

Strengthening the response to HIV/AIDS among Mobile and Migrant Workers: Global Partnership in the Maritime Sector

By Gita Lingga, Communications Officer, ILO Jakarta

BALI (ILO News) - "Employers have key role to play in addressing stigma and discrimination in relation to HIV/AIDS. This is particularly important for migrant workers who are often screened before being employed," said Mr. Alan Boulton, Director of the ILO for Indonesia and Timor-Leste, during his presentation at the satellite session "HIV and Mobile Workers: Towards Public-Private Partnership in Maritime and Transport Sectors" at the 9th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) in Bali on 10 August.

Other panels in the satellite session, organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) included: Ms. Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, Regional HIV/AIDS Practice Leader and Programme Coordinator of UNDP, Mr. Syed Asif Altaf, Global HIV/AIDS Coordinator of the International Transport Workers' Federation, Mr. Suresh Idnani, Vice President of International Maritime Health Association as well as Regional Coordinator South Asia of the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare, Ms. Reyko Matsuyama, Partnership on HIV and Mobility in Southern Africa of IOM, and Ms. Rosilyne Borland, HIV and Health Promotion Coordinator of IOM.

Mr. Boulton said that the ILO has implemented a multi-pronged approach at international, national and enterprise levels to strengthen its response to HIV/AIDS. At the international level, the ILO aims to build the capacity of ministries of labour, employers' and workers' organizations and their partners, while it also aims to create a conducive framework at the national level and directly reach mobile and migrant workers at the enterprise level.

With the majority of those living with HIV being the most productive age group, the epidemic has also made inroads into the world of work, in particular amongst migrants and mobile workers. These workers, in particular in the maritime and transport sectors, are categorized as a high-risk group owing to a number of factors, such as high mobility, living in new environment and being away from partners and families.

Mr. Boulton presented some best practices in working with mobile and migrant workers from Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. In Indonesia, for example, the ILO has worked with the Association of Migrant Workers' Employment Agencies (APJATI) and the Indonesian Migrant Workers' Service and Placement Centers (BNP2TKI) to provide education and implement non-discriminatory practices. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the ILO has supported sensitization and advocacy events with representatives from the Association of Licensed Foreign Employment Recruiting Agencies (ALFEA), the Migrant Service Center and the Gulf Approved Medical Centers Association (GAMCA).

He also underlined ILO's participation in the Global Partnership on HIV and Mobile Workers in the Maritime Sector. This is an initiative among international organizations and global networks dedicated to decreasing the vulnerability of seafarers to HIV through combating risky behaviours, increasing access to HIV-related services, promoting a sense of ownership of strategies to reduce HIV infection by key stakeholders, and ensuring that best practices in HIV testing are used in the maritime sector.

To date, pilot activities are under development targeting Filipino seafarers. Stakeholder consultations and discussions with donors are planned for late 2009. The seven partners include the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare (ICSW), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA), the International Shipping Federation (ISF), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).