



UN NEWS CENTRE

With breaking stories and
newswire products from



Countries adopt new UN standards to improve conditions for domestic workers



Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO

16 June 2011 –

Government representatives and delegates representing worker and employer organisations attending a United Nations conference today adopted a set of international standards aimed at improving the working conditions of millions of domestic workers worldwide.

The new Convention on Domestic Workers [adopted](#) at the annual conference of the UN International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) in Geneva states that workers around the world who care for families and households must have the same basic labour rights as those available to other employees.

It calls for reasonable hours of work, weekly rest of at least 24 consecutive hours, a limit on in-kind payment, clear information on terms and conditions of employment, as well as respect of the rights associated with employment, including the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

“We are moving the standards system of the ILO into the informal economy for the first time and this is a breakthrough of great significance,” said Juan Somavia, the ILO Director-General.

“History is being made.”

Recent ILO estimates based on national surveys or census in 117 countries place the number of domestic workers at a minimum of 53 million, but experts say they could be as many as 100 million across the world.

In developing countries, they make up at least 4 to 12 per cent of those in wage employment. Around 83 per cent of domestic workers are women or girls. Many are migrant workers.

“Bringing the domestic workers into the fold of our values is a strong move, for them and for all workers who aspire to decent work, but it also has strong implications for migration and of course for gender equality,” said Mr. Somavia.

Manuela Tomei, the Director of the ILO’s Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, said “domestic workers are neither servants nor ‘members of the family.’ After today they can no longer be considered second-class workers.”

The convention will come into force after it has been ratified by two States.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[UN labour agency chief calls for ‘new era of social justice’](#)