



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

**3 December 2008**

As we observe this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the theme “Dignity and Justice for All of Us” is highly pertinent in light of the deepening global economic crisis. People with disabilities are often excluded and marginalized – not least from the world of work. They are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of ILO Convention No. 159 concerning the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is timely to recall the rights of people with disabilities and the contribution they can make to social and economic development.

Of the 650 million people with disabilities – around 10 per cent of the world’s population – some 470 million are of working age. About 80 per cent live in developing countries, and the vast majority are either living below the poverty line or are engaged in vulnerable forms of work.

Against these odds, people with disabilities daily demonstrate their productivity and their commitment to contributing to their communities and societies. Throughout the world, people with disabilities are valued employees or employers constantly challenging misconceptions about their ability to work. This is doubly important – it is a matter of respecting the rights and dignity of people with disabilities as well as empowering individuals, strengthening economies and enriching societies.

The ILO’s mission of promoting decent work for all embraces people with disabilities. ILO Convention No. 159 concerning the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), along with our Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace provides a framework for the inclusion of people with disabilities in skills development and the open labour market. The recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adds a crucial policy tool that will enable people with disabilities to play a much more central role in social and economic development.

Whether dealing with the present global economic turmoil or the inequality and poverty that pre-dated this crisis, it is in our common interest to rise to the challenge of shaping new approaches for inclusive societies and productive economies that assure dignity and justice for all of us. The ILO is fully committed to this task.

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