



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
On the occasion of the
ILO's 90th anniversary**

21 April 2009

“90 years working for social justice”

On 21 April 2009 we launch a global celebration of the ILO's 90th anniversary.

Events around the world will bring together the ILO's tripartite constituents —governments, workers and employers— and others who are mobilizing for decent work for all. These local dialogues will have global significance and impact.

They will draw strength from our history. They will tap the long experience, knowledge and networks of the ILO to address the challenges of today and to shape a better future.

We mark this anniversary at a time of profound economic and social upheaval. But for the ILO, crisis has historically provided a crucible for change. Emerging from the cataclysm of the First World War, the Organization was founded on the basic conviction that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice”.

Through war and peace, depression and economic growth, governments, workers and employers have continued to come together in dialogue around our table of shared values: that work must be a source of dignity; that labour is not a commodity; and that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere.

These values and action were recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969. Those values continue to guide and define our work today.

What we are doing is more than a celebration of our past. It is a strategic opportunity to focus on the pressing priorities of people today – the need for jobs, social protection, rights at work – and to forge solutions through dialogue.

Gathering against a backdrop of rising unemployment and underemployment, business closures, deteriorating conditions of work and the undermining of respect for rights at work, along with growing inequality, poverty and insecurity, Heads of State and Government, parliamentarians, academics, members of civil society and activists will join to reaffirm the ILO's mission—to steer a course towards social justice and a world of work based on human values.

Our values and action have set the norms for the treatment and well-being of workers – women and men – including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, equality of opportunity and non discrimination, freedom from forced labour and from child labour and safe and healthy work.

These values and action have helped create sustainable enterprises that generate jobs, develop skills for all persons—wherever they live, whoever they are—and promote a movement for corporate social responsibility.

These values and action are needed more than ever to create a globalization that is fair and sustainable.

They are needed to offer voice and hope to the peoples of the world.

We offer the building blocks of the Decent Work Agenda: employment creation – including green jobs – through sustainable enterprises; solidarity in the form of social protection; upholding standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; and harnessing the creative power of dialogue and collective bargaining to find the best solutions.

These are the conditions that will enable women and men to obtain work in conditions of freedom, dignity, security and equity – in times of crisis, in recovery and beyond.

Our tripartite legacy is the foundation of our future. Above all, our agenda for the twenty-first century springs from people: fuelled with the renewable energy of the human spirit, the energy and resilience of people and their reasonable demand everywhere for a fair chance at a decent job.

So together, let us answer that legitimate demand. Together, let us make the policy choices that sustain the goal of decent work; and together, let us advance the cause of decent work for social justice and a fair globalization. That's our mission, our mandate and our responsibility.

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