



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 103rd SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO)**

(GENEVA, 28 MAY – 12 JUNE 2014)

To Mr Guy Ryder

Director General of the International Labour Organization

At the dawn of creation, God made man the steward of his handiwork and charged him to cultivate and protect it. Human labour is part of that creation and continues God's creative work. This truth leads us to consider work as both a gift and a duty. Indeed, labour is not a mere commodity but has its own inherent dignity and worth. The Holy See expresses its appreciation of the ILO's contribution to upholding the dignity of human work in the context of social and economic development through discussion and cooperation between governments, labourers and employers. Such efforts serve the common good of the human family and promote the dignity of workers everywhere.

This Conference has been convened at a crucial moment of social and economic history, one which presents challenges for the entire world. Unemployment is tragically expanding the frontiers of poverty (cf. [*Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, 25 May 2013*](#)). This is particularly disheartening for unemployed young people who can all too easily become demoralized, losing their sense of worth, feeling alienated from society. In working for greater opportunities for employment, we affirm the conviction that it is only "through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive work that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their life" ([*Evangelii Gaudium*](#), 192).

Another grave and related issue confronting our world is that of mass migration: the sheer numbers of men and women forced to seek work away from their homelands is a cause for concern. Despite their hopes for a better future, they frequently encounter mistrust and exclusion, to say nothing of experiencing tragedies and disasters. Having made such sacrifices, these men and women often fail to find dignified work and fall victim to a certain "globalization of indifference".

Their situation exposes them to further dangers such as the horror of human trafficking, forced labour and enslavement. It is unacceptable that, in our world, slave labour has become common coin (cf. *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 24 September 2013*). This cannot continue! Human trafficking is a scourge, a crime against the whole of humanity. It is time to join forces and work together to free its victims and to eradicate this crime that affects all of us, from individual families to the worldwide community (cf. *Address to the New Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See, 12 December 2013*).

It is also time to reinforce existing forms of cooperation and to establish new avenues for expanding solidarity. This calls for: a renewed insistence on the dignity of every person; a more determined implementation of international labour standards; planning for a focused development on the human person as its central actor and primary beneficiary; a re-evaluation of the responsibilities of international corporations in the countries where they operate, including the areas of profit and investment management; and a concerted effort to encourage governments to facilitate the movement of migrants for the benefit of all, thus eliminating human trafficking and perilous travel conditions. Effective cooperation in these areas will be greatly assisted by defining future sustainable development goals. As I recently expressed to the Secretary General and Chief Executives of the United Nations: “Future sustainable development goals must therefore be formulated and carried out with generosity and courage, so that they can have a real impact on the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure decent work for all, and provide appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development.”

Dear Friends, the social teaching of the Catholic Church supports the initiatives of the ILO which aim to promote the dignity of the human person and the nobility of human labour. I encourage you in your efforts to face the challenges of today’s world in fidelity to these lofty goals. At the same time, I invoke God’s blessing on all that you do to defend and advance the dignity of work for the common good of our human family.

FRANCIS