

National Seminar on Construction Safety
On the occasion of World Day for Safety and Health at Work
Opening Speech
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Mr. Lin Yisheng, Director General,
Mr. Shang Chunming,
Mr. Sha Xiaolin,
Ladies and gentlemen, good morning!

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to be with you all this morning to attend the national seminar entitled Building a Harmonious Society: Paying Attention to Construction Safety, on the occasion of commemorating ILO World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

I would like to begin by thanking the State Administration of Work Safety and the Ministry of Construction and other participating organizations for their commitment and support to this event. This has demonstrated the Governments' resolve to continue to improve occupational safety and health in the construction industry. In this regard I must acknowledge the important work that has already been undertaken to do just that and I will return to this point later in my speech.

The construction industry has traditionally been considered as a hazardous occupation, due to the high incidence of occupational injuries and , above all , of fatal accidents. The number of fatal occupational accidents in construction all over the world is not easy to quantify, as information on this issue is not available for most countries. Nevertheless, ILO estimates that at least 60,000 fatalities occur at construction sites, around the world, every year. This means that one fatal accident occurs approximately every ten minutes in the sector, which also means that around 17% of all fatalities at work (1 in every 6) are construction fatalities.

In addition, construction workers are also exposed to a number of health risks, including exposure to hazardous substances, manual handling of heavy or awkward loads, and exposure to high levels of noise and vibration. Back pain and other muscular injuries from lifting of heavy loads account for

many work-related injuries in this industry. Asbestos is a particular cause for concern, since although the use of asbestos has been banned in many (but not all) countries; construction workers may be exposed to hazardous levels of airborne asbestos dust during demolition, refurbishment or maintenance work.

The ILO has long paid attention to occupational safety and health in construction. In 1937, the ILO adopted its first Convention for the industry. In 1988, the Safety and Health in Construction Convention (No 167) and its associated Recommendation (No 175) were adopted, reflecting the need for a broad approach to tackling some of the safety and health problems in construction. One of the key issues that this Convention addresses is the need for planning and coordination of safety and health on site. It clarifies, for example, that where several contractors are working simultaneously on the same site, the main responsibilities for safety and health are upon the principal contractor, but that each employer is responsible for applying measures relating to workers under their own control.

In 1992, a new ILO Code of Practice-‘Safety and Health in Construction’- was approved. This Code gives practical guidance as to how safe and healthy working conditions can be provided and maintained on construction sites, complementing the broader approach of the Convention and Recommendation.

In 2001, the ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001) were published. I would like to emphasize that although this guidance applies to all economic sectors, it is especially useful for the construction industry with its particular need for a coordinated and systematic approach to managing occupational safety and health. Prevention of accidents and exposure to risks is the paramount objective to strive towards.

The basic idea of this new approach, the OSH management system, is that of the continuous improvement in OSH performance is necessary not only for workers protection but also for enhanced quality and productivity. The new approach puts special emphasis on the commitment and leadership of the top management, the active participation of workers, and the integration of the management of OSH with other management systems within the enterprise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The construction industry is still a booming sector in China, which greatly contributes to national economic development and provides a large quantity of employment opportunities for urban and rural labour forces.

China has ratified the ILO Convention 167 and made a lot of progress in implementing the Convention. China promulgated the Law on Work Safety and the Law on Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases in 2001; and last February the State Council approved the Regulation on Work Safety Management in Construction Project and Regulation on Work Safety Permit that requires that any enterprise or company must get a work safety permit before it engages in a construction work. The Ministry of Construction has issued a number of rules and technical standards to implement those laws and regulations and strengthened the safety supervision system at various levels of the construction administration.

Recently, we notice that the Government has attached a great importance to protecting the rights and interests of migrant construction workers, including the protection of their safety and health at work. We welcome that for the first time, the migrant workers are required to be covered by the Employment Injury Insurance.

The Chinese Government is committed to building a harmonious society through a sustainable development strategy for economic and social advancement, aiming at establishing an overall well-being society by 2020. OSH should be an integrated part of the strategy, which is also in line with the concept of people-oriented development perspective.

The construction industry demands the attention of everyone involved. It requires the government, trade unions, sector's associations, developers, architects, engineers, contractors, subcontractors and workers to play their role. We must work together to create a safe and healthy workplace for all. The ILO will support you in this endeavor.

Thank you all for your participation and commitment.