



Third China International Forum on Work Safety
Opening address
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Dear State Councillor Hua Jian Min
Dear Minister Li Yi Zhong
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour and pleasure to convey to you the best wishes of the Director-General of the International Labour Office, Mr. Juan Somavia, for the success of this 3rd China International Forum on Work Safety.

I am pleased to note that this Forum has brought together so many world leaders and professionals from the field of occupational safety and health. The Forum provides us with an excellent opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other in the coming days. I congratulate the Organizing Committee on its tremendous efforts in preparing for the Forum.

We live in a dynamic world in which economic activities are globalized and inter-connected. The ILO's objective of ensuring everyone the right to earn a living in freedom, dignity and security – in short Decent Work – must be pursued in this global context.

In terms of human suffering and related economic costs, the magnitude of the global impact of occupational accidents and diseases, as well as major industrial disasters, has been a longstanding source of concern at the workplace. Significant efforts have been made at all levels to overcome this problem; but nevertheless, according to ILO estimates, about 2.2 million workers die each year from work-related accidents and diseases. Occupational safety and health has been a central issue for the ILO ever since its creation in 1919 and continues to be a fundamental requirement for achieving the objectives of the Decent Work Agenda.

Work-related deaths and injuries take a particularly heavy toll in developing countries, where large numbers of workers are concentrated in primary activities such as agriculture, logging, fishing and mining. The construction activity also has a high death toll in countries which are experiencing rapid industrial development.

In comparison with formal workers, workers in the informal economy are more likely to be exposed to poor working environments. Such exposure impairs health and productivity as well as the general well-being and quality of life of informal economy workers and their families. Often they are not aware of the risks they face and those who are, may not know how to avoid them.

Although effective legal and technical tools and measures to prevent occupational accidents and diseases exist, there is a need for increased awareness of the importance of occupational safety

and health as well as a high level of political commitment. Efforts to tackle OSH problems, whether at international or national levels, are often dispersed and fragmented and as a result do not have the necessary level of coherence to make an impact. There is thus a need to give higher priority to OSH at international, national and enterprise levels and to engage all social partners in initiating and sustaining mechanisms for the continued improvement of national OSH systems.

To respond to the emerging safety and health needs worldwide, the ILO adopted a Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health at the 91st Session of the International Labour Conference in 2003. The Conference concluded that the building and maintenance of a national preventative safety and health culture and the introduction of a systems approach to occupational safety and health management at the national level were the fundamental pillars.

The Global Strategy called for the reinforcement of promotional and awareness-raising activities for occupational safety and health. As a response, each year on 28 April the ILO organizes the World Day for Safety and Health at Work. Various innovative national activities are organized as collaborative efforts with the social partners in over 100 countries, including China.

The Global Strategy also reaffirmed the importance for all countries to apply international labour standards on occupational safety and health, and called for the development of a new instrument establishing a promotional framework. Based on guidance provided by the Global Strategy, the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention and its accompanying Recommendation were adopted in June 2006 after a two-year discussion at the International Labour Conference. This new type of Convention focuses on the promotion of occupational safety and health with the objective of placing OSH high on the national agenda with a systems approach at the national level.

Our experience has shown that prevention programmes should address the diverse and complex workplace hazards and risk factors in a comprehensive manner. The integration of occupational safety and health into an overall policy and management arrangement is increasingly perceived as an effective means of action. The ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001) have been widely applied and provide a unique international model, compatible with other management system standards.

At the national level, the development and launching of a medium-term national occupational safety and health programme on a tripartite basis and its regular review facilitate a systematic approach to occupational safety and health. Such a programme is key for the improvement of national systems and performance on occupational safety and health and an important element of the new Promotional Framework Convention. I am pleased to note that many countries in Asia, including China, have developed such programmes. I do hope that Asian countries take a lead in ratifying and implementing this new innovative Convention.

We have been witnessing the continuous reinforcement of safety and health measures in China in recent years. The two major safety and health laws, namely Law on Work Safety of the People's Republic of China, and Law on Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases of the PRC, were enacted in 2002. These two laws provide the fundamental OSH pillars in China. The ILO Safety and Health in Construction Convention No.167 was ratified in 2002; the ratification of ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention No.155 is now under consideration; and a national tripartite workshop on Convention No. 155 was held in July this year in close collaboration with the ILO. China's national guideline on safety and health management systems, which was developed reflecting the ILO's Guidelines, has been widely applied. The Chinese Government just issued an Eleventh Five-Year National Programme on Work Safety.

The social partners in China have also been active in promoting occupational safety and health. The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) developed its own safety and health strategy which it implemented through its networks. The ACFTU's extensive training and information

dissemination activities have been supportive of workplace prevention measures. China Enterprises Confederation (CEC) has been offering practical safety and health measures to employers which can also enhance productivity and business competitiveness. The CEC organized action-oriented safety and health training courses for small enterprises using the ILO's Work Improvement in Small Enterprises (WISE) approach.

I am pleased to note the longstanding collaboration between China and the ILO: most recently the ILO worked with the Chinese authorities and social partners in compiling a National Profile on Occupational Safety and Health, which provided a comprehensive overview of the national situation, programmes and systems on occupational safety and health. The Profile was used in the formulation of a national programme on work safety. The Chinese approach for a national profile and programme is in line with the principles of the new ILO Convention on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health that was adopted by International Labour Conference in June 2006 in Geneva and is expected to have a significant impact on safety and health conditions in China.

In spite of concerted efforts and progress, China is still facing a tremendous challenge in the area of safety and health. There is a need to strengthen the national system for occupational safety and health. Let me mention some key areas for improvement. First of all, it is important to improve the system for data collection on accidents and diseases as well as hazardous workplaces. These data form the basis for elaborating a plan of action at the national and local levels. Establishing a close link with the employee injury insurance scheme is also important as lessons from many countries show. Second, the reinforcement of a legal framework and compliance assurance mechanisms, including government inspection, should be continued so as to catch up with the development of a market economy and growing small enterprises. Third, safety and health training and support services should be improved in terms of quality and coverage and to promote the enterprise-level activities as joint efforts of management and workers. I am confident that Chinese experiences in these endeavours will be successful and could provide a good model for other countries, particularly those in transition to market economies.

The ILO will work closely with the government and social partners in member States in undertakings to improve occupational safety and health. The ILO uses various means of action to provide support and services to governments, employers' and workers' organizations in drawing up and implementing programmes for the improvement of occupational safety and health. These activities are based on knowledge and experiences gained at the international level and advocate the fundamental principles, values and rights embodied in ILO Conventions and Recommendations.

In the coming days, there will be many presentations which will provide useful insights into how we can improve workers' protection from hazards and risks at the workplace. I hope that this Forum will offer another opportunity to reinforce our commitment to international cooperation and to join efforts for ensuring the safety and health of all workers.

In conclusion, our fight is a just cause and in winning it we shall prevent unnecessary disability, suffering and death for people whose only wish is to earn their livelihood at work. As the UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan said in his message for World Day for Safety and Health at Work, Safe Work is a basic human right. Hence, we shall continue our efforts to ensure safety and health for all workers. As in other challenges, I am confident that China will succeed.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.