



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

18 December 2008

Today we recognize the 200 million international migrants, 50 per cent of whom are women and men migrant workers, who have left their homes and communities to find work and better opportunities elsewhere in the world to support their families and communities. They make huge but often unrecognized contributions to growth and development of both their host countries and home communities.

The principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are well reflected in the two ILO Conventions on migrant workers – Migration for Employment Convention, 1949 (No. 97), and the Migrant Workers Convention, 1975 (No. 143) – as well as in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Their Families (1990), all landmarks in the international protection of migrant workers. Equality of treatment and non-discrimination are universal principles enshrined in these instruments which provide the foundation for a rights-based approach to labour migration in a globalizing world. It is encouraging that 80 countries have ratified one or more of these instruments.

The current global financial and economic crises have serious implications for migrant workers worldwide. Past experience makes us painfully aware that migrant workers, especially women workers and those in irregular status, are among the hardest hit and most vulnerable during crisis situations. While the full impact of the crisis on migrant workers is yet to unfold, there are reports of direct layoffs, worsening working conditions including wage cuts, increasing returns, and reductions in immigrant intakes. Yet all sectors may not be equally affected, and destination countries should assess their labour market needs before resorting to general layoffs of migrant workers. It is important that migrant workers do not become scapegoats for the current financial and economic crisis.

Source countries are already grappling with the challenges of employment creation for their citizens including increasing numbers of return migrants and falling remittances. The integrated strategy for decent work contained in the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization provides us with a solid foundation in addressing the current crisis. Availability of decent work opportunities at home would also pave the way for migration by choice, not by necessity.

A growing global mobilization involving, among others, global and regional trade union federations, employers' organizations and national associations will be critical in advancing migrant worker concerns.

On this International Migrants Day, the ILO renews its commitment to promote decent work for all women and men migrant workers worldwide in close collaboration with the United Nations family.
