



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

5 June 2008

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment are workplace issues. Meeting the enormous challenge of arresting climate change, the loss of biodiversity and pollution and of supporting sustainable agriculture capable of providing food for all, requires major changes in production and consumption patterns.

Enterprises will be at the centre of such change. There will also be profound effects on employment patterns. It is increasingly recognized that there will be major adjustments in labour markets, not only new opportunities but also transformations and job losses.

But what is still much less appreciated, is that green growth and avoiding dangerous climate change depend on greener enterprises and green jobs. Meeting environmental goals requires the contribution of employers and workers along with the government policies and services which facilitate change and help labour markets adjust and prepare for the future.

The great transformation towards low-carbon and eco-efficient economies is already under way. Millions of green jobs have already been created from Germany to China, from the United States to India, from Brazil to Bangladesh, in renewable energy, energy efficiency, recycling, sustainable agriculture and environmental services, often in new enterprises. There are clearly huge opportunities for more and better employment as well as for development and poverty reduction through green jobs and clean growth.

Green growth can become a strong driver for sustainable development if green jobs are also decent jobs and if there is a just transition for enterprises and workers. A decent work approach includes: the promotion of green enterprises and green jobs; active labour market policies which combine social security for displaced workers with skills development to help enterprises and workers to adapt and seize opportunities; work that is clean and safe for workers and the environment; and respect for workers' rights that give freedom including to engage in social dialogue which is key to shaping effective responses.

Indeed, cooperation between employers and workers in enterprises can go a long way in reducing emissions, saving resources and finding balanced strategies which are equitable within and between nations and thus politically sustainable.

The current crisis in the agricultural sector and soaring food prices which could reverse many of the recent gains in poverty reduction, are a dramatic reminder of the need for coherent global and national policies. This is particularly true for developing countries who have contributed least to the climate crisis and to other environmental problems but who will bear the brunt of the consequences. At the same time, they have large unmet development needs.

In partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and others, the ILO is rolling out its Green Jobs Initiative. Its aim is to assist governments, employers and workers from around the world to prepare for the change ahead, to seize the opportunities of green jobs and to overcome the challenges of transitions. It is an integral part of the United Nations-wide strategy to address climate change through coherent policies and programmes.

The ILO is pleased to put its Decent Work Agenda at the service of low carbon goals.

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