

**Statement by Mr. Juan Somavia  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
2006 ECOSOC High-Level Segment**

**“Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development”**

**Roundtable 3 on Globalization and labour migration**

The ILO considers the ECOSOC High Level Segment on employment and decent work a most appropriate forum for discussing the linkage between globalization and labour migration.

The ILO views migration as a labour market and decent work issue within the overarching framework of the Decent Work for All agenda. Most of world’s migrants (estimated at 191 million in 2005 by the United Nations) are migrant workers and their dependants. And international labour migration is likely to increase further in the future given demographic trends in destination countries and decent work deficits in source countries. The failure of globalization to create productive employment and decent work where people live is the prime factor in increasing migration pressures. However, our common objective should be to ensure that migration takes place “by choice and not by necessity” as highlighted by the Global Commission on International Migration.

For globalization to be fair, the contributions of labour migration to sustaining economic activity and social development should be recognized. Labour migration can make a significant impact on source countries. Every year, migrant workers send home to developing countries large volumes of remittances - estimated at US\$160 billion in 2005 - to support their families and communities. These remittances help build better houses, provide health care, enable children to attend school and improve food security for families and communities left behind. Returning migrant workers bring back financial and social capital and skills while transnational communities can contribute to home economies through transfers of skills, technology and investments.

At the same time migrant workers contribute a lot to the prosperity of host countries. They make up for declining birth rates and ageing populations, and contribute to economic growth and social welfare. Under globalization, migrant workers are increasingly in demand not only for high-skilled jobs, but also for many of the low-skilled jobs in agriculture, cleaning and maintenance, construction, domestic service, and health care, which national workers often shun. But developed countries increasingly welcome mostly skilled workers from developing countries leading to a “brain drain”. Limited legal migration avenues for others have often led to growth in irregular migration and trafficking resulting in gross violations of human rights.

Yet, migrant workers do not get a fair deal in the global economy. They face many challenges including exploitation, poor conditions of work, absence of union rights, low social protection, and racism and discrimination. Women migrant workers are especially vulnerable as some may end up as victims of trafficking and forced labour.

Gains from migration and protection of migrant rights are indeed inseparable. Migrant workers can make their best contribution to host and source countries when they enjoy decent working conditions, and when their fundamental human and labour rights are respected. This is why the

ILO has pioneered development of international instruments for the governance of labour migration and protection of migrant workers since the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

With rapidly advancing globalization, policies and mechanisms need to be put in place to regulate and manage present-day labour migration. To this end, the ILO has promoted a tripartite debate in recent years, starting with the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization.<sup>2</sup> In 2004, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference undertook a General Discussion on migrant workers and adopted a Resolution<sup>3</sup>, which called for an ILO Plan of Action on Labour Migration. The centrepiece of this Action Plan is the “*ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration: Non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights-based approach to labour migration*”,<sup>4</sup> adopted by a Tripartite Meeting of Experts in 2005.

The Framework is a considered response to constituent demands for assistance, and addresses the major issues faced by migration policy makers at national and international levels. It is a comprehensive collection of principles, guidelines and best practices on labour migration policy, providing practical guidance to constituents on the development and improvement of labour migration policies. The Framework focuses on decent work for all, governance of migration, migrant rights, development linkages, and international cooperation. It respects the sovereign right of all nations to determine their own migration policies. The Framework recognizes the crucial role of social partners, social dialogue and tripartism in migration policy. It advocates gender-sensitive migration policies that address the special problems faced by women migrant workers.

There is broad convergence of ILO perspectives with other recent global initiatives including the International Agenda for Migration Management of the Berne Initiative, the report of the Global Commission on International Migration, and the report of the UN Secretary-General on International Migration and Development. All recognise the need for promotion of multilateral approaches and international cooperation, protection of migrant rights, gender sensitive migration policies and the creation of decent work opportunities in home countries to reduce migration pressures. The recently established Global Migration Group is an appropriate forum for promoting cooperation and coherence in the field of international migration.

The UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in September 2006 will be a milestone in the emphasis given to migration by the international community. The ILO looks forward to the Dialogue as an opportunity for laying a solid foundation for sustained multilateral cooperation that maximizes the benefits of labour migration for origin and destination countries and for migrant workers themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> See Convention on Migration for Employment, 1949 (No.97) and the Convention on Migrant Workers, 1975 (No.143).

<sup>2</sup> ILO (2004). A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all. Geneva, World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization and International Labour Office, Geneva, February 2004.

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/wcsdg/docs/report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The full *Report of the Committee on Migrant Workers, ILC 2004* which contains the above Resolution is available ( in English) at:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc92/pdf/pr-22.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/download/tmmflm-en.pdf>