

**World Day on Safety and Health at Work  
"Managing risks in the work environment"**

**(Beijing, 28 April 2008)**

**Opening Speech by Ms. Constance Thomas,  
Director of ILO Office for China and Mongolia**

**Dear Ladies and gentlemen, Good morning!**

On behalf of the International Labour Organization, I would like to welcome all of you to this important event to observe the World Day on Safety and Health at Work. This is our fourth consecutive year to do so in China. I would like to express my appreciation to State Administration of Work Safety, All China Federation of Trade Unions and China Enterprise Confederation, for your support and commitment.

This worldwide event puts the spotlight on work safety and is an invaluable opportunity for governments, workers, employers, and safety and health professionals to continuously promote a safety culture by sharing good practices and exchanging experiences.

The theme of this year's World Day is "Managing Risks in the Work Environment", which perfectly matches the Hazards Control Year of 2008 launched by the Chinese government. This is not a coincidence - but a demonstration of the importance of risk management and control.

People everywhere are exposed to safety and health risks in their work. It is the ILO's belief that all risks at work can be controlled, and almost all accidents or ill health can be prevented. For this to happen much more needs to be done.

In 2005, the ILO estimated that globally 2.2 million people die annually from work-related accidents and diseases and this death toll appears to be on the rise. Moreover, each year there are an estimated 270 million non-fatal work-related accidents (each resulting in at least three days' absence from work) as well as 160 million new cases of work-related diseases. This account means that too many men and women are at risk and suffering as a result of trying to make a living. They are too often exposed to hazardous chemicals, fumes, dust and unsafe processes and practices that can and should be better managed and controlled.

While some industries are inherently more hazardous than others, groups such as migrants or other marginalized workers are often more at risk of experiencing work-related accidents and ill health, since poverty or lack of other employment options frequently forces them into unsafe operations. Our goal must be to reduce and eventually eliminate these unsafe workplaces, where ever they exist.

If we do so, we will not only reduce human suffering and economic burdens of work-related accidents and ill-health, but also enhance productivity, which benefit both enterprises, and the national economy. As you may know that each year work related accidents and diseases cause an economic loss equivalent to 4% of world's gross domestic product.

I know that China is committed to accident and risk prevention and is actively working to learn more about risk management and control, to strive to apply it better and in a more widespread manner. In this regard, I point to the ratification last year of the ILO OSH Convention No. 155, which aims to prevent accidents and injury to health at work by minimising, so far as is reasonably practicable,

the risks and hazards inherent in the working environment.

For your information, we also see other initiatives worldwide with this aim. The EU OSH framework directive (Council Directive 89/391/EEC), which has been transposed into law in all Member States, also requires that employers must assess all the risks to workers' health and safety. In the light of the results obtained from this assessment, employers must take preventive measures needed to prevent occupational risks.

The recently-adopted Workplace Safety and Health Act of Singapore has moved from being prescriptive to results-based by requiring all employers to conduct comprehensive risk assessments for all work processes and provide detailed plans to eliminate or minimize risks. By doing so, employers are obliged to take ownership of OSH standards and outcomes to effect a cultural change of respect for life and livelihoods at the workplace.

The ILO World Day theme report provides you with some key information on risk management based on the ILO instruments and experiences. I am sure that the other speakers invited by the organizers today will introduce their good practices and experiences as well.

While there is no system of risk management which can be applied universally to all undertakings, independently of size, sector and the risks specific to their activities, there are a few general points on this issue I would like to take this opportunity to stress.

- Commitment of top management is crucial
- Safety and health risk management should be incorporated into the organization's general management system and be aligned

with other associated systems such as environmental risk management

- While management commitment is critical, it is not sufficient if employees lack safety awareness or ignore clear instructions or established rules. In this regard, safety training for workers to follow the rules and good practices and to properly use the personal protective equipment provided by their employer are essential.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I would like to emphasize that the real and universal challenge lies in developing a general culture of risk awareness in all life situations, taking in the multiple risks to which individuals are likely to be exposed in life and at work.

As an organization, it is worthwhile and beneficial to help its all staff better understand risks and improve the knowledge on risk management and control. In other words, each individual, each worker, each organization should subscribe to this preventive safety and health culture and act accordingly.

The OSH journey never ends as the nature of work is constantly evolving and inherent risks exist everywhere. We must be always vigilant to ensure our safety and health standards and practices remain relevant and continuously improving. I urge you to keep up the good work in improving your OSH practices. After all, maintaining a safe and healthy workplace is a win-win proposition - companies remain productive and competitive, while workers are protected and remain healthy.

Finally, I wish the workshop success and all of you good health!