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**Statement by
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**63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Third Committee
Agenda item 56: Advancement of Women**

Mr. Chair,

The ILO's statement today aims at sharing with you some important progress related to the promotion of gender equality in the world of work and how the objective of Decent Work can be achieved through a real and effective gender mainstreaming.

As I have already mentioned in my previous statement to this Commission, member States, workers and employers attending the 97th International Labour Conference in June this year adopted unanimously the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

The Declaration establishes that the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda, namely employment, social protection, social dialogue and tripartism, and fundamental principles and rights at work, are inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive, and that "gender equality and non-discrimination must be considered to be cross-cutting issues" in those strategic objectives. For the first time in history, ILO Constituents did not limit themselves to acknowledge the importance of gender mainstreaming, but declared it as "must" for the achievement of Decent Work.

This overarching policy statement goes hand in hand with the specific international labour standards that the ILO's constituents have adopted with the aim of eliminating gender-based discrimination in the world of work, namely the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No.100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No.111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). It is worth highlighting that Convention No. 111 now enjoys extremely high international acceptance, with 168 member States having ratified it: this leaves only 14 ratifications to be obtained for universal application within the ILO.

Yet the practical implementation requires continuous attention. Evidence for the need more proactive measures to achieve gender equality in the world of work can be found in the "Global Employment Trend for Women", released by the ILO in the occasion of the International Women's day this year. The report shows that improvements in the status of women in labour markets throughout the world have not substantially narrowed gender gaps in the workplace. The share of women in vulnerable employment, either unpaid contributing family workers or own-account workers, rather than wage and salaried work, decreased from 56.1 to 51.7 per cent since 1997. For many women, moving away from vulnerable employment into wage and salaried work can be a major step towards economic freedom and self-determination.

Access to labour markets and to decent and productive employment is crucial in the process of creating greater equality between men and women and policies to enhance women's chances to participate

equally in labour markets are starting to pay off. Societies are starting to recognize the potential of female labour in reducing poverty, and the need to search for innovative ways of lowering economic, social and political barriers. Providing women an equal footing in the workplace is not just right, but smart. Despite this the sluggish pace of change means that disparities are still significant. Most regions still have a long way to go to ensure the full economic integration of women whose untapped potential to contribute to economic development has yet to be realized.

In this context, Mr. Chair, I am glad to inform you that the general discussion of the 98th session of the International Labour Conference in 2009 will focus on Gender equality at the heart of decent work. The last time gender equality featured as a stand-alone item at the Conference was over 20 years ago, in 1985. The follow-up to that tripartite discussion resulted in many positive developments that advanced equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men throughout the world of work. Yet numerous equality issues have not been adequately dealt with over the years, and important gaps identified by the 1985 discussion persist in the context of globalization.

To support Constituents in their preparation for the Conference, the ILO has launched a campaign aimed at increasing general awareness and understanding of gender equality issues in the world of work; highlighting the specific linkages between gender equality and securing decent work for all women and men; promoting the ratification and application of key ILO gender equality labour standards; and advocating the importance of overcoming existing barriers to gender equality as beneficial for all.

The campaign focuses on a number of themes such as maternity protection, workers with family responsibilities, breaking through gender stereotypes in employment, recognizing different consequences for women and men migrant workers, and occupational health and safety issues, including violence against women and girls, for women and men workers.

Special attention, Mr. Chair, is given to women and girls who are victims of trafficking. ILO estimates indicate that women and girls make up the overwhelming majority of those trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation (98%). Since a larger number of women than men end up in abusive and exploitative situations, experts in the field have called for anti-trafficking interventions to be gender-responsive and to address trafficking as a development issue at national and local levels. In this context, I am glad to announce that the ILO has recently published an overview paper on migration, gender equality and development. This paper is meant to stimulate reflection on the gender aspect of migration in view of the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) which will be held in Manila in October this year.

In addition to the above, the International Training Centre of the ILO, that places a clear spotlight on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, is reaching out an every-year wider range of actors through specific training, learning and capacity building activities. In addition, the Training Centre is implementing a large pilot project conducted for the European Commission, focused on raising awareness of companies about combating gender stereotypes, one of the major obstacles to achieving gender equality at work.

Lastly, Mr. Chair, I would say a few words on the effort the ILO is putting to achieve the target of 50 per cent of professional posts to be filled by women by 2010 set up by Director General Mr. Somavia in 1999. The recently endorsed ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality establishes strategies, indicators and targets, and clarifies managerial accountability to this end. I am confident, Mr. Chair, that in two years time, when addressing this Committee, I will be able to report the ILO accomplishment in this context.

In closing, Mr. Chair, the ILO reaffirms its commitment to contribute to the promotion of gender equality and Decent Work for All Women and Men, and looks forward to actively participating in the discussion on this item in the following days.

Thank you