



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

18 December 2010

Today we mark the 20th anniversary of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. This treaty, together with the pioneering ILO Convention No. 97 (1949) on migration for employment and the supplementary ILO Convention No. 143 (1975) on migrant workers, provides the rights-based foundation for the governance of international labour mobility.

Migration embodies the internationalization of labour mobility – women and men leaving their communities and countries, crossing borders to meet the increasing demand for skills and labour in countries with ageing populations and undergoing industrial and technological transformation. Migrant workers are commonly searching for the means to secure a better life for themselves and their families. The remittances, skill and knowledge transfers, investments and international business activity that migration generates contribute significantly to economic, political and social advances in countries both of origin and of destination.

However, too often the experience of many migrants is a lack of respect for their rights and human dignity. There is high vulnerability to abuse and exploitation in workplaces including non-payment of wages as well as denial of fundamental rights like freedom of association and collective bargaining. This is especially the case for migrants in irregular situations which are all too often tolerated in both receiving and sending countries. Workers in such situations and certain categories of migrants such as domestic workers, especially women, are particularly vulnerable.

Nearly two-thirds of the ILO's member States (183 countries) have now ratified at least one of the three complementary Conventions on migration, adopting international standards as a basis for their migration laws and policies. Both the guidelines for international cooperation and the protection of migrants provided by the instruments on migration are more essential than ever in the context of a global employment crisis. Migrants are disproportionately represented among those losing their jobs. Those who manage to remain in employment are often compelled to take whatever work they can get, often on substandard pay and under ever more abusive conditions and without access to even the most basic forms of social protection.

While the crisis has exacerbated the situation, we must not forget that there was a pre-existing deficit of employment and decent work.

Wider ratification and application of the migration Conventions will provide a strong foundation for effective national migration policies that match economic need, with social justice and human dignity. Today we also need to be attentive to discrimination and xenophobia which risk aggravating the situation of migrants.

The ILO is committed to keep helping member States fully implement a rights-based approach to migration that works for the benefit of all.

Meeting economic needs, ensuring productivity and competitiveness, and improving well-being in a globalized world will necessarily involve migration and diversity. Ensuring that migration is a road to decent work will be a key indicator of progress in building economies and societies based on social justice.

* * *