



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

**17 October 2008**

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty comes at a time of profound global uncertainty and financial turmoil. This year's theme—"Human Rights and Dignity of People Living in Poverty"—is a fitting focus.

Particularly, in these times of crisis charting a sustainable course for the future is unworkable without respect for human rights including workers rights.

People the world over understand that the route out of poverty and into dignity is through the opportunity of a decent job based on rights, protection and social dialogue.

Delivering on this demand has never been more critical. Let us not forget that in many ways we were in a crisis before the financial crisis erupted—an unfolding crisis of continuing massive poverty worldwide and growing social inequalities in advanced, emerging and developing countries.

The World Bank estimates that 100 million people have fallen back below the US\$1 a day poverty line and the billions living in poverty are seeing their inadequate purchasing power eaten away by price increases.

A major challenge is ensuring that the poor have opportunities for productive work. To do so, calls for action on many fronts. One key priority must be building and extending basic social protection systems, an all too often neglected element in our poverty prevention and reduction strategies. Yet this is an essential tool for enabling people to become productive and start working out of poverty.

There are many examples of initiatives which provide work and sustainable livelihoods to those in the informal economy, help maintain local economic activity and provide the infrastructure that supports future economic development.

Through organization and the exercise of fundamental rights, women and men gain strength forming cooperatives and associations that can support their economic activities and also serve as channels for enhancing social protection.

Basic pensions and child support are also effective means of getting cash into the poorest communities and together with basic health-care schemes have a direct impact on poverty, preventing for example the resurgence of child labour that has been a feature of past crises.

Initiatives such as these are vital to the working poor and their families hit first by food and fuel prices rises and now by the threat of economic slowdown and recession.

Scaling up initiatives to reduce poverty is essential to poverty eradication, a sustainable recovery and a fair globalization.

It is time for creative and common-sense policy directions. Let us work together to reorient policies towards people's aspirations for decent work for a decent life.

\* \* \*