



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

20 February 2009

Today we mark the first World Day of Social Justice, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 2007. The General Assembly invited member States and all those seeking to promote social justice to re-connect with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development.

Ninety years ago, the ILO's Constitution affirmed: "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice". On this foundation, the ILO has brought its work-centred mission to the cause of social justice.

In the midst of the present crisis, it is timely to focus on this goal. The global financial crisis has quickly affected the real economy and provoked a jobs crisis. Economic recession is paralleled by the spectre of social recession. Hard won gains in poverty reduction – albeit insufficient – are being undermined. The middle class in many countries has seen its purchasing power steadily erode. Women and men, families and communities feel threatened. Social tensions and challenges to social stability are already evident.

But let us also recall that prior to this crisis there was already a major socio-economic crisis with widespread poverty, under employment, growth in inequality and difficult social conditions for many. The ILO had long cautioned that the global economy was on an unsustainable course, lacking the direction to make markets and globalization work for all. Consequently, we cannot be content with returning to a pre-crisis position. We must still rise to the challenge of achieving sustained economic growth with social progress, capable of delivering the Millennium Development Goals and going beyond.

The Social Summit's point of departure was that production and economic growth had to meet the needs of people – for rights, for work, for justice, for social integration and for a sustainable environment. From a foundation of rights at work, it identified employment as a key means of stepping out of poverty and of fostering social cohesion. These were the building blocks of a coherent approach to social development that was not subsequently pursued in practice.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda – the contemporary expression of the ILO's historical mandate is centred on the dignity of work and of the worker. And in June 2008, the ILO's constituents adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization which affirmed the role of the Decent Work Agenda in the context of globalization. It sets out a vision and a practical programme for promoting social justice through the world of work.

The Decent Work Agenda encompasses four objectives that are "inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive" – promoting compliance with fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting employment and enterprise creation, extending social protection and

reinforcing social dialogue along with cross-cutting themes of gender and development. It provides a value system for the global economy and offers the means for ensuring that the dignity of work and the demands of the productive process are both respected.

The future can be shaped with the right policies. Today, financial, trade, economic and social policies need to coalesce around the package of productive investment, jobs, protection and respect for rights at work as a means of getting out of the crisis and beyond.

Work is a principal determinant of how people experience the present and their prospects for the future. It is a keystone of social justice.

In designating this day, the General Assembly asked the international community to consolidate further its efforts to eradicate poverty, promote full employment and decent work, gender equality, social well-being and justice for all.

The ILO is pleased to join the common endeavour of charting a new course for realizing social justice.

* * *