



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

**1 December 2009**

“I am living my rights. Stop AIDS, keep the promise.” It is our collective responsibility to respond to this call of World AIDS Day 2009.

Over 33 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. More than 90 per cent are adults in their productive and reproductive prime.

Keeping the promise means enabling HIV-positive workers to remain on the job. Eliminating HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in the world of work upholds the dignity of work and of workers. Policies and strategies for prevention and treatment sustain the workforce: they must reach all workers, wherever they work, including in the informal and rural economy. And in sustaining the workforce we sustain families, communities, societies and economies.

Today, with four million people worldwide able to access treatment, progress can be acknowledged. Yet let us not forget that for every two persons who obtain treatment, there are five new infections and one of every two new infections is among 15-24 year olds. Too many of these young people are unlikely to realize their potential.

We cannot relent on prevention. It must be multi-dimensional and approached with long-term commitment, creativity and diversity.

The ILO with its unique tripartite structure comprising governments, workers and employers, works in close partnership with UNAIDS, other international agencies and a range of national stakeholders to reach women and men in their workplaces – whether in factories or offices, in farms or homes, on the roads or at sea. We forge partnerships for prevention, to fight stigma and discrimination and to break down barriers to testing and treatment. The ILO’s approach, set out in our [Code of Practice](#), is reflected in workplace policies and programmes that are multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral, well-targeted and gender-sensitive, responsive to national specificity. In June 2010, the International Labour Conference will consider adopting a new labour standard in the form of a Recommendation on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work to reinforce our work.

The present economic crisis is aggravating pre-existing challenges of unemployment and underemployment, poverty and growing insecurity. Social protection systems, already weak or absent in so many instances, are unlikely to be able to provide the much needed buffer.

The weakest tend to be hit first and hardest. Those living with or affected by HIV and AIDS often belong to the most vulnerable segments of society. Suffering multiple disadvantages, they see their livelihoods and their very lives threatened.

It is widely acknowledged that the crisis response must be both productive and people-centred and that the post crisis world must be different. The ILO's [Global Jobs Pact](#) – a real economy response to the crisis – is centred on employment and social protection within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda, in which respect for rights at work and social dialogue are integral components. The Pact calls for workplace programmes on HIV/AIDS as part of an effective crisis response. It also advocates a social protection floor so that all have access to basic social services, and income transfers for the poorest. Such action must be sustained in the post crisis world.

On this World AIDS Day we pay tribute to all who are engaged in breaking the silence and tackling one of the cruellest global tragedies of our times.

The ILO renews its commitment to doing our part to keep the promise in and through the world of work.

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