that will result in a positive change in the lives of indigenous and tribal peoples – clearly this must be an integral component of action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda is anchored in the principle of human dignity through work. Covering international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue, with gender as a cross-cutting theme, it is also an agenda for inclusive and balanced development. It is a key means of realizing the MDGs, as recognized in the Outcome Document of the UN World Summit in 2005. We place this Agenda at the service of indigenous and tribal peoples everywhere.

As a tripartite institution, the ILO's work is grounded in dialogue, organization, participation and consensus-building. Consequently, within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda, Convention No. 169 offers an excellent basis for promoting "Partnership for action and dignity", the theme of the Second Decade of Indigenous People. Ratification of the Convention, in itself an expression of commitment to the cause of indigenous and tribal peoples, plays an important catalytic and consensus-building role.

In contributing to the Programme of Action of this Decade, the ILO will focus on promoting Convention No. 169 as a platform for action and dialogue. It will also share widely, through practical information tools, its experience in implementing the principles of the Convention.

The ILO looks forward to strengthening its partnerships with indigenous and tribal peoples – and all relevant actors towards the goal of participatory and inclusive development. As we do so, we reinforce our own capacity to support the legitimate aspirations of all peoples to live and work in dignity.

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