

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO)'S 90TH
ANNIVERSARY AND WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY & HEALTH AT
WORK CELEBRATIONS IN ZAMBIA

International Labour Organization (ILO Lusaka Office) celebrated the ILO's 90th anniversary combined with World Day for Safety and Health at Work (OSH) commemoration on 28 April 2009. This event was organized by ILO and its tripartite constituencies: Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS), Zambia Federation of Employers (ZFE) and Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), and it was held at Lusaka National Museum. The event's programme was composed of speeches and exhibitions. Attendance was open to the general public.

Speeches were from the ILO, United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), the Government through MLSS, and employers in Zambia through ZFE. The Minister of Labour and Social Security, Hon. Austin Liato MP, was the Chief Guest.

In her welcoming speech read on behalf of Mr. Gerry Finnegan, the ILO Representative for Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, Ms. Birgitte Poulsen cited that, "As we celebrate the 90th anniversary of the International Labour Organization this year, it is also fitting to recall the ILO's founding mission as we observe the World Day for Safety and Health at Work". Occupational safety and health is a human right and an integral part of a people-centred agenda for development. Unsafe work is a human tragedy that causes daily anxiety, inducing poverty if ill health or injury reduces or takes away the capacity to work if mechanisms for support are absent, culminating in shortening worker's lives. Much of this tragedy involving millions of workers each year plays out unseen and unheard, never making the headlines. Yet so much of this tragedy and hardship can be prevented.

Ms. Poulsen emphasised that everyone stands to gain from safe and healthy workplaces. Workers and their families; governments; enterprises; societies, and economies have a stake in reducing work-related accidents, injury and illness. Safe work underpins sustainable enterprises which benefit from improved productivity, quality and workforce motivation. A healthy workforce and safe and productive enterprises are part of successful and sustainable development strategies.

Finally, she cited that, “The ILO is observing its 90th anniversary and the World Day at a time of global crisis – a financial crisis, an economic crisis and a jobs crisis. The ILO must be particularly vigilant to ensure that strategies for adjustment and economic recovery do not follow a “low road” which devalues human life and safety in the workplace. The words of the ILO’s Constitution, also written at a time of turmoil resonate today – “Labour is not a commodity.” This is why the ILO insists on the goal of decent work covering work itself, social protection including occupational safety and health, rights at work and social dialogue. With this in mind, it is important for all of the key partners – governments, employers, workers and their organizations, community-based organizations and local authorities, the multilateral system, and funding agencies, among others – to do their part to make occupational safety and health a global message and a global commitment backed by national action”.

Speaking at the same occasion, the UNRC Mr. Macleod Nyirongo stressed the point that, “in the context of the millennium development goals (MDGs), there can be no poverty reduction (MDG-1) without jobs and incomes. We cannot have an effective provision of health, education and other vital social services without the existence of a productive, healthy and well-motivated workforce. The scourge of HIV & AIDS particularly affects those of working age, so we need effective policies and programmes to counter HIV & AIDS in the world of work”.

The Minister of Labour and Social Security, Honourable Austin Liato cited that, “the ILO estimates that some 2.2 million women and men around the globe succumb to work-related accidents and diseases every year. World wide around 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million cases of work-related illnesses occur annually. The ILO further estimates that 4% of the world’s Gross Domestic Product is lost through workplace injury, death and disease. Work-related accidents and ill health place a tremendous burden on workers, their families, enterprises and the society as a whole”.

Therefore, to reduce the number of occupational accidents and diseases in our workplaces, it is necessary that proper management of risks in the work environment is instituted. This will not only reduce both the economic and social burden of work-related accidents and diseases, but will further enhance productivity and benefit our enterprises and national economy by, among other things, lowering the number of insurance and compensation claims. He added that, “the successful realization of a safe and healthy work environment will

require the active participation of both employers and workers through a system of clearly defined responsibilities and duties where the principle of prevention is accorded the highest priority. In connection to this, the Government has further put in place Legislation such as the Factories Act, Chapter 441 of the Laws of Zambia, which is meant to enhance the rights of workers to a safe and healthy working environment.

In the final speech, ZFE President, Dr. George Chabwera emphasised that, “a healthy and safe work place promotes the work ethic. Hence, it is critically vital to have safe and healthy work places in order to enhance productivity. However, we should not take for granted the need for a safe and healthy work environment. While employers will ensure that the work environment is safe and healthy, it is incumbent upon employees that they too contribute to the work environment by being health and safety conscious”.

Exhibitors were ILO beneficiaries, mainly women entrepreneurs and members of the Zambia Cooperative Federation (ZCF), with various products services such as crafts, high value agricultural produce, pesticides, disinfectants and many more. Others were member companies of Zambia Federation of Employers (ZFE) exhibiting various safety equipment and health services such as Voluntary Counselling and Testing, checkups on blood pressure and sugar levels.

The Minister with his delegation opened the exhibitions, and entertainment by Nomakanjani Arts continued till the end of the celebrations.