



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

12 August 2010

Today the ILO joins with the UN family to celebrate the launching of the second International Year of Youth.

Dialogue and mutual understanding, the themes of this international year, will be instrumental in shaping viable policies that respond to the need and aspirations of young people for decent work and of societies for the creativity, dynamism and vigour of youth.

Many young men and women around the world have had the opportunity to realize their potential and are making tremendous contributions in workplaces, communities and societies.

However, this is in stark contrast with the situation of many others. The global recession has dramatically highlighted the difficulties which young people face in their quest for decent work and has exacerbated structural unemployment, underemployment and poverty.

Between 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate registered the largest annual increase on record reversing the pre-crisis trend of a declining rate since 2002. By the end of 2009, of some 620 million economically active youth, 81 million – or 13 per cent – were unemployed. Today, young people are nearly three times more likely than adults to be unemployed.

And for many young people who do find work, the story is not much brighter. A common reality is one of long working hours, low pay, limited or no job security, no income or support when they are out of work. Many are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, inadequate education and training and poor jobs. In 2008, more than 28 per cent of all young workers – or 152 million – were living in households surviving on less than US\$1.25 per day.

The lack of decent and productive work can foster frustration, anger, a sense of rejection and idleness. There are also significant economic and social costs when enterprises, communities and countries fail to nurture and benefit from the potential of young people.

For the tripartite ILO the promotion of decent work for young people is a central concern. The Global Jobs Pact, a decent work response to the crisis, focuses on employment and social protection and highlights the need for integrated and balanced recovery measures that are both productive and people-centred. One of its guiding principles is enhancing support to vulnerable women and men hit hard by the crisis including youth at risk. It highlights the role of vocational and technical training and entrepreneurial skills development, especially to unemployed youth in overcoming structural challenges. These measures are founded on respect for rights and social dialogue.

The voice of young women and men is key to improving their living and working conditions and enabling them to contribute towards wealthier and sustainable economies, fairer societies and stronger democracies

In this International Year of Youth let us commit to promoting a constructive dialogue and mutual understanding for the full and effective participation of youth in all aspects of society.

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