



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

12 August 2009

We mark International Youth Day amidst a global economic and social crisis that is hitting young people hard.

Over the past year, youth unemployment has risen faster than overall unemployment worldwide. Already prior to the crisis, young people were nearly three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. The number of unemployed youth is projected to reach between 78-90 million by the end of 2009 rising from over 72 million in 2007.¹ In many countries, this grim unemployment picture is darkened further by the large numbers in poor quality and low paid jobs with intermittent and insecure work arrangements, including in the informal economy. More youth are poor or underemployed than ever before: some 125 million young people earn less than US\$1 per day.

This amounts to a great loss: for each young woman and man whose potential is not realized, for economies which cannot tap the productive capacity of young people, and for societies that are weakened and threatened by youth without hope.

On this Youth Day as we focus on the theme of “Sustainability: Our Challenge. Our Future” we emphasize the intergenerational solidarity that must underpin sustainability. Today’s policy choices and action will be instrumental in defining the futures of young people and the kind of world they will inherit.

Young people are themselves agents of change for a better world. They have stood up for greater equity within and between nations; productive and motivated youth help drive economic prosperity; their innovative and creative capacity can generate sustainable sources of growth and jobs, especially green jobs that contribute to environmental sustainability. Yet young people face tremendous difficulties in securing decent work. It is particularly important at this time of crisis to renew our efforts in support of decent work for youth.

In June 2009 the ILO’s International Labour Conference, with the participation of government, employer and worker delegates, adopted the Global Jobs Pact – a decent work response to the current crisis. It aims to promote an economic recovery along with opportunities for decent work. It proposes balanced policy measures to accelerate investments in human capital, employment creation, jobs recovery and growth of sustainable enterprises. Together with employment, social protection, fundamental principles and rights at work as well as social dialogue are the elements of an integrated crisis response that can also support economic, environmental and social sustainability.

¹ ILO, *Global employment trends update*, May 2009. Revised update of estimates on youth unemployment will be released by the ILO in September 2009 with the sixth edition of the *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*.

The Pact highlights the labour market vulnerabilities of young people and calls for action to enhance support to youth at risk. Many governments are taking measures to address rising youth unemployment, including expansion of existing training programmes, subsidies to enterprises to hire young people, and measures for youth entrepreneurship. The best labour market entry path for young people remains a good basic education, vocational training or higher education and initial work experience. Where required such measures can be targeted to vulnerable groups of youths.

As long as millions of youth are un- or under-employed, globalization will neither be fair nor just. Helping young people to realize their productive potential and to harness their energies and talents to shape a better world is our challenge and our responsibility today, and our gift to our future.

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