



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the ILO
on the occasion of
International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

9 August 2012

“Indigenous Media, Empowering Indigenous Voices” – the theme of this year’s observance is a reminder that the voice and participation of indigenous and tribal peoples are indispensable in shaping a future that respects their dignity. The plight of many of the world’s indigenous and tribal women and men testifies to the urgency of the need.

It is estimated that there are 370 million indigenous and tribal peoples in the world with half this population living in cities. Many indigenous women and men are still severely affected by poverty and discrimination and struggling to have their voices heard. Today new technologies and tools such as social media, mobile platforms and websites are proving to be effective means of sharing information and promoting awareness of their rights within their own communities in their own languages. They also open up avenues for communicating with others to overcome bias and inaccuracies that stem from a lack of understanding of indigenous cultures and beliefs. New technologies also offer powerful tools for effective organization which is fundamental to empowerment.

The ILO has had a long standing commitment to working closely with indigenous peoples in their efforts to strengthen their voice and expand their choices. We do so in the framework of a social justice mandate to promote decent work for all - also indispensable in establishing patterns of growth that are fairer and more sustainable.

Over the past decade, this approach has gained resonance. Ratifications of the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (No. 169), adopted in 1989, have doubled over the last ten years, including the first African ratification by the Central African Republic in 2010. This Convention complements the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and they have a common objective of addressing persistent social injustices affecting indigenous peoples.

The ILO’s report “*Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: From commitment to action*” discussed at the International Labour Conference in June 2012 depicts the challenges indigenous peoples face in gaining access to state institutions and the consequent weak enforcement of labour legislation; lack of awareness of their fundamental rights; the absence of a strong collective voice to defend their rights and interests effectively; and the prevailing high levels of poverty. The global youth employment crisis is even more acute for young indigenous women and men who are four times more likely to be unemployed than non-indigenous nationals in certain countries. They are also more prone to long-term unemployment and part-time employment, and a greater proportion is detached from the labour market.

At a time of global economic crisis which heightens vulnerability, the ILO has continued to develop innovative approaches to strengthen indigenous peoples’ voices, including through partnerships within the UN family. The ILO has been pleased to engage in the pioneering United Nations Indigenous Peoples’ Partnership (UNIPP) along with the OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. It

aims to support the efforts of indigenous peoples and governments to translate their rights and aspirations into positive change by strengthening their institutions and their capacity to fully participate in governance and policy processes at the local and national levels.

Inclusive processes must be founded on dialogue, knowledge and organization. Indigenous media has a key role to play in this process.

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