



**Message by Juan Somavia  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
on the occasion of  
World AIDS Day**

**1 December 2008**

On this World AIDS Day, the ILO recommit to making work and workplaces key avenues for responding to the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

The last Global AIDS Report showed signs of progress in the battle against the epidemic. This is encouraging – we know that with concerted action we can beat it.

And yet some 33 million people are living with HIV. Nine out of every 10 are adults in their productive prime. Beyond the deep human tragedy of HIV/AIDS, the epidemic has severely undermined the capacity of many countries to meet developmental challenges. They have been deprived of skilled and experienced teachers, managers, farmers, factory workers, government officials, care providers and so many others.

Social and economic inequality has been a key factor in the spread of HIV. The ongoing global economic crisis will aggravate this situation and hard won gains will undoubtedly be under pressure. The crisis may have a number of further implications for those who have already contracted the virus and are in a vulnerable position. The loss of a job, for example, may mean the end of vital HIV treatment (provided by employer or covered by earnings). The loss of income in an AIDS-affected household may lead to children being taken out of school and put to work. Lay-offs may be used to hide or excuse HIV-related discrimination.

At this turbulent time, strong leadership and a clear vision that connects people's lives and livelihoods with recovery and growth are all the more critical if we are to keep the promise to stop AIDS.

The tripartite ILO has been working across the globe to show how governments, enterprises and employers' and workers' organizations can join forces and forge alliances to help reduce HIV transmission and manage the impact of the epidemic in and through the workplace – this is an integral part of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. We are also taking this effort to the informal economy where so many are particularly vulnerable.

We are committed to giving leadership in the response to HIV/AIDS through the world of work by promoting gender equality and supporting initiatives to provide jobs, protection and life-saving information. Freedom to organize, a fundamental right at work, is essential to empowering women and men and combating discrimination.

As we mark this 20th World AIDS Day, the ILO pledges to continue fighting AIDS in and through the world of work.

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