



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

9 August 2008

On this International Day we highlight the right of indigenous peoples everywhere to live and work in dignity. It is a moment to take stock of progress and to reflect on the challenges ahead.

The majority of indigenous peoples only find work in the informal economy. They are more likely to face discrimination in employment and suffer multiple disadvantages in matters of access to land and ownership rights, credit, marketing facilities and other resources. They are commonly subject to forced dispossession of land for agricultural development as well as for logging and mining activities.

The ILO has had a longstanding concern for the situation of indigenous peoples. The promotion of relevant international labour standards is at the heart of the Organization's efforts towards the goal of improving the living and working conditions of indigenous and tribal peoples.

The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) recognizes the value of indigenous and tribal peoples' specific knowledge, skills and technologies as the foundation for self-determined development processes. Also particularly relevant is the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) ratified by 166 ILO member States which requires governments to put in place an effective national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of access to employment, and particular occupations, including indigenous peoples' traditional occupations.

With the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007, the international community also took a further major step in the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples' rights world-wide.

Such instruments provide sound guidance on strategies that respect the integrity and rights of indigenous peoples. But what ultimately matters is that they should bring positive change to the lives of indigenous peoples. Experience has shown that the traditional occupations and rich heritage of indigenous peoples can be part of forward-looking and innovative development strategies based on inclusion and participation. As an institution founded on organization and dialogue, we place particular emphasis on these instruments in shaping such strategies.

On this day the ILO recommits to working with indigenous peoples in support of their quest for decent lives and livelihoods.

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