



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

**Geneva
8 March 2010**

On this International Women's Day, the ILO joins the rest of the UN system in its call for equal rights and equal opportunities for all.

Today we highlight what is working for working women.

Fifteen years ago, the ILO addressed the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing with the theme "All women are working women!" Since then, gender equality in the world of work has progressed through national policies and legislative frameworks.

Good practices were shared at the International Labour Conference last June in the discussion on *Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work*. Policies and laws now ban discrimination at work based on sex. Labour inspectorates and courts are better monitoring the application of gender equality. Awareness of workers' rights concerning equality of opportunity and treatment has increased across all regions. Information campaigns have empowered both women and men workers to demand their rights. Many governments have adopted active labour market policies that address gender inequalities within overall objectives of job-rich growth, sustainable enterprises and decent work.

Nevertheless, the global economic crisis is placing the recent advances at risk. Our report on *Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges*, shows that a new gender gap may be emerging. Although women's overall labour force participation is growing, women remain disproportionately represented in poorly-paid, insecure, part-time, home-based or informal work and continue to be undervalued when it comes to equal pay for work of equal value. Major causes of inequality are linked to structural imbalances that weigh against women and systems of collecting national data that are gender-blind.

The Global Jobs Pact was adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2009 to help mitigate the social impact of the crisis. The Pact calls for recovery packages that integrate gender equality concerns in all measures. The economic crisis is as an opportunity to shape new gender equality policy responses. When governments design and implement fiscal stimulus packages, for example, it is important to recognize the labour market disadvantages that women may face. Women carry the heaviest burden when it comes to unpaid care work. This may expand as the crisis deepens and further limits women's access to labour markets if policies for sharing care responsibilities with men are not forthcoming.

The 2009 ILC resolution on *Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work* shows what works for working women and gender equality. It guides our efforts towards a labour market in which all women and men can participate freely and actively. It calls, for example, for measures to facilitate women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship

development, to address unequal remuneration between women and men, to enhance social protection for all, to strengthen women's participation in social dialogue on an equal footing with men, and to prevent and eliminate violence against women at work.

In some regions, cooperatives and enterprise clusters are powerful vehicles of social inclusion and social and economic empowerment for women. Women are increasingly becoming better organized in sectors where they have traditionally been discriminated against; they have better access to finance and business services catering to women's specific needs. This does not only benefit women themselves, but their families, communities and societies at large.

On International Women's Day 2010, let us recommit to actively supporting what works for working women as an integral part of the Decent Work Agenda.

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