

ASPPI 10th General Assembly and Convention
Davao City, 28 August 2009

Closing Remarks by Linda Wirth
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Magandang Hapon Sa Inyong Lahat!

Looking around, I noticed a buzz of excitement that still fills this room after two days! I must therefore say that you must have greatly benefited from the discussions you had with the panel of speakers and discussants. And I must thank and congratulate them for sharing their wide-ranging perspectives.

I apologize that I couldn't come here earlier to give ILO's perspective on the subject of managing occupational safety and health or OSH amidst economic challenges. I'm sure the presentations and discussions during this convention have generated a better appreciation of the key issues that bear on OSH in these times of economic difficulties.

So let me also congratulate the ASPPI for choosing a theme that is just so timely under the present circumstances. We all know that the world is experiencing a serious financial and economic crisis and despite recent reports of a recovery, workers, including in the Philippines, continue to be displaced and companies continue to be affected. The challenges remain and the opportunities to address them must be maximized. This convention is one such important opportunity.

I only have one thing to say, as a closing message. While the crisis may cause reductions in resources allocated to safety and health and for enforcing these standards, we must be aware of the potential adverse consequences. The result could be a sharp rise in work accidents, injuries and fatalities and work-related stress. In economic terms, this could be much more costly than what it will take to comply with standards.

While it is true that we should concentrate at the present time on the restoration of sustainable productivity and equity, we need to do this with full respect for labour standards, including those related to occupational safety and health. Only this will ensure that people live socially and economically productive lives. The long-term business viability of enterprises increasingly depends not only on their productivity but also on meeting the legal requirements and social expectations that come with their roles as corporate citizens of the local and international community. In fact successful and profitable companies have clearly demonstrated across the globe that safety and health at the workplace is an essential ingredient for improving productivity along with decent working conditions, efficient work organization, harmonious industrial relations, worker participation, equality of opportunity and

treatment, skills and technological upgrading. Active workplace safety and health committees with representatives from management and workers are a key mechanism for social dialogue on these components of productivity and worker welfare and for determining the right balance between them according to the specific situation of the enterprise and local context. Their role is even more critical during times of crisis such as the present.

Ladies and gentlemen, everyone has the right to a safe and healthy working environment. That is what ILO deeply believes in. And this is especially true in a time of crisis. The crisis should therefore not be an excuse to lessen decent working conditions, but an opportunity to promote them in new and creative ways. Much investment has been made to improve standards which would be lost if they were rolled back. Also to build back the standards further investments would have to be made. It is not only the right thing to do to safeguard workers' safety and health, but it is also the smart thing to do!!

Maraming Salamat at Mabuhay!