



INTERNATIONAL **LABOUR** ORGANIZATION

**Commission on the Status of Women**

**Forty-ninth session**

*(28 February -11 March 2005)*

**High-Level Plenary Meeting**

*7 March 2005*

**Combating gender inequalities in the labour market is key  
to achieving the Millennium Development Goals**

*Statement by*

**Djankou Ndjonkou**

**Representative to the United Nations and Director  
ILO Office for the United Nations**

ILO OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS  
220 EAST 42ND STREET • SUITE 3101 • NEW YORK, NY 10017  
TELEPHONE: 212-697-0150 • FACSIMILE: 212-697-5218  
E-mail: [newyork@ilo.org](mailto:newyork@ilo.org)

Mr. Chairman,

Increasing numbers of women are entering the labour force worldwide, yet the quality of their jobs is often below the "threshold of decency". This often entails long hours of work in addition to women's unpaid household duties, low pay, job insecurity, unhealthy and dangerous conditions, sexual harassment and a lack of social protection, representation and a say in decision-making.

In addition, women are disproportionately concentrated in the informal economy and outside International Labour Standards and social protection systems. Much of women's work in global production chains and forms of labour such as domestic work, migrant labour and home work where women predominate is excluded from the scope of social protection and fair compensation.

Despite near-universal ratification of the ILO Convention on equal remuneration for work of equal value (No. 100) adopted over 50 years ago, there is little progress in closing the gender pay gap. Such poor conditions for women also threaten those of men affecting the livelihoods of families in what is a race to the bottom. Decent work for women benefits families, communities and nations, and helps to promote economic progress, poverty eradication and stability.

While globalization has created new opportunities for some, including women, it has exacerbated the plight of the poorest in the world, the majority of whom are women. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization<sup>1</sup> has warned that the imbalances and disparities of globalization are morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. The Commission has identified education and decent work as key instruments if the global economy is to deliver on the aspirations of women and men. But this will not be possible if the rules of the global economy remain unfair. In order to level the playing field, the Commission called for: fairer rules for international trade, finance and investment, migration, and intellectual property; urgent measures to promote the implementation of core labour standards and a minimum level of social protection; and new efforts to mobilise international resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

The ILO Decent Work Agenda is an important vehicle for the practical implementation of Section F on "Women and the Economy" of the Beijing Platform for Action. Making decent work a global goal will require that the focus of macro-economic policies includes employment as central to poverty reduction. Achieving decent work means the creating jobs with rights and social protection through meaningful social dialogue between governments and actors in the business and labour communities and in civil society. As women represent half the world's population, gender equality is fundamental for achieving the Decent Work Agenda. Four key areas for advancing gender equality in the world of work are non-discrimination in employment and occupation, equal remuneration for work of equal value, maternity protection and equal sharing by men and women of family responsibilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization: *A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all*. ILO, Geneva, 2004. Also available on [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

With rapidly changing systems of production and provision of services in a globalized economy, it is critical to support the organization of women workers and their participation in trade unions and entrepreneurial associations, especially in the informal economy. Promoting partnerships with women's organizations is also key to ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed in labour and business organizations.

The Beijing Platform for Action provides a comprehensive set of measures across all sectors to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. Its full implementation is therefore a prerequisite for reaching the targets set out under the Millennium Development Goals. Promoting women's access to income and decent work is a central strategy for working out of the grinding poverty faced today by millions of families around the globe.

Thank you for your attention.