



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

10 December 2009

This year's observance focuses on promoting discrimination-free societies and a world of equal treatment for all.

All who work – wherever they work – have rights at work. Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental principle and right at work. Yet in all parts of the world, many men and women experience work-related discrimination because of their sex, colour, ethnicity, social origin, religion, national extraction or political opinion – and many suffer multiple disadvantages on these as well as other grounds.

There has been progress in prohibiting workplace discrimination by law. However, proactive measures and better enforcement are needed to make equality a reality. We must also ensure that education, training and employment policies are in place to deliver effectively for groups affected by persisting and entrenched forms of discrimination and exclusion.

We cannot lose sight of the goal of ending discrimination at this time of economic crisis when existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion risk being accentuated.

While financial markets and economies show some signs of a rebound, the crisis is far from over – least of all in the lives of millions of men and women who have lost their jobs or who are still in work but facing considerable uncertainty and insecurity. For those in the informal economy it means heightened vulnerability, worsening poverty.

In June 2009, the tripartite ILO put forward the [Global Jobs Pact](#) – a Decent Work response to the crisis. The Pact proposes a balanced and realistic set of policy measures that can strengthen efforts to address the crisis. It is centred on accelerating employment creation and building social protection systems. At the same time it recalls that respecting fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting gender equality and encouraging voice, participation, and social dialogue are also critical to recovery and development. It responds to people's needs and those of the real economy.

The Global Jobs Pact has been widely welcomed and the support for a balanced approach that integrates rights with action on other fronts is most encouraging.

Upholding fundamental principles and rights at work – freedom from child labour, forced labour and from discrimination at work, and freedom of association and collective bargaining – and the related international labour standards, can help to drive a recovery that is based on the dignity of work. Fundamental rights are enabling and empowering. And in times of crisis, a culture of social dialogue rooted in these rights is invaluable as a mechanism for maintaining social peace and stability and advancing inclusive policies for economic recovery.

On this Human Rights Day, we say no to discrimination and to all other abuses of human rights at work.

The ILO is committed to joining its voice and action with all who are striving to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality in the lives of women and men, boys and girls everywhere.

* * *