



Note to correspondents

ILO to consider future of employment in the tobacco sector Geneva, 24-28 February 2003

Tuesday 18 February 2003

(ILO/03/06)

GENEVA (ILO News) - Workers, employers and governments meet here on 24 to 28 February to consider, for the first time, the future of the world's 100 million workers who depend in some way on the production, manufacture and distribution of tobacco and tobacco products for their livelihood.

The [Tripartite Meeting on the Future of Employment in the Tobacco Sector](#) is to discuss what ILO officials called stagnating or declining employment in the global tobacco sector as well as the uncertain future of millions of non-unionized, informal sector workers including impoverished women and children. Participants will include representatives of governments, tobacco manufacturers and employers, workers and unions and grass-roots groups of non-unionized tobacco workers.

The ILO has issued a new report on the subject entitled, "Employment trends in the tobacco sector: Challenges and prospects" which is available in printed copy or on-line.

"Tobacco has never been more controversial than it is today," said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. "For many who work in the tobacco sector the world over, stagnating or declining employment is a burning workplace and social issue - especially among the most

vulnerable such as migrants, women and children, ethnic minorities and castes or tribes who depend on tobacco for a livelihood. Their future must also be considered."

The meeting will also consider a series of measures aimed at mitigating the negative repercussions on employment levels and working conditions from current developments in the tobacco industry, and discuss the role of social dialogue and actions that could be taken by governments, by employers' and workers' organizations at the national level and by the ILO with a view to heading off negative effects on workers.

Employment situation

ILO officials say that overall, of some 100 million persons employed worldwide in all aspects of the tobacco sector, some 90 per cent of these workers are in the developing countries. Of the 100 million, only about 1.2 million work in manufacturing, with some 40 million in growing and leaf processing, 20 million more in home industries such as hand-rolling "bidi" or "kretek" cigarettes in India and Indonesia and the rest in tobacco-related processes and industries ranging from distribution, sales and promotion of tobacco use to organizations fighting *against* tobacco consumption.

About 6 million tons of tobacco are produced each year in some 120 countries, with 80 per cent of production coming from the developing world and 70 per cent from six countries: Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, the United States and Zimbabwe.

The ILO report says the current figure for employment in the tobacco sector has stabilized (largely remained unchanged) in the past five years. In the industrialized countries, employment had declined steadily over the past three decades, largely due to improved manufacturing, farming techniques and consolidation of tobacco interests. The report noted that "no correlation has been established between the decline in (tobacco) consumption and the decreasing rates of employment."

The report expresses concern, however, that as tobacco manufacturers continue to seek new markets and adopt new technologies, they may be heading toward a new era in which tobacco manufacturing may involve few, if any workers. In the United Kingdom, for example, 3 per cent more cigarettes were being produced in 1998 than in 1990 with 75 per cent less labour, the report says.

Of primary concern, however, are the most vulnerable members of tobacco-growing societies, the report says. These include ethnic millions of workers such as members of castes, tribes and religious minorities in India; impoverished farmers in Malawi; women workers in India and Indonesia; migrant workers in the United States; child labourers in tobacco plantations in Africa, Asia and Latin America; poverty-stricken workers in Brazil who may be caught in debt-bondage; and victims of conflict in some tobacco-growing countries.

"These workers and their families, in thrall to the tobacco sector for their livelihoods, are faced with the prospect of an uncertain future for their sector," the report says. "If tobacco manufacturing workers are among the best paid in industry around the world, tobacco farmers in developing and some transition countries cannot be said to benefit from the high added value of the product; unorganized, they cannot avail themselves of bargaining mechanisms to negotiate wages and working conditions."

Contact address for more information:

Ms. Clara Foucault-Mohammed, Industrial Specialist
International Labour Office
4 route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland

Tel.: +4122/799-6883. Fax: +4122/799-7967.

E-mail: foucault@ilo.org or sector@ilo.org

* * * * *

: [Employment trends in the tobacco sector: Challenges and prospects](#), International Labour Office, Geneva, 2003. ISBN 92-2-113425-3. Price: 17.50 Swiss francs.

Updated by CL. Approved by KMK. Last update: 18 February 2003.

For further information, please contact the Department of Communication (DCOMM)
at Tel: +41.22.799.7912, Fax: +41.22.799.8577 or E-mail: communication@ilo.org