



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

8 March 2008

Today we celebrate the enormous—and often unacknowledged—contributions of women around the world to their families, communities and societies. This year, the focus of the United Nations is financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. At the ILO, we are marking the day by highlighting the importance of “Investing in Decent Work for women: Not just right, but smart.”

We believe that the workplace and the world of work are at the centre of global solutions to address gender equality and the advancement of women in society.

Women continue to enter the world’s workforce in great numbers. Over the past decade, the number of working women has increased by 200 million. More women are completing higher levels of education and moving into senior management positions at their places of work.

But these advancements cannot and must not obscure the glaring inequities that still exist in workplaces throughout the world. Women are 40 per cent of the working population worldwide—yet represent 60 per cent of the world’s working poor.

Unemployment among women also continues to increase. In 2007, there were 81.6 million women looking but unable to find work—that’s over ten million more than one decade ago.

Even when they do find work, women are more likely to be in vulnerable employment that is low paid and lacking in benefits and social protection. Due to gender roles and responsibilities, they also must reconcile the double-burden of unpaid family care work.

Gender inequality isn’t just bad social policy; it is bad economics. The most recent ILO Global Report *Equality at work: Tackling the challenges*, highlights the role that gender inequality plays in constraining productivity, growth and prosperity. Addressing such inequality at the workplace and tapping into the vast socio-economic potential of women through improvements in their status in labour markets would benefit individuals and families, workers and employers, and societies and national economies. In other words, investing in decent work for women is not just right, but smart.

We at the ILO will continue to strive for gender equality and respect for the rights of individuals in the world of work. We are committed to working with governments, employers and workers towards the goal of promoting decent work for women and men alike. Our recently-revised Action Plan for Gender Equality has been launched to underpin our efforts to that end.

On this International Women's Day, we reaffirm that by championing women's rights and investing in decent work, we are empowering societies and advancing the cause of economic and social development for all.

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