

**"Making decent work a global goal
and a national reality"**

Policies, Strategies, Practices for sustainable development

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Opening address of the ISSA Secretary General

Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky

Honourable Minister,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and pleased to be here with you at this International Conference on "Making decent work a global goal and a national reality". I am particularly pleased that ISSA, the International Social Security Association, is one of the co-organisers of this important event in the framework of the 30th A+A International Congress for Occupational Safety and Health.

I wish to express my special thanks and gratitude to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for their support in making this Conference a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, ISSA's objective is to promote and develop social security, including the prevention of occupational risks, throughout the world. Since its foundation in 1927, the Association has always sought and fostered international co-operation with other agencies, including those involved in the field of prevention of occupational risks.

At the international level we work in close partnership with the International Labour Office (ILO), with whom we share very similar values with regard to the promotion of safe and healthy workplaces and the strong commitment we feel to these values. This is clearly reflected in the fact that, since 1955, we jointly organize every three years, together with a national host organization, the World Congress on Safety and Health at Work which is the most significant event of its kind, attended by approximately 3 000 participants from around the globe. As you might already know, the next World Congress will take place in June 2008 in Seoul, Korea.

For the ISSA, prevention forms an essential component of social security. Protecting the health of human beings is a basic humanitarian principle and is consequently one of the fundamental objectives of social security. Therefore, occupational safety and health must be a nationally and internationally recognized factor in social security, which unfortunately is not yet always the case.

A healthy and decent work environment is, however, on a worldwide basis, unfortunately still a privilege of relatively few.

A great many of the worldwide labour force is NOT working in the formal economy and is therefore not protected. Indeed, it is estimated that around 80% of the world's population is working without a safety net, without any formal system of protection, let alone under safe and healthy or decent working conditions.

In the context of globalization, the greatest challenge for all countries is how to transform the difficulties encountered in adapting the new working conditions into opportunities for the further improvement of safety and health at work.

Still more often than not, investments in improving working conditions are merely seen as a cost factor to business and to society; it is not yet seen as a basic human right and as a means for economic growth and development.

But, ladies and gentlemen, we know that economic growth does not automatically lead to social justice and social security and improved safety and health conditions. Rather, a lack of preventative action leads to economic loss and ... human suffering!

The impact of work accidents and occupational diseases on the families affected is a human tragedy whose impact is impossible to

value.

But accidents and ill-health can be prevented. And good prevention significantly impacts on social security costs as it reduces compensation, rehabilitation and other related costs caused by a work accident or an occupational disease. Healthy individuals are the basis of productivity and cost-effective activities. **Safety pays, is our credo.**

This implies an unequivocal responsibility of the different actors involved: government, employers as well as social security, to protect workers. But decent work should, however, not only be a global goal - it should become a **national reality** through different means of action such as adequate legislation and efficient prevention measures.

The challenges in today's changing world of work are immense. And only a comprehensive, concerted approach, involving all stakeholders can achieve positive change in attitudes and in terms of results.

The ISSA, through its comprehensive prevention programme, is committed to contributing to this new approach by continuously promoting the importance of prevention of occupational risks in the international arena and by strengthening its cooperation with the

ILO and other agencies to achieve the goal of making the workplace a decent one at the global and national level.

I wish us a very successful and fruitful conference and look forward to lively discussion and exchange over the next two days.

Thank you.
