



**Address by Mr. Juan Somavia,  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
on the occasion of  
International Women's Day  
(8 March 2007)**

Today we celebrate the achievements of women – the newsmakers and the pathbreakers as well as the unsung contributions of all women who in vastly differing circumstances are the backbone of their families, communities and societies.

In some countries gender gaps are slowly diminishing. Women have fought deep-seated inequalities and prejudices to break through barriers that had hitherto ensured their exclusion simply on the basis of gender. They are driving forces for change.

This is indeed cause for celebration.

And for the International Labour Organization, it is particularly fitting that on this day we also remember those working women whose courageous struggles for justice and equality are very much part of the history of this day.

Much has been accomplished but much remains to be done.

For this occasion, the ILO is releasing its latest report on global employment trends for women. According to the study, the number of women participating in labour markets – either in work or looking actively for work – is at its highest point. In 2006, an estimated 1.2 billion of the 2.9 billion workers in the world were women. However, the report also found that more women than ever before are unemployed, stuck in low-productivity jobs in agriculture and services or receiving less money for doing the same jobs as men.

Promoting gender equality in and through the world of work is intrinsic to the ILO's mandate. Ensuring that women and men everywhere can enjoy respect for fundamental principles and rights at work – including freedom from discrimination in employment and occupation; have productive work; access to social protection; and a voice at work, are key to ensuring that women are not left out and left behind.

As we celebrate this day, the United Nations also puts the spotlight on violence against women and girls. There cannot be social and economic progress when there is impunity against such violence which is fed by gender inequality. Where inequalities exist, the strong bully the weak, and violence in its many forms rears its ugly head. It is a real human tragedy and women and girls may ultimately pay with their lives. It also carries an economic and social cost.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda is an agenda for equality. In promoting decent work – work with freedom, equity, security and human dignity – we are committed to doing our part to ending violence in all its forms against women wherever they work.

Achieving gender equality and ending impunity for violence against women calls for a transformation of minds and attitudes along with the empowerment of women in an environment of opportunity for all.

In the promotion of decent work, the ILO and its tripartite constituents – governments, employers' and workers' organizations – are united in a commitment to this goal.

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