

**Remarks by Ms Maria Angelica Ducci, Executive Director, Office of the Director-General, ILO, at the Launch of *Progress of the World's Women 2005*, 16 September 2005**

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Your Excellency Mr. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya;

Honourable Annika Soder, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the kingdom of Sweden;

Mr. Zephryn Diabre, Associate Administrator, of UNDP;

Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM;

Ms. Martha Chen, Coordinator of WIEGO;

Ms. Barbara Krumsiek, President of the Calvert Investment Group

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen;

It is a great honour to participate in the launch of the **Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty**.

First, I would like to extend my heartfelt felicitations on this landmark report. This report is the result of a very fruitful interagency collaboration between UNIFEM, UNDP and the ILO and provides a blueprint for improving our efforts in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the devastation of hurricane Katrina has shown the extent to which all nations are vulnerable to events which can plunge entire regions and populations into poverty. We must develop and improve our mechanisms for poverty reduction.

We are here to celebrate the launching of the **Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty** because we understand that there is a gender dimension to vulnerability to poverty; to its effects and to its consequences. The Feminization of Poverty is generated by discrimination in the labour market, exacerbated by conflict, and sustained by lack of opportunity to develop marketable skills.

I am especially pleased to see the importance that this report attaches to Decent Work as a strategy for sustainable poverty reduction. Ever since its

inception the ILO has fully engaged its efforts to sustainable strategies for global poverty reduction. UNIFEM's excellent publication demonstrates that the gender dimensions of poverty parallel the gender dimensions of work within any given society. There is a link between the gender segmentation of the economy (as shown by patterns of employment) and poverty and social inequality. Thus the report amply demonstrates that the incidences of poverty are significantly greater in the segments of the economy in which women predominate.

**Women, Work and Poverty**, addresses issues of vital concern to the Decent Work Agenda and to our programme **Working out of Poverty**. It is significant that at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing 95, the ILO is also celebrating the tenth anniversary of the launching of the Gender, Poverty and Employment Capacity building programme and that the launching of our **Decent Work Programme** precedes the declaration of the **Millennium Development Goals** by less than a year.

The **Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty** documents and demonstrates powerful issues, including:

- that the empowerment of women is essential to the eradication of poverty;
- that women's economic security is a necessary condition of poverty reduction and;
- **that Decent Work is crucial to economic security.**

The principal route out of poverty for both women and men is productive and freely chosen work. Without rights, women and men will not be empowered to escape from poverty. Social protection safeguards against poverty and the participation of employer's and workers' organizations in shaping government policy for poverty reduction is key.

In contrast, poverty is a direct result of a deficit of decent work for men and women.

The Decent Work Deficit has far reaching implications for people everywhere. For example: HIV/AIDS is modifying the global workforce. In certain parts of the world, (not just in Africa) life expectancy has diminished considerably and large numbers of dependent children and aged people are destitute. The pandemic is placing added burdens on workers; but its effects are felt even more by women who must also play the role of care givers. **How then can we underestimate the importance of employment that provides not only a living, but also social protection?**

In all households the social cost of discrimination in economic and social welfare policies is very great. Although more than 20 percent of households are female headed, many governments do not recognize women as heads of households. They therefore have no access to social benefits, to government subsidized credit and to allocation of benefits for their dependents. **There is no immediate debt reduction for the human cost of this persistent discrimination.**

In the past decade, the ILO has worked with global (economic, social and political) institutions to:

- promote fair globalization;
- address the needs of workers in the informal economy and;
- create enabling policy and market environments for working out of poverty.

As a strategy, the ILO has called for greater policy coherence linking economic growth with social welfare and; for better governance of financial institutions so as to insure that economic growth is accompanied by the creation of greater opportunities for employment. All of this has been done with a strong gender focus demonstrating the links between gender equality, poverty reduction and macro-economic policy.

Both UNIFEM and the ILO believe that governance is a key issue in addressing informality of work. Informality of work must be addressed on several levels but particularly by inhibiting the factors that force workers to accept sub-standard work; by facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal and; by improving the conditions of work in the informal economy. Most significantly, **Women, Work and Poverty**, shows that respect for rights, in particular, freedom of association is essential for poor women's empowerment, particularly in the informal economy.

Globalization, technological change and market-oriented reforms present challenges as well as opportunities for workers. Our job as policy advisers is to insure that reforms improve the status of poor workers who are often invisible. The Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty, provides a powerful tool for the elaboration of effective policies to promote gender equality and reduce poverty through the Decent Work Agenda. It offers valuable analytical tools that demonstrate the linkages between the quality of employment, the incidences of poverty and gender equality. Finally, it concludes that unless efforts are made to create decent work for the global informal workforce, especially for women, the world will neither eliminate poverty nor achieve gender equality.

Thank you .