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**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

3 December 2009

Today we focus on the goal of ensuring that the process of realizing the Millennium Development Goals is inclusive of persons with disabilities. This is necessary for their empowerment and that of their communities.

Globally, one in ten people – some 650 million – has a disability, with 470 million of working age. And about 80 per cent are in developing countries. Disability is both cause and consequence of poverty. Estimates are that people with disabilities make up 20 per cent of the poorest worldwide. Clearly, the goal of halving poverty by 2015 requires the inclusion of disabled persons in programmes for poverty reduction and for social and economic

development.

Despite their proven potential, people with disabilities remain under-represented in the work force and concentrated in low-paid informal economy jobs. Many are excluded from opportunities for decent and productive work by virtue of societies' attitudes to disability along with diverse barriers that hinder their full and equal participation.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda – centred on the dignity of work – is an agenda for inclusive development, rooted in rights and in the real economy. The Decent Work Agenda defines the ILO's approach to all workers including those affected by disability. It is founded on non-discrimination and on promoting opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, and access to skills training. Decent work also involves the extension of social protection, supporting those unable to work, facilitating the entry or return to work of those who can. And organization, voice and dialogue are fundamental elements. They bring strength and are key in ensuring that disability issues are on the table and included in policies and programmes for economic and social development.

International Conventions and laws, complemented by the ILO's Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace point to what can be done to open up work places and work spaces to persons with disabilities. They provide the framework for practical programmes on vocational rehabilitation, including community-based rehabilitation, skills development, employment and self employment as well as research and identification of good practices.

Much has been achieved in recent years. Yet there is a long road ahead. And, in the face of the present economic crisis millions of the world's most vulnerable are being pushed deeper into unemployment and underemployment, informality and poverty: among these are persons with disabilities.

There is a new global recognition that economic progress is unsustainable if the majority of people are counted out, not counted in. In June this year, the tripartite ILO adopted a Global Jobs Pact – now widely supported – which represents the application of the Decent Work Agenda in the crisis context. It specifies the need to help vulnerable groups who are hardest hit. It provides a sound foundation to build an integrated and inclusive approach to disability in recovery and beyond.

The recently adopted UN Resolution on Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities will reinforce action to ensure an inclusive process and the empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities.

The ILO is pleased to contribute to this objective through its action to help ensure that persons with disabilities can realize their potential and find routes out of poverty in and through the world of work.

On this day we salute all who have driven the fight for the rights of persons with disabilities.