



**Address by Juan Somavia  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
on the occasion of  
Human Rights Day**

**10 December 2008**

The ILO is proud to join in the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Proclaimed as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”, the Universal Declaration places respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms squarely in the context of the fight against poverty and the promotion of social progress, through measures at the national and international levels.

The ILO’s mandate is inseparably linked to the Universal Declaration. Indeed, the Declaration draws from many of the principles of the ILO Constitution including the right to just and favourable conditions of work, protection against unemployment, equal pay, and the right to form and join trade unions.

The ILO’s international labour standards – together with the human rights instruments adopted by the General Assembly – form a solid, coherent and mutually reinforcing body of international law aimed at ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms in the world of work set out in the Universal Declaration.

As we celebrate today the noble cause of human rights, the goals and aspirations of the Universal Declaration still remain distant and unrealized for millions of working women and men worldwide.

Continuing massive poverty, and growing social inequalities and unemployment call for reinvigorated action, particularly in light of the economic crisis. Indeed, the current turmoil requires us to focus all the more on ensuring respect for human rights. Women and men working in the informal economy are deprived of decent work and sustainable livelihoods, and vulnerable social groups, including migrant workers and indigenous and tribal peoples continue to face discrimination and exclusion.

The Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work campaign launched by the ILO in 2008 highlights the progress made in ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men in the world of work, but also raises awareness of persisting barriers to gender equality that have yet to be tackled effectively.

The ILO’s Decent Work Agenda is a concrete response to all of these challenges, as reaffirmed by the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization in June 2008. Decent Work brings together four interrelated and mutually supportive objectives: employment creation and enterprise development, social protection, social dialogue, and rights at work.

In this 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we also commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the 50th anniversary of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), two of the ILO's fundamental Conventions.

As we work towards universal ratification of the ILO's fundamental Conventions, particular efforts are needed to achieve progress with regard to freedom of association and collective bargaining, the protection of which is not yet enjoyed by much of the world's workforce.

With the adoption of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the ILO and its tripartite constituents have embarked on an important process of strengthening their capacity to promote Decent Work, in close cooperation with our partner organizations in the United Nations system.

It is only through joining forces that we can effectively respond to the Universal Declaration's call for a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms it proclaims can be realized.

\* \* \*