



**Message by Mr. Juan Somavia,  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
on the occasion of World AIDS Day  
(1 December 2007)**

***Keeping the promise: Stop AIDS – Take the lead***

Today the World AIDS Campaign calls on us to focus on the role of leadership in keeping the promise to stop AIDS.

All who have been connected with this epidemic know from experience the devastation of HIV/AIDS. In the world of work we have seen the destruction of human lives and of families as well as the assault on fundamental rights – particularly discrimination against HIV positive workers and the threat of child labour – when parents fall victim to AIDS. We have also witnessed the tremendous toll on enterprises and on the economy through lost productivity, loss of skilled workers and health-care costs. The epidemic's deadly force strikes hardest in the productive adult population.

The ILO's engagement is founded on our globally endorsed goal of promoting Decent Work – based on rights at work including freedom from discrimination, expansion of employment opportunities, social protection for all and social dialogue.

The workplace is a vital channel for fighting stigma, promoting prevention, reaching out to provide care and support.

The ILO's Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work has proved to be a most useful tool in fighting HIV/AIDS at the workplace.

A further expression of our constituents' – employers' and workers' organizations and governments – commitment to the long haul is their decision to develop a legal instrument on HIV/AIDS. It will build on the Code of Practice, reinforcing its principles, particularly with respect to stigma and discrimination and the contribution of the workplace to the achievement of universal access to prevention, care and support.

As the epidemic evolves, so, too does our collective response. Over time, the realization that this disease is as much a development challenge as well as part of a public health crisis, is leading it to become more firmly centred in the development agenda.

With this has come greater recognition of the importance of an integrated approach in addressing the breadth of the epidemic. HIV spreads along the fault lines of society and brings them into sharper relief. The fight against the disease must also be an integrated battle against gender inequality as well as uneven access to education and health care and opportunities for decent work, nationally, regionally and globally.

An integrated approach is even more demanding, making effective leadership an even greater imperative.

The ILO is committed to doing its part.

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