

**The ILO – 90 years of hope
A better world starts here.**

Opening Remarks By Mr Bill Salter
Director of ILO Subregional Office for East Asia

On the occasion of the ILO's 90th anniversary,
28 April 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Your Excellency Minister S. Subramaniam,
Distinguished guests,
Honoured guests and Forum participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the Ministry of Human Resources and the tripartite partners for hosting and supporting this important occasion. It is a reinforcement of the special relationship that the International Labour Organization has developed with the **Malaysian** Government and social partners.

So it is my great pleasure and honour to be celebrating the 90th anniversary of our Organization here with you today and would like to extend to you all a warm welcome to the seminar on Health and Life at Work: A Basic Human Right.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The world collectively yearns for a safe pair of hands to help us through these uncertain times, to ensure that principles of fairness, equity and social justice are upheld. Globally, and particularly here in Asia and the Pacific, there is a widespread desire to correct some of the failures of globalization.

Given that the International Labour Organization is the United Nations' agency that deals with work and workplace issues – and its unique three-part structure of Governments, Workers and Employers – it is no surprise that we are being called upon to help respond to this current crisis. This challenge comes at a significant moment for the ILO, as it marks its 90th anniversary.

The economic crisis is an opportunity to rebuild jobs and lives in a more sustainable way. Employment should not only meet our basic needs today but it should offer some hope of social and economic progress to individuals and societies. This is what we mean by decent work.

90 years is a long time. But, in my view, the crisis we face today shows – should there ever have been any doubt – that the ILO's mandate is as fresh, relevant and universal today as it has ever been. Just consider how, as times have changed, the ILO's mandate has adapted to and incorporated changes in the world of work.

The ILO's Conventions have set the internationally recognized standards that most of us now take for granted; including the eight-hour work day, basic workplace safety standards, maternity protection, an end to child and forced labour, equality, the right to organize and speak out. In realizing decent work in Malaysia, the Ministry of Human Resources formulated and implemented a strategic plan for a

period of 2007-2010. To enhance the employability of its workforce and promote decent work for all, the Ministry organized, in collaboration with its social partners and the ILO, a tripartite seminar in November 2008. I am also pleased to inform you that the ILO is now working with the constituents in developing a decent work country programme in Malaysia.

I appreciate your efforts in addressing occupational safety and health as an issue of rights in employment, and am convinced that this Forum – taking place on the World Day for Safety and Health at Work - will produce real progress towards this end.

On the ILO's 90th birthday it is right that we should feel pride in the achievements of the past nine decades. In Malaysia, where you have made such enormous advances in that period, there must be great pride in achievement. But what is even more important is the future. We must use this occasion to look ahead and renew our support for the fundamental principles the ILO stands for and - in these testing times - plan how we can work, together, to further social justice and achieve decent work for all.

So, the message of the ILO's 90th birthday is one of hope - a better world starts here – if we so choose.

Thank you.