



**Address by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
International Migrants Day**

18 December 2009

On this International Migrants Day, the ILO pays tribute to millions of migrants who have left their homes to find work and better opportunities to support their families and communities. This movement largely reflects the failure of policies to generate enough decent jobs where people live. Migrant workers make large but often unrecognized contributions to growth and development of both their host countries and home communities. Yet too often they become trapped in the most difficult of circumstances including exploitation, discrimination, poor working conditions, lack of respect for rights at work and limited or no social protection – problems likely to be accentuated by the current global economic crisis.

The year 2009 marks the 60th anniversary of the first international Convention on migrant workers adopted by the ILO, the Migration for Employment (Revised) Convention, 1949 (No.97). It is also the eve of the 20th anniversary of the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). These together with the ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) are milestones in the international protection of migrant workers. These instruments enshrine the universal principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination and remain highly relevant in the current crisis.

The global economic crisis continues to have especially adverse impacts on migrant workers worldwide who generally experience higher unemployment rates than native workers in most countries. At the same time, more restrictive admission policies have reduced migration opportunities. For the first time in more than a decade, remittances from migrant workers to their families at home have declined. There is evidence of increasing xenophobia and racism against migrants in many destination countries as well.

The ILO has responded to the economic crisis by developing a decent work response to the crisis – the Global Jobs Pact. The Pact acknowledges the particular vulnerability of migrant workers. The Pact focuses on accelerating employment creation and building social protection systems, while recognizing that respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting gender equality and encouraging voice, participation, and social dialogue are critical to recovery and development. All these apply to migrant workers as well. Thus the crisis provides an opportunity to make globalization fairer for all workers, including migrant. Today the ILO renews its commitment to working with tripartite partners and other stakeholders for promoting decent work for all, and upholding the rights of all women and men migrant workers worldwide.

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