

## ILO Director-General's Message

Juan Somavia - 10 May 2007

Launch of the Global Report on Discrimination

Thank you for coming together as the ILO launches a major new report on the state of discrimination in the world or work. The report is called ***Equality at work: Tackling the challenges***.

Fundamentally, it is about answering a common demand we hear around the globe. Sometimes it is expressed in the voting booth. Sometimes it is voiced on the streets. Women and men are saying: Give me a fair chance at a decent job. A fair chance, on an equal footing, to build a better life.

More and more evidence shows that by answering this fundamental call for dignity and inclusion we can build more prosperous enterprises, more peaceful communities, more stable societies.

What does the report tell us?

The encouraging news is that laws and policies to combat discrimination show healthy growth. For example, nine out of ten ILO member states have ratified the two core conventions on discrimination. The UN has just adopted a major new convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The ILO code of practice on combating discrimination against those living with HIV/AIDS is now being used in more than 60 countries.

Despite headway, we also know that awareness, capacity and institutions to combat discrimination lag behind.

Every day, women earn less for the same job as a man. People with disabilities and older workers are denied opportunities to contribute the full measure of their potential. Minorities find themselves screened out of the hiring process because of race or religion.

And as the report details, new forms of discrimination are emerging – based on age, sexual orientation, or genetic predisposition.

How do we tackle the challenge? Our report outlines a plan of action.

- Stronger laws and more effective enforcement;
- Promoting gender equality through more integrated and better coordinated global action;
- Mainstreaming non-discrimination and equality into national policies and ILO decent work country programmes;
- And better equipping workers and employers with the tools to promote equality in the workplace.

We have much to learn from each other. And this report provides a catalogue of extremely useful national experiences to draw from. There is no single path to opportunity and inclusion, but there's also no doubt that the workplace is a key entry point for achieving wider equality.

Because work is central in our lives, eliminating discrimination at the workplace will go a long way to rooting it out in society at large.

By tackling the challenge of discrimination, we will empower individuals, strengthen economies, and enrich societies at large.

Thank you for being a part of this effort and doing your part to make equality a reality. ■