

Commentary

BUFFIN PARTNERS INC.

ECONOMIC INVESTMENT AND ACTUARIAL RESEARCH

The International Labour Organization

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency devoted to advancing opportunities for men and women to obtain productive work in conditions of security, equity and dignity. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage employment opportunities, enhance social protection and engage in dialog on work-related issues. The ILO brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programs. The ILO is responsible for developing, implementing and supervising International Labour Standards. In cooperation with its 181 member nations, the ILO seeks to ensure that its Labour Standards are respected in both principle and practice.

The ILO was established in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles following the first World War, to reflect the belief that universal lasting peace could be accomplished based on social justice. The founders of the ILO were committed to achieving humane working conditions and combating injustice, hardship and poverty. The ILO became an agency of the United Nations in 1946. The ILO provides technical assistance programs to governments, workers and employers worldwide, particularly in developing nations. In countries such as Poland, Chile and South Africa, the ILO assisted in the attainment of democracy through its support for the rights of trade unions. On its 50th anniversary in 1969, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1998, the ILO adopted a *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. These principles and rights are the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining and the elimination of forced labor, child labor and discrimination in employment. The guarantee of these fundamental principles and rights at work, according to the Declaration, enables

workers to claim rightfully the fair share of the wealth that they have helped to create, and enables them to achieve their full human potential.

Work is central to people's well-being in a globalized world economy. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, thus strengthening individuals, families and communities. Such progress, however, depends on working conditions that are decent and that represent the aspirations of people during their working lives. These aspirations include opportunities for work that is productive and that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. They also include better prospects for personal development and social integration, and freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Paramount among these aspirations is equality of opportunity and treatment for all men and women. Providing work opportunities is the key to eradication of poverty and is the means by which individuals may share in the gains brought about by increased international economic integration. Extending opportunities for decent work to more people is a crucial element in making globalization more inclusive and fair. For these reasons, creating employment opportunities is at the heart of global development policy. The role of the ILO in promoting strategies for a fair system of globalization is supported by the 2004 Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. More specifically, the functions of the ILO are to bring together governments, employers and workers to set International Labour Standards, supervise their implementation, raise awareness, develop policies and devise programs to ensure that its efforts are rooted in the needs of working men and women.

The ILO works actively with the United Nations and other multilateral agencies to

develop policies and programs that support the creation of decent work opportunities as a basic component of efforts to reduce and eradicate poverty. Underlying the ILO's activities is the importance of cooperation between governments and employers' and workers' organizations in encouraging social and economic progress. This cooperation is reflected in negotiation, consultation and exchange of views; it is a flexible means that enables employers' and workers' organizations to manage change and achieve social and economic policy development objectives.

The ILO seeks to define and guarantee labor rights and improve work conditions by building a system of International Labour Standards expressed in the form of Conventions, Recommendations and Codes of Practice. The ILO has adopted more than 180 Conventions and 190 Recommendations covering all aspects of the world of work. In addition the ILO has developed a number of Codes of Practice. In areas as varied as maternity leave and protection of migrant workers, these standards play an important role in the drawing up of national legislation. The ILO provides advice in the drafting of national labor laws and operates a supervisory process to help ensure that standards ratified by individual member States are applied in practice.

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Buffin Partners Inc.

P.O. Box 1255
Sparta, NJ 07871
Phone: (973) 579-6371
Fax: (973) 579-7067

Email: commentary@buffinpartners.com

