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**Statement by**  
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**53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

Chair, Honorable Ministers,  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

The theme of this session - *Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS* - is at the heart of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Not only have the ILO tripartite constituents - employers, workers and governments - adopted a specific instrument on work-family, Convention 156 in 1981, but also the latest policy document of the ILO, the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, places gender equality at the centre of all ILO action. This covers employment creation and sustainable growth, social protection, social dialogue and principles and rights at work.

And the Commission's analysis of this theme is highly relevant in the context of the current global economic crisis. Despite the fact that today more than ever before women are in paid work, time-use studies around the world clearly show that, in addition to their paid job, women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work in the household and for the family such as caring for children and sick family members. This female "double burden" will be exacerbated by the crisis. The latest ILO data shows that women's unemployment by the end of 2009 may reach 7.4% compared to 7% for men<sup>1</sup>.

Family responsibilities and their conflict with paid work demands are a major factor contributing to women's disadvantage in the labour market. It is also one of the main reasons women turn to vulnerable and informal employment as well as part-time, self-employment or home work. At the same time, we have seen over the last years that men are increasingly concerned about work-life balance so that they can be more involved in family matters, especially caring for children and elderly parents. Yet viable State services for equal sharing often are lacking.

In this context, evidence from both developed and developing countries shows that work-family balance measures must be part of the policy package for achieving decent and productive work for women and men. ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention 156, to date ratified by 40 countries, calls for equality of opportunity and treatment for both women and men workers with family responsibilities. Ratifying States must adopt national policy to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise that right without being subject to discrimination and, without conflict between their

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<sup>1</sup> ILO: Global Employment Trends Women, 2009

employment and family responsibilities. The policy package works best when this Convention is part of a wider framework of measures to promote gender equality which includes the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

To put in context what I have just shared with you, I would like to highlight some good practices from different regions.

### **Kenya**

Primary schools in Kenya are required to have a unit for pre-school education, known as Baby Classes, where parents can leave children from the age of 3 years, and pick them up on the way home from work. The Government has adopted a policy of partnership which allows parents' associations, religious and welfare organizations, private firms and individuals to cooperate with local authorities for the creation, financing and management of these units and a role in training pre-school teachers.

### **India**

*Mobile Crèches* is a voluntary organization that operates childcare centres for workers on construction sites, taking children from birth to 12 years. It reaches about 13,000 children per year through 13 permanent centres and 56 on construction sites. Mobile Crèches approaches builders at potential construction sites with a view to opening a centre for the children of its workers as long as there is construction on the site. On agreement, the builder provides accommodation, electricity and water. About 13 per cent of financing comes from construction contractors, 31 per cent from local grants and 29 per cent from foreign donors, the remainder coming from other fund raising.

### **Paraguay**

Good practices relate to government action. The Tripartite Committee on Equal Opportunities (CTIO) implemented a number of measures to help reduce the wage gap between women and men, and to investigate the work that women do, including care work. The measures include developing machinery for the reporting of discrimination, awareness raising to improve understanding of inequalities and facilitate initiatives to remedy them, and providing information on how women's work comes to be underrated. Paraguay recently ratified ILO Convention 156.

### **New Zealand**

The Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust is a not-for-profit organization tasked with providing EEO information and tools to employers and raising awareness of diversity issues in New Zealand workplaces. The Trust organizes the annual Work and Life Awards that acknowledge and honour workplaces and individuals that encourage work-life balance, have effective diversity management, attract talented people and build loyal, creative and productive workforces.

In conclusion, the ILO would like to make some important recommendations, hoping they will be taken into consideration for action at the national level.

- Governments are encouraged to ensure that both women and men have access to parental leave and other forms of leave, including paid maternity and paternity leave and emergency leave that can be used for sick family members. This should be supported by incentives for men to avail themselves of this leave and backed up by sensitization campaigns to promote the acceptance of the notion that the family is the concern of each individual, man and woman.

In line with the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Secretary General's Report to this Session, ILO would also call upon governments, international and regional organizations, employers' and workers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders to:

- Promote the ratification and implementation of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the implementation of Recommendation (No. 165),
- Increase public investment in infrastructure and public services to alleviate the unpaid work demands on households which particularly affect women and girls (including transportation, water and energy supply, health services, childcare and other family and community services),
- Improve working conditions and the quality of working life, including measures aimed at: the progressive reduction of hours of work and the reduction and amount of overtime; more flexible arrangements in working schedules; rest periods and holidays; adequate and fair wages and incomes and social protection measures; support to parents re-entering employment after a leave period for family reasons,
- Strengthen social dialogue and coordination between line ministries, employers, trade unions, women's organizations, and civil society to ensure coherent policies and measures to promote greater understanding, recognition and sharing of responsibilities, between the State, the private sector and households, and equal sharing between women and men.

Thank you for your attention.

