

# STATEMENT

67<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee



International  
Labour Office

*Check against delivery  
17 October 2012*

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**STATEMENT BY**

Mr. Kevin Cassidy  
ILO Office for the United Nations

67<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee

**Agenda Item 28: Advancement of Women**

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Chairperson,

Despite the intensification of efforts and significant progress in many areas of social and economic development, successes in achieving gender equality, ending discrimination and violence against women, are still lagging far behind in a rapidly changing world.

Gender equality cannot be achieved when discrimination remains embedded in political, economic and social institutions and in development processes; it often remains unaddressed or is addressed in an uneven manner.

For the ILO, the pursuit of gender equality is based on two fundamental pillars. Firstly, we subscribe to the *rights-based equity* rationale which argues the need to address the discrimination women face as a matter of fundamental human rights and social justice. Women are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and consistently fare poorly in terms of socio-economic opportunities and treatment. These types of inequalities deprive women of choice in employment and are contrary to normative considerations of fairness and justice.

Secondly, there is the *economic efficiency* rationale, which argues that women can play a critical role as economic agents capable of transforming societies and economies. Gender equality is not only an intrinsic value and a right in itself, but is instrumental in achieving and sustaining economic growth, social change and poverty reduction. Relevant in all cultural settings, economic empowerment of women unleashes their energy, skills and potential as a force for development.

The importance of enabling women to achieve economic independence, on an equal footing with their male counterparts, was recognised by the International Labour Conference, in

June 2007, through the adoption of the **Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises**. It stated that “*Women’s economic empowerment is crucial for sustainable societies. It requires equal access to entrepreneurship opportunities, financial services and labour markets.*”

The recognition that women’s economic empowerment is key to poverty reduction was central to the ILO’s 2009 Conference **Conclusions on Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work**. The same message came from this year’s Conference, when the 185 member States adopted **Conclusions on the youth employment crisis: a call for action**.

Chairperson,

Discrimination at work may be compounded by physical or psychological violence which is often gender-based. The clearest illustration of this is sexual harassment. There is a close connection between violence at work and non-standard forms of employment, gender, youth, and certain high-risk occupational sectors. A young woman with a precarious job in the hotel industry or in domestic work, for instance, is much more likely to be exposed to the risk of sexual harassment than an older male office worker with a permanent job.

National and international legislation against workplace violence and gender-based violence exists, but preventive action is essential to create and sustain a violence-free working environment where women workers can feel as physically and psychologically safe as their male colleagues. For example, designing and establishing procedures to improve the reporting of violent incidents in conditions of safety and confidentiality can contribute greatly to this objective.

The ILO has taken a number of practical steps to ensure that the advancement of women is not just a verbal commitment but a reality achieved through active engagement and delivery.

In 2011, the ILO’s Tripartite Body overwhelmingly adopted the Convention on Domestic Workers (No. 189) which seeks to improve the working conditions of an estimated 53 million domestic workers worldwide. And with nearly 83 per cent of domestic workers worldwide being women or girls, this new standard provides protection for those hidden from public view, and hence more vulnerable to abuse and violence.

I am pleased to announce that this Convention has been ratified by Mauritius, the Philippines and Uruguay. The ILO kindly encourages all Member States to join these countries in ratifying this important convention.

Furthermore, the International Labour Conference in June this year adopted a new international labour standard, entitled the *Recommendation concerning national floors of social protection (No. 202)*. The Recommendation reaffirms that social security is a human right and provides guidance to member States in building comprehensive social security systems and extending social security coverage.

Research shows that social protection floor provisions can lead to greater empowerment for women, who are disproportionately represented in low-income groups. Through the establishment of a social protection floor we help women become their own agents of change through the labour market and educational opportunities once they gain income security and access to essential services provided by the floor. Our experience shows, for example, that benefits paid in the form of social transfers directly to women result in the improvement of their status and their capacity to exert increasing control over how household income is spent.

Chairperson,

The ILO works closely with key stakeholders at the local, national and regional levels to ensure that there is a broader awareness of the important role of women in contributing to economic development and holding decision-making roles equal in status to their male counterparts.

In Bangladesh, the ILO has undertaken surveys in key sectors and analysed the situation of female migrant and domestic workers and developed a guiding document for policy formulation and revision of the Labour Act of 2006.

In China and Indonesia, the ILO has developed guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace in consultation with government officials, workers' and employers' organizations. An increasing number of workshops are being held to more widely communicate these issues which in a number of cases helped enterprises improve their policies and set-up preventative mechanisms.

In Pakistan, with support from the ILO, around 200 Employers (mostly in medium sized enterprises) have adopted a "Gender Equality Policy" for their respective companies. Prohibition of sexual harassment is one of the major topics covered in the policy.

In West Africa, through our projects promoting fundamental rights at work the ILO has placed special emphasis on ILO Conventions on Equal Remuneration (No. 100) and Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (No. 111) to promote equality between men and women at work, eliminate discrimination and violence based on gender in the workplace.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the ILO has been an active and committed partner in the pursuit of equality and the promotion of rights of all women at work. The ILO vision of gender equality is reflected in its numerous Conventions, Resolutions and Declarations.

The ILO will continue to approach gender mainstreaming through systematically analysing and addressing the specific needs of both women and men, and implementing targeted interventions to enable women and men to participate equally in – and benefit equally from – development efforts.

Thank you.