



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
World Environment Day**

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A sustainable future is a green future. And forests are an indispensable part of this picture.

This year's theme "*Forests – nature at your service*" reminds us that we destroy forests at our peril. Their fate dramatically illustrates how social development, economic growth and environmental sustainability are inextricably intertwined.

The unsustainability of the prevailing model of growth has been increasingly laid bare – economically, environmentally, socially and politically. Environmental degradation is one manifestation of the imbalances produced by this inefficient model of growth. Another is its failure to yield sufficient opportunities for the decent work that people need.

The economic crisis which it did produce has forced millions of people out of work and pushed many more back into poverty. Globally, there were 27.6 million more unemployed people in 2010 than before the crisis. The number of workers in extreme poverty in 2009 is estimated to have been over 40 million more than it would have been without the crisis. And the pre-crisis situation was already unacceptable.

Environmental degradation and misuse of the forest resource and the deep-seated crisis of jobs and decent work are interconnected.

In an inefficient growth model with a marked deficit of decent jobs, the quest for survival along with the unbridled exploitation of resources fuels unsustainable use of forests with loss of jobs and livelihoods. It also and fosters intolerable labour practices such as forced labour.

Yet forests are at the service of job creation. We must also take steps to ensure that they are at the service of decent job creation.

Tens of millions depend directly on forests for their living. For 60 million indigenous and tribal peoples, forests are not only the economic basis of their survival but also the very foundation of their cultural and spiritual identity. Some 14 million are employed in the formal forestry sector. And the survival of a much larger number depends on informal and often subsistence use of forests.

ILO research has shown that there are significant sustainable employment and income opportunities in Amazon forests. Another study in collaboration with China suggests that reforestation can create several hundred thousand temporary and permanent rural job opportunities.

The choice must be made to seize these opportunities or continue the downward spiral of economic dependence, overuse, degradation and loss of livelihoods. A sustainable future means turning these job opportunities into decent green jobs.

Despite the formidable challenges more and more countries are striving to build a mutually beneficial relationship between forests and people.

Sustainable forest use and management require a skilled workforce and good work practices. Certification systems and labels for sustainable forest management have already incorporated international labour standards. Under the Green Jobs Initiative involving the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Organisation of Employers and the ILO, our recent global study “Skills for Green Jobs” highlights the role of training in controlling deforestation (Brazil), job creation for low income and unemployed youth (Republic of Korea), and contributing to poverty reduction (Uganda).

Brazil is building decent work standards into forest management in the Amazon region. Similarly, programmes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) increasingly recognize that the co-benefits of employment, income and local governance are critical for the success of these schemes.

We must use the opportunity of the Rio UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 to make progress towards an inclusive growth model with policies that are efficient for people, for productive investment and for nature.

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