

MAY, 2008

WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK.

Every year on 28th April, various events take place worldwide to commemorate the World Day for Safety and Health at work. This year, like last year the ILO together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) on 6th May 2008, organized an exhibition of various health and safety equipment and services as a way of bringing attention to the issues of Occupational Health and Safety (OSH).

The event was held in the Lusaka Show Grounds and was attended by a cross section of people including health sciences students from the Chinama Hills College in Lusaka.

In a speech read on his behalf by the ILO Lusaka, HIV and AIDS Programme Officer, ILO Country Director, Gerry Finnegan, said many women and men continue to be denied the most fundamental human right to health and safety at work. “Millions of men, women and youth are being deprived of that right by being subjected to hazardous work that results in occupational accidents and even death; the majority of these occur in developing countries such as Zambia”.

Mr Finnegan cited the ILO Convention number 187 and a number of Conventions and Recommendations which address Safety and Health in the World of Work as some of the instruments that underscore the importance of human resources.

Labour and Social Security Minister, Honourable Ronald Mukuma, stressed the point that, “We need to remind ourselves that every work-related death, injury or illness is a preventable tragedy”, he said.

Honourable Mukuma bemoaned the fact that victims of these tragedies are usually workers in the prime of their lives, whose immediate and extended families often depend on them for livelihood.

The Minister further pointed out that safe work is decent work, and that reducing the number of occupational accidents and diseases enhances productivity, and is beneficial both to enterprises and national economies as the number of compensation and insurance and working days are reduced.

Speaking during the same occasion, Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) President, Leonard Hikaumba, said workers have been complaining for a long time now, about the unsafe working environments they work in – “it is now time to move from mere talking to action”, he said.

Mr Hikaumba added that workers in every sector need to be covered when it comes to OSH. He called on Government to take the lead in OSH promotion, as it is the biggest employer in the country.

“All workers –transporters, nurses, the police and so on, should be covered when it comes to Occupational Safety and Health. Look at the factors that affect the way people work” he said.

Zambia Federation of Employers (ZFE) President, George Chabwera, said employers recognise OSH as an important element in the national economic indicators. Mr Chabwera stressed that OSH is a serious matter in the employment of labour.

Mr Chabwera said OSH can only be achieved if the employers, workers and the community work together. He said enterprises must undertake preventative actions that ensure that there are minimal injuries.

“Employers must always take advantage of technological advancements that minimise workplace hazards,” he said.

The event closed with a number of people commending the initiative. The HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing providers present at the event expressed happiness at the willingness that a number of people exhibited in having access to the VCT services.