



Geneva, 28 January 2009
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Dear Madam, dear Sir,

**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON BUSINESS RESPONSES TO THE
DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE**

Geneva, 28-29 April 2009

The International Labour Office is organizing a meeting in Geneva from 28 to 29 April 2009 on “the business responses to the demographic challenge”.

This meeting will be a technical meeting for employers’ organizations, the funding of which allows for **24 employer representatives** to participate, plus a number of invited observers from multinational enterprises. Please find attached a background note explaining the scope and content of this important ILO-ACT/EMP meeting as well as a tentative programme.

IOE member federations are invited to nominate a participant to this meeting. However, given the interest likely to be shown for this event and its technical nature, we will be obliged to select participants according to the following criteria:

- The nominee’s actual involvement in the demographics debate
- The activities in this area for his/her federation
- Regional distribution

Nominations should, therefore, include information as to the person’s technical knowledge of the demographics debate. In order to meet the ILO’s requirements with regard to the preparation of this meeting, we would appreciate receiving your nomination through the attached registration form, including the information requested, **by Monday 23 February 2009**.

Unfortunately funding is limited. However, any candidates not selected among the twenty-four participants are most welcome to attend at their own expense.

Yours sincerely,

Antonio Peñalosa
Secretary-General

Annexes

Circular addressed to IOE member federations and to the employer members of the ILO Governing Body.

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Background

One of the most important issues facing the world of work in the coming decades is demographic change. The global population is ageing. The US Department of Commerce estimated the number of people aged 60 or older today to be 605 million, and projected that to grow to almost two billion by 2050. According to the 2006 Revision of World Population Prospects, for the first time in history the number of persons over the age of 60 in the world will likely surpass the number of persons below the age of 15 by the year 2045. This has major implications for economies and markets everywhere, even in the near future. The current political debates on what to do about it are fiercest in developed countries, but the issue has already raised concern in emerging market countries as well.

The debates are mostly about measures necessary to keep welfare systems afloat while dependency ratios increase on account of the rising high-age segment (those above 65 years). As more people retire and live longer, fewer young people enter the labour market—and tend to do so at a later age than was the case in the past, effectively reducing the total length of their participation in the labour market. This puts into question the sustainability of social security systems, especially as regards health and old age benefits. However, the challenge is also about where to find adequate supplies of skills to sustain economic activities essential for the decent work agenda and prosperity for everybody.

Business has begun to consider what needs to be done to overcome the challenges of an ageing population. Employers are engaging in the public debate while taking measures within their own operations to retain older workers. The answers to the challenge have to cover both public policy and workplace practice, and they need to address acquired rights, expectations, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Age discrimination legislation has had mixed results, and new thinking is required to create an environment that sets the right incentives, encourages the right behaviours and allows necessary adjustment.

Responses to the demographic challenge also need to take account of a dynamic world where common perceptions based on observations made in the past no longer hold true. For instance, increasing education, better health and improving lifestyles have transformed the average older person.

The impact of ageing populations in the developed economies will have large scale impacts on the developing world and vice-versa. Increased labour migration, off-shoring of work and increased labour productivity are some of the solutions presented to this demographic challenge. Some fear the brain drain will harm the development prospects of poorer

countries, while others consider that migration and productivity increases are limited measures that will not adequately meet the demographic challenge.

The event

The ILO's Bureau for Employers' Activities will organize an international symposium to address these issues from a business perspective. It will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 28 and 29 April 2009, and will bring together employer representatives from a wide range of countries, both developed and developing. The expertise to inform the discussions will include leading researchers and thinkers, as well as practitioners from the business community who have taken a lead in addressing the ageing of the workforce. Interactive sessions will allow participants to question findings and see what lies behind them, debate the issues, see new perspectives and network amongst themselves to find solutions to the problems they face in their own situations back home.

Day one will review demographic trends and the impact they have on business. It will also look at current debates and the public policy and regulatory frameworks in place today. Day two will look at what is happening to people on the ground, and what business is doing about it. Case studies of interesting workplace initiatives will be presented. Finally, participants will consider a business agenda for action at both societal and company levels to successfully meet the challenge of ageing populations and progress towards the global goal of decent work for everyone.

Participants will return to their companies and organisations with a better understanding of one of the greatest challenges facing societies around the world, the best ideas available to deal with it and a network that can be mobilised and leveraged when the need arises.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Tuesday 28 April 2009

12h00 – 13h30	Registration
13h30 – 13h40	Welcome
13h40 – 14h50	Overview and context: Scenario-setting. Demographic changes, migration, rising educational attainment, dependency ratios, where will markets and skills be in 2050
15h00 – 15h20	Break
15h20 – 16h30	Public policy: regulatory initiatives Overview of age-discrimination legislation Selected initiatives, successes and challenges
16h30 – 17h30	Public policy: Issues relating to social protection, funding of old-age benefits, health costs
17h30 – 18h30	Public policy: incentives, subsidies, training, changing expectations, etc.
18h30	Reception

Wednesday 29 April 2009

09h00 – 10h30	Managing an older workforce I : Results of a survey on trends
10h30 – 11h00	Break
11h00 – 12h30	Managing an older workforce II: Company case studies of workplace Initiatives
12h30 – 14h30	Lunch
14h30 – 15h30	Break-out groups: Business agenda: company strategies, roles of employers' organizations
15h30 – 15h50	Break
15h50 – 16h30	Reporting back
16h30 – 17h00	Closing: Pulling it all together