



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

3 December 2010

Today, we focus on "Keeping the promise: Mainstreaming disability in the Millennium Development Goals towards 2015 and beyond".

Too often, stigmatization and discrimination close the doors of opportunity to people with disabilities. They come to be defined by their disability; not their capacity; they are thought of in terms of cost, not productivity; subjects for charity, not agents of change.

People with disabilities are commonly among the poorest of the poor, trapped in a "vicious circle" of poverty. In turn poverty can be a causal factor of disability.

Disability for the majority means exclusion from mainstream social, economic and political life, including exclusion from the world of work.

Yet decent work is the sustainable route out of poverty and an integral component of sustainable development.

Globally, one in ten people – some 650 million – has a disability. Four fifths live in developing countries. About 82 per cent live below the poverty line. Of the nearly 450 million disabled women and men of working age, the vast majority are unemployed. Mounting evidence points to the high economic costs of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work – the ILO has recently estimated that the cost of such exclusion can range from 3 to 7 per cent of a country's GDP.

Men and women, enterprises, societies and economies stand to benefit from decent work strategies: it is time to focus on opening up opportunities for decent work for all if poverty is to be significantly reduced and eventually eradicated – including among people with disabilities.

Starting from the objective of realizing respect for basic human rights and drawing on international labour standards, strategies for employment promotion must be accompanied by a commitment to policies and action that empower and enable people with disabilities to access employment opportunities – from skills development and self-employment to awareness-raising that can break down the prejudices that impede effective participation. As do all workers, people with disabilities also need a buffer of social protection. And organization and participation in social dialogue enable people with disabilities to become active agents in changing their future through the world of work.

This is the ILO's Decent Work approach to disability.

On this Day, the ILO commits to continue working with stakeholders to put the Decent Work approach at the service of the realization of the MDGs and disability inclusive strategies for sustainable development. As a member of the UN family we are pleased to do our part to follow up the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to support the related Strategy and Plan of Action for the UN system.

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