

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES**

**15 May 2012**

This year's International Day of Families highlights the need for work-family balance. The aim is to help workers everywhere provide for their families financially and emotionally, while also contributing to the socio-economic development of their societies.

Current trends underscore the growing importance of work-family policies. These include greater participation by women in the labour market, and growing urbanization and mobility in search for jobs. As families become smaller and generations live apart, extended kin are less available to offer care, and employed parents face rising challenges.

Millions of people around the world lack decent working conditions and the social support to care for their families. Affordable quality childcare is rarely available in developing countries, where many parents are forced to leave their preschool children home alone. Many young children are also left in the care of older siblings who, in turn, are pulled from school.

A number of countries offer generous leave provisions for mothers and fathers. Many more, however, extend few comprehensive benefits in line with international standards. Paternity leave provisions are still rare in the majority of developing countries.

Flexible working arrangements, including staggered working hours, compressed work schedules or telecommuting, are becoming more widely available – but there is much room for improvement everywhere. I am committed to this in our own organization, where we are currently looking at our own arrangements, and seeing what we can do better.

We need to respond to the ever-changing complexities of work and family life. I welcome the establishment of family-friendly workplaces through parental leave provisions, flexible working arrangements and better childcare.

Such policies and programmes are critical to enhancing the work-family balance. These actions can also lead to better working conditions, greater employee health and productivity, and a more concerted focus on gender equality.

Work-family balance policies demonstrate both a government's commitment to the well-being of families and the private sector's commitment to social responsibility.

On this International Day of Families, let us renew our pledge to promote work-family balance for the benefit of families and society at large.