



**Remarks by Juan Somavia  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
at the launch of the  
Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All  
(Geneva, 18 June 2003)**

I thank all of you for being here. It is an important occasion for all the reasons just mentioned by my colleague Assane Diop — I thank him for his words and for his leadership on this issue. I'd also like to thank Ambassador Chung, Daniel Funes de Rioja and Leroy Trotman. On their own, they represent governments, employers and workers — but together they embody the ILO consensus and commitment to action on social security already approved by the International Labour Conference. And, of course, I thank the Social Protection Sector and the Department of Communication and all those within the Office who have put the Campaign together.

We are focusing on social security in a time of great social and economic insecurity. In much of the developed countries, the future of established social security systems is on the agenda and under scrutiny — we see this not only in the news but in the daily reality of life. Nations are struggling to find ways to maintain their systems for the benefit of future generations in the face of changing work patterns and changing demographics.

But for most workers around the world, the question isn't about sustaining the social security system for tomorrow; it is about finding ways to build one for today.

The present course of the global economy simply is not generating enough jobs where people live and it is pushing more people into the back alleys of the market place, the informal economy — a world of no rights, no protection, no support.

The result? Four out of five people today do not have adequate social security. And half of the world's population has no social security coverage at all. In many least-developed countries, more than nine out of ten workers live and work without any type of safety net.

And, of course, when we are dealing with these issues in the ILO the challenge cannot only be measured in statistics, it is measured in human lives. Living without social security means living with constant fear. It means if you fall ill and you can't work--you have no income, you have no food. It's as basic as that. It means older people forced to live in destitution because they have no pensions. Children forced to work for family survival. It means people dying because they have no basic health care and no medicine. And, too often, for survivors, it means big debts to pay for funeral costs — very often giving rise to bonded labour. We see these things every day in the work of the ILO at the field level.

There is no universal approach to expanding social security coverage. Each country has its own unique situation and requires tailored solutions. But we should not be daunted by the challenge. It has proven to be possible. Countries such as the Republic of Korea, Tunisia, and Costa Rica have

shown the way. In 1987, for example, 20 per cent of the people of the Republic of Korea had health coverage. A dozen years later, every citizen has access to basic coverage.

Our Global Campaign is grounded in this sense of possibility and new approaches. This is a Global Campaign to raise awareness of social security as a route to inclusive societies and an important tool in the eradication of poverty. It is a Global Campaign to improve overall understanding, knowledge and guidelines for the extension of social security. And it is a Global Campaign to build broad partnerships based on practical action — on pioneering approaches, new ideas and results on the ground. We will concentrate on five key activities:

First, helping countries develop national action plans for extending social security. We're working today in countries like Honduras, Mali and Sri Lanka to meet this goal.

Second, strengthening community-based efforts in the informal economy. The ILO has led the way in developing micro-insurance systems that open up access to health services in the informal economy. We have been working in India, Bangladesh, and West Africa, particularly with women's organizations.

Third, experimenting with the idea of a Global Social Trust. We are seeking to develop links between industrialized countries and social security systems in developing countries. We're now partnering with a European country and hope to test a pilot project in Africa. All of this is under discussion.

Fourth, improving governance of existing social security schemes and developing new ones for the self-employed. We are working in countries such as Angola, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe in this area.

Fifth and finally, extending health coverage through partnerships. And we have entered into a major new alliance with the Pan American Health Organization to extend social protection in the Americas.

As our Conference ends, I see a will to mobilize our institutional energy and creativity to help people find a dignified way out of poverty through work. We have set out the connection between our decent work agenda and the poverty eradication agenda. And universal access to health care and basic income security are part of a social foundation that empowers poor families to participate productively in society and the economy. It is clearly an instrument of development.

In the end, social security systems contribute not only to human security, dignity, and social justice — they also provide a foundation for inclusion, empowerment, and democracy. So in a larger sense, this Campaign on Social Security is about family security, community security, political security. It is based on a fundamental understanding: secure families build secure communities and stable societies.

I thank our constituents for the tripartite presence at this table. I thank all who are working with us and joining this effort to better the lives of people and meet one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

Thank you all for being part of this event. I think it will prove to be an important moment in the ILO's history. We have set out a programme which we call "a Campaign" in order to project our goals. But, in fact, it is so much more. It is the deep conviction that unless we do these things, we are going to fail to meet the fundamental aspirations and hopes of people — not vis-à-vis the ILO as such, because we are just an institution — but with respect to the way our political systems work, the way our communities are organized and the values that are shaping our societies.

People want those in power to realize that first and foremost, there must be a moral commitment to creating real societies that respond to the needs of people.

Thank you.

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