



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

5 June 2009

The global financial and economic crisis is prompting us to rethink values, policies and practices that have led to a global jobs crisis, increasing poverty and inequalities, and a widespread disregard for the environment.

We ignore the mounting costs of energy-intensive production and consumption patterns and the threats posed by climate change at our peril. Achieving a high-employment low-carbon economy must become a top priority in moving towards a more sustainable development path.

Green jobs that contribute to preserving or restoring the environment are being created directly and indirectly. Equally important, though less visible, green jobs can help to make the whole economy more environmentally friendly. Adjusting production and consumption patterns to low-carbon and green economies is a global challenge affecting enterprises and workplaces everywhere.

Similarly, adaptation to climate change poses a huge challenge, particularly for those developing countries which did little to cause the problem but now are likely to suffer most. In December this year, the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference offers an opportunity to make a major step forward if an ambitious new agreement is reached which takes due account of all pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.

The Green Jobs Initiative sponsored jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), has highlighted the promise of a triple dividend from green jobs: sustainable enterprises; poverty reduction; and a job-centred economic recovery.¹

Meeting the dual challenges of the economic crisis and of climate change hinges on adjusting existing jobs and workplaces and on investing in new technologies generating new sources of growth, enterprise creation and jobs. Green jobs are a practicable and effective option for reviving economies and for quickly creating large numbers of jobs.² Similarly, investment in adapting to climate change could provide many new jobs, particularly for low-income persons.

¹ See the Green Jobs report: http://www.unep.org/pdf/A_Global_Green_New_Deal_Policy_Brief.pdf

² For a more detailed discussion, see for example, ILO: The financial and economic crisis – A decent work response; UNEP: The Green New Deal – A policy brief.

The ILO is working together with UNEP and other multilateral partners in a “Green Economy Initiative” adopted by the CEB (UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) to respond to the crisis by promoting investment in long-term environmental sustainability as part of a stimulus and recovery expenditure, and to put the world on a climate-friendly path.

It is encouraging to see that an increasing number of stimulus packages include support for the greening of economies and the creation of green jobs. But, lifting millions of workers surviving on less than US\$2 per day out of poverty, calls not just for green jobs but also decent work – where the promotion of enterprise and job creation is accompanied by measures to ensure adequate incomes and social protection, support for social dialogue and respect for workers’ rights.

Wisely invested, resources for recovery could leave a legacy of energy efficient infrastructure, rehabilitated ecosystems, renewable energy sources, and enterprises and workplaces more resilient to climate change.

And they could lay the foundation for a greener economic future which is environmentally sound, economically productive and socially sustainable.

* * *