

# STATEMENT

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



International  
Labour Office

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## STATEMENT BY

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66<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee  
**Agenda item 27: Advancement of Women**

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Mr. Chair,

The advancement of women is an indisputable mandate collectively endorsed across the UN system. The ILO, for its part, has been a staunch advocate for women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the world of work through the promotion of international labour standards and the Decent Work Agenda. Investing in women's full economic potential is critical to increasing productivity and economic growth, and supporting the move towards a more balanced and sustainable development.

However, in the wake of the global economic crisis, there has been a fear that the progress made in the past decades in advancing women's positions in the world of work is being undermined.

According to ILO's *Global Employment Trends 2011*, the unemployment rate for men stood at 6%, whereas for women it was 6.5%. An increasing concern are low participation rates for female employment which currently stands around 53 per cent compared to 78 per cent for men. In other words, some 510 million women worldwide are of working age, but are not economically active. This translates into wasted talent, untapped ideas and loss of productive capacity.

Women everywhere are struggling to find decent work. Our research indicates that women are increasingly migrating in larger numbers for work due to limited labour market opportunities at home. Of the 214 million international migrants on the move today, 50 per cent are women.

Much of the work secured by women migrants is in the informal economy which provides a vital source of livelihoods for women and their families; however, this also puts them at greater risk of exploitation with little formal protection.

In this regard, domestic work is an area of great impact on women's empowerment and gender equality and a focus of the ILO. There are an estimated 53 million domestic workers worldwide, of which nearly 83 per cent are women or girls, many of them migrant workers.

The ILO's Member States with their worker and employer representatives overwhelmingly adopted the Convention on Domestic Workers (Convention 189) this year. The Convention is significant in that for the first time it extends to workers in the informal economy the same basic rights at work as those available to other workers. The Convention not only has wider implications for migration and gender equality, but also provides a stronger framework of support for all workers who aspire to decent work.

Mr. Chair,

Our work on the advancement of women is furthered through research, knowledge sharing, and policy advice based on continual learning and application. The 2009 International Labour Conference Resolution concerning gender equality at the heart of decent work emphasized social dialogue and tripartism as essential policy tools to advancing gender equality in the world of work.

The resolution asked governments to make employment policies central to economic and social policies and noted that gender-sensitive policies were critical to ensure that the poor, particularly women, were able to benefit and participate in, economic growth. It also recognized the importance of fostering SME's and women's entrepreneurship as a key means of generating employment and offering social and economic empowerment of women, as well as men and their families.

The social protection floor initiative, led by the ILO and the WHO, is another key development that will have an important impact on women's empowerment. Protection is usually provided through employment-based social services schemes that do not cover those in informal and casual work, where women are heavily represented. The UN Millennium Development Summit last year stated that "promoting universal access to social services and providing social protection floors can make an important contribution to consolidating and achieving further development gains."

A Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, convened by the ILO and WHO and chaired by USG Bachelet, was established to enhance global advocacy activities and to elaborate further the policy aspects of this approach, is now near completion of its work and will publish a seminal Global Social Protection Floor Report. The Report will serve as an advocacy tool and provide general guidance on global and regional policies and strategies to support the implementation of the social protection floor in developing countries and address poverty issues in developed countries.

The Social Protection Floor will be further addressed through a standard setting exercise at the ILO's 101<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference which will take place in June next year.

Mr. Chair,

The crisis has highlighted the need for greater gender equality in the labour market to counter vulnerability to economic shocks and to support recovery and poverty reduction. The Global Jobs Pact, a widely supported ILO initiative, states that the "*current crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to shape new gender equality policy responses...In discussions on recovery packages, both regarding their design and assessing their success, women must have equal voice with men*"

The ILO continues to pursue a rigorous research agenda to inform international discussion and public policy assessment. The ILO's 2011 Global Report entitled *Equality at work: The continuing challenge*, notes that in spite of continuous positive advances in anti-discrimination legislation, the global economic and social crisis has led to a higher risk of discrimination against certain groups such as migrant labour.

The report also finds that the gender pay gap still exists, with women's wages being on average 70-90 per cent of men's, and sexual harassment persists as a significant problem in workplaces predominantly for young, financially dependent, single or divorced women.

In closing, Mr. Chair, the ILO reaffirms its commitment to contribute to the promotion of gender equity and Decent Work for all women and men, and looks forward to actively participating in the discussion on this important issue.

