Among the many profound and thought-provoking issues raised by the Secretary-General in his report “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations” presented at the Humanitarian Segment of ECOSOC 2002, we wish to highlight a few which are of particular concern for ILO.

In paragraph 41 of his report, the Secretary-General affirms:

“The link between poverty and humanitarian emergencies is made more complex by the breakdown of institutions of law and order, including institutions of the family and institutions on the local level that safeguard the protection of fundamental and universal human rights. Add to this dire poverty the additional burden of collapsed or ineffective states, and the result is often a re-invigoration of "parallel" informal economies.”

Later, in paragraph 57, he underlines that:

“Efforts to reach and aid the most vulnerable affected by crises can only be sustained if there is a clear strategy for moving as quickly as possible away from the simple provision of emergency relief and towards a more comprehensive humanitarian and development assistance programme. Experience has taught the importance of linking relief to development at the earliest possible stage. The transition from relief to development is more than an economic process. It involves institutional change that engages the full participation of society and establishes the basis for stability through recognition of the human rights of civilians.”

And later still, in paragraph 58, he reminds us that:

“It is important to ensure that the way aid is provided does not weaken or destroy any existing coping mechanisms. In fact, assistance efforts should provide the seeds of future recovery and rehabilitation, through the strengthening of local capacities and the encouragement of communities to begin, even in the midst of crisis, their own way towards sustainable development.”

These issues, the link between poverty and emergencies and the need for a focus on development from the start, are at the very core of ILO’s mandate, culture, experience and strategy for intervention.
The ILO is the UN agency with global responsibility for work, employment and labour market issues. Its mission is to promote opportunities for men and women everywhere to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. In particular, through its In Focus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRIISIS), established in 1999, the International Labour Organization pursues these immediate objectives:

1. Develop a coherent framework and comprehensive capacity to respond speedily and in effective manner to the employment-related and decent work challenges of different kind of crises.

2. Promote socio-economic reintegration and poverty alleviation of crisis-affected groups – women and men – through employment intensive investment programmes, skills training, retraining, small enterprise development, local economic development, social dialogue, social safety nets and protection and mobilization of increased volume of resources for such interventions.

3. Increase awareness at the national, regional and international levels of the importance of employment, social inequalities and other social concerns in crisis situations.

4. Build ILO constituents’ capacity to play a greater role in crisis monitoring, prevention and tackling of the adverse consequences.

The aim of the ILO crisis response programme, in fact, is primarily to promote employment-friendly reconstruction, help save existing jobs and create new ones. In so doing, the ILO develops a valuable knowledge base on crisis response, preparedness and prevention, which it disseminates widely. This also feeds into its advocacy and capacity-building work aimed to help practitioners recognize the relevance of decent work in peace building, and develop their skills accordingly.

ILO’s contribution to the efforts of response to crises and to reconstruction programmes is based upon its comparative advantage, particularly in terms of:

- **Its tripartite structure and emphasis on social dialogue**, that could play a significant role in preventing as well as tackling the effects of the crisis by helping to promote reconciliation and to build a consensus around economic and other objectives, for example, among parties often on opposing sides of a conflict;

- **Its core international labour standards** which could provide a framework for the prevention and resolution of a crisis (as happened during the last peace negotiations in Guatemala);

- **Its long history of policy and technical cooperation work on poverty alleviation**;

- **Its track record on women, gender analysis and gender equality matters**, as well as on disabled persons and migrants and on the social and economic integration of these marginalized groups;

- **Its capacity to develop social protection** – social security and non-statutory social benefits schemes – in the crisis context.

- **Its ongoing skills training and other projects** in conflict-affected countries in the different regions,
including its proven expertise in the reintegration of ex-combatants and the relevant material prepared for this purpose;

- **Available data, tools and research insights** to underpin effective action in support of such countries and the affected groups;

- **Its long-standing, extensive country-level operational action** on employment-intensive investment;

- **Its capacity to contribute to crisis response and prevention through its field structure, in particular its multidisciplinary teams**;

During the last three years, ILO IFP/CRISIS has been at the forefront of crisis response and reconstruction activities worldwide. Rapid needs assessments were undertaken with the regional and field offices to Mozambique after the floods, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Somalia, South Lebanon, East Timor, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, India – Orissa cyclone and Gujarat earthquake, Venezuela, Solomon Islands and Ethiopia. In addition, the IFP/CRISIS participated in inter-agency needs assessment missions on the post-conflict situations in the Horn of Africa, Sri Lanka and Casamance in Senegal, elaborated contingency plans for Somalia and undertook assessments in Colombia covering internally displaced populations, ex-combatants and child soldiers.

Several post-crisis technical assistance programmes have been formulated following the above missions. These include employment recovery and reduction of economic vulnerability in the aftermath of the floods in Mozambique, reintegration of demobilized soldiers (notably including child soldiers) in different countries of the Great Lakes region of Africa, and the “employment for peace” programme in Sierra Leone, covering skills training linked to self employment, business support services and reintegration projects for disabled people and youth.

In Europe, ILO IFP/CRISIS together with IOM and the Lester Pearson Centre, Canada, provided assistance to UNMIK on the socio-economic reintegration of the demobilized KLA soldiers in Kosovo, whilst in Serbia an integrated area-based local economic and social development programme was designed for the Preservo Valley.

A number of employment related programmes are under way in East Timor, and in the Solomon Islands, ILO IFP/CRISIS in partnership with UNDP developed a three-million dollar project for the employment of demobilized militia. The response package to the *Gujarat earthquake in India* included a model programme for social and economic reconstruction in 10 villages in Kutch district funded by the ILO and implemented by SEWA (self-employed women association).

In Afghanistan the IFP/CRISIS currently focuses on four areas: a) employment generation through the rehabilitation of public and community infrastructure and utilities using ILO labour-based technology and work methods; b) promotion of the re-entry of Afghan women in the labour market; c) skills development for Afghan job-seekers, including ex-combatants; d) improve the match between supply and demand in the labour market through employment policy development and employment service centres.
In response to the earthquakes in El Salvador and in Peru, rapid employment impact projects were launched in partnership with UNDP. Elsewhere in Latin America, a proposal was prepared to promote decent jobs for peace and reconciliation at the local level in Colombia.

One of the lessons learnt – possibly the most important – from these and other activities carried out by ILO IFP/CRISIS at the field level is that there is not yet sufficient awareness, among donors and key actors – national and international –, of the importance of the employment dimension of crises. It is therefore a major challenge of ILO’s to be an advocate for crisis prevention, preparedness and response and for post-crisis reconstruction programmes to fully take into account this important dimension. Successful experiences should be replicated in wider contexts and funding requirements raised from the crisis outset. In this respect, it is essential that the international community and the affected countries make full use of ILO’s comparative advantage in this sector.

There have been examples, in the recent past, of excellent cooperation between ILO and other partners, through which the employment dimension has been mainstreamed into crisis response and reconstruction programmes, but which did not necessarily secure donor funding. In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, following the deadly eruption of volcano Nyiragongo in January 2002, that destroyed nearly half of the town of Goma and took out an estimated 70 percent of the town’s economic activities, ILO contributed substantially to the design of an inter-agency initiative (with UNDP and Habitat) aimed at the restoration of livelihoods. A labour-intensive programme was proposed to address the immediate and longer-term aspects of unemployment in the area of Goma. In the short-term, the labour-based works (applying a labour/equipment mix that gives priority to labour) would have provided direct and temporary employment for a large number of unskilled workers. In the longer-term, the physical facilities rehabilitated through these works (sanitation, market places, urban and peri-urban roads) would have provided improved access to city markets for agricultural and fisheries production, improving the health and living conditions of the population of Goma.

From this and other recent experiences we draw the conclusion that more should be done to ensure timely funding of transitional and development activities and to sensitize donor governments to provide the necessary resources. Major emphasis should be put in bringing employment concerns to the forefront of the disaster management cycle.

The theme of this year’s Humanitarian Segment of ECOSOC, “Strengthening of the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disasters and complex emergencies, with particular attention to reaching the vulnerable and the transition from relief to development”, highlights another area where improvements are needed. The persistent “marginality” of employment issues in relation to crises is also evident in the existing coordination arrangements among operational agencies. A recent review of these mechanisms carried out by ILO in Geneva shows quite an uneven situation.

At Headquarters level, whilst the ILO is now fully represented in the United Nations Development Group, it is not part of two of the other Executive Committees established by the Secretary-General in the framework of the UN reform, namely the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security. It is therefore another major challenge of ILO to carry out advocacy and information activities within the UN system in order to make its role and potential
contribution in crisis response and reconstruction better known.

Likewise, whilst ILO is a valid contributor to the 30 organizations-strong Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (CPR) network, it is not represented in the UN Framework for Coordination, the main New York-based mechanism through which the United Nations addresses issues of early warning and preventive actions.

Of particular significance is the fact that ILO does not participate to the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC, established in June 1992, serves as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination relating to humanitarian assistance in response to complex and major emergencies under the leadership of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. Through an articulate mechanism of Working Groups and sub-Working Groups, the IASC is in fact the main policy-making mechanism of the humanitarian community. It is necessary to make all efforts for ILO, in its capacity of operational organization, to become a member of the IASC. It is essential that an organization which participates in the development of common humanitarian action plans in many countries, which appeals through the Consolidated Appeal Process and which is a major partner in emergency and development programmes around the world be fully represented in this primary policy coordination mechanism. In so doing, the IASC would also be strengthened in its efforts to improve the coordinated response to all crises. It has been repeatedly suggested that an IASC subsidiary body be created to look at the employment and other immediate development dimensions of crises.

At the field level, where ILO has area offices in 40 countries, recent experience show the great potential of the cooperation between ILO and other partners, and clearly indicates the way forward. In particular, it is of the essence that: the organization is an active participant in the UN Disaster Management Teams (where they already exist), that it participates in joint needs assessment and planning missions and that it is fully integrated in the process of production and maintenance of contingency plans. In such a way, all of ILO’s core values and competencies can inform the management of disasters, from prevention and preparedness to response and reconstruction.

The situation in post-crisis environments is markedly more positive. ILO is a full contributor to the UN structures put in place under the leadership of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, such as in Afghanistan, East Timor and Kosovo. In Afghanistan, for instance, the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People 2002 (ITAP) was prepared by the UN Country Team, supported by their headquarters through a newly constituted Joint Working Group of members of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), in consultation with members and standing invitees of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). It drew on the outcome of a range of discussions and consultations among the international community, Afghan and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Watching Brief Meeting held in Islamabad from 27-29 November 2001 and the Round Table on Women’s Leadership in Afghanistan held in Brussels from 10-11 December 2001. ILO’s “Jobs for Peace” strategy for Afghanistan, prepared by ILO IFP/CRISIS, provided a solid foundation in the preparation of the ITAP and was fully taken into account at the Tokyo conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Likewise, ILO is a fully-fledged participant to the country-level process of inter-agency strategic coordination and resource mobilization. The UN inter-agency Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP)
has evolved, in the course of the last few years, from a collation of individual agencies’ appeals to a comprehensive strategic planning tool. As mentioned above, ILO participates to the development of country-level Common Humanitarian Action Plans, which are the planning components of the CAP, and has appealed through the CAP for over US $ 22 million in 2002.

The determining factor for ILO’s approach to crises is the conviction that the challenge of assisting millions of dispossessed people and vulnerable groups affected by crises worldwide cannot be met if we think and act exclusively in terms of traditional humanitarian assistance. A major element of the crisis response promoted by the ILO is facilitation of the socio-economic integration of crisis-affected people through the formulation and implementation of programmes that promote job-creation, income generation and social integration.

ILO is working in partnership with many UN agencies and international institutions to affirm the centrality of employment in crisis response. One example for all is the establishment of a “working group on UNHCR-ILO partnership” which meets regularly at headquarters level and has already created positive synergies for joint-projects on particular emergencies. More partnerships are being developed and tested in the field on a daily basis.

While the consequences of the lack of employment have been clearly indicated in the last year session of ECOSOC, in terms of development, security and sustainability (as stated in the report of the Secretary-General “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”), we believe that the ILO and the other UN agencies will need to be cohesive in their determination to achieve greater results on behalf of the vulnerable people and help them to obtain the jobs they need to rebuild their livelihoods.

In view of these considerations, the ILO will continue to seek to take active part in the UN coordination mechanisms.