

**STATEMENT TO THE 97<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE**

**By**

**Conchita Poncini, International Federation of University Women**

**Thank you Madame la Presidente:**

**The Report of the Director General is commendable in its format and delivery content which has improved over the years thanks to the high quality and competence of its technical and administrative staff. We congratulate the Governing Body and the Director-General Juan Somavia, particularly, for their leadership and vision. We want to express our congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the Gender Bureau for our close collaboration to integrate the gender equality perspective in ILO's constitutional mandate, strategic objectives and programme of work. We also congratulate the Workers' Group in electing Anna Biondi as Secretary the first woman ever to be elected to this position. We have high expectations that the ILO global campaign just launched will enhance the success of the agenda item on "Gender Equality as a Core of Decent Work" at its next year's 98<sup>th</sup> Session. On behalf of the International Federation of University Women and the Federation of Business and Professional Women International, respectively convener and co-convener of the Working Group on Women's Employment and Economic Development of the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women, we stand ready to mobilize our Working Group in this campaign and in the work leading to the 98<sup>th</sup> Session.**

**We are also addressing this 97<sup>th</sup> Session of the ILC with great satisfaction and gratitude because after a decade of advocacy, we understand a decision has been taken to change the language of the Standing Committee to make it gender equal. In this regard, permit us to recall, inter alia, Constitution Article 3, para. 2, which should ensure gender equal participation in the decision-making organs and in all agenda items and to revise Article 9, para.3 to ensure gender equality in the staff of the ILO.**

**IFUW followed the session on Committee on Skills and thank the Chair for allowing us to make a general statement. We appreciate the attention the Committee gave to gender equality. We indicated that women are often differently treated in law, policy and practice, and that much of the work done by women, whether paid or unpaid is under valued and not recognized. We hope that the social and cultural barriers faced by women in accessing education and training will be given particular attention by the ILO especially as women have proven in economic crises their great creativity and innovation in developing strategies to secure livelihood for themselves and their families. Often unpaid work of women in the informal economy has contributed as models of best practice for non-tradition, lifelong learning and training strategies. We propose that such skills acquired through informal means be recognized and used for skills development mechanisms.**

**IFUW commends the important work carried out by the Committee on Rural Employment on promoting rural employment for poverty reduction. We are gratified with the high level of sensitivity to gender issues which underpinned much of the discussions and are especially pleased that the key point agreed upon is the recognition that women should not be listed as one of several groups meriting special attention but make up over half the population and that the unequal treatment between women and men requires targeted attention. We hope that such targeted emphasis on rural employment opportunities for women will continue into the work due to be undertaken by the ILO, governments and social partners to promote rural employment for poverty reduction with a human rights approach. We are pleased that the Agreed Conclusions has underscored that public policies should strengthen secondary education and vocational training in rural areas and ensure equal access for all women and men and that women be the focus of training in entrepreneurship. IFUW particularly welcomes the recommendation to governments to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women, equal access to education and vocational training and better possibilities for all to reconcile work, private and family life and**

**that workers' organizations should strengthen the participation of women and youth in workers' organizations in rural areas.**

**Finally, on the proposed Declaration of the Committee on Strengthening of ILO's Capacity, we fully agree that the four strategic objectives are inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive and, to optimize their impact, efforts to promote them should be part of the ILO's global and integrated strategy for decent work and that gender equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting issues. It should however not forget the two-pronged approach of women's human rights and right to development, which should be specifically targeted in the Decent Work Agenda.**

**Thank you Madame la Presidente.**

**cp. 11 June 2008**