

World AIDS Day 2010 – Workplace policies to tackle HIV and AIDS

In June 2010 the Government, Employer and Worker representatives that make up the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the first international labour standard to focus specifically on HIV and AIDS. The [Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the world of work 2010 \(No.200\)](#) takes a rights-based approach to the pandemic and contains comprehensive measures to improve access to prevention, treatment and care, and to eliminate stigma and discrimination in the work place. On World AIDS Day 2010, ILO Online spoke to Dr. Sophia Kisting, Director of the ILO Global Programme on HIV and AIDS and the world of work, about progress made on giving effect to the Recommendation since adoption in June.

11/30/2010

The International Labour Conference of the ILO adopted a new Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the world of work in June 2010. What response has it received since adoption?

Sophia Kisting: The response has really been quite overwhelming and the enthusiasm with which it has been taken up is very encouraging for us.

Those who were here during the second discussion on the Recommendation at the ILC in 2010 went back to their countries feeling that they had a strong human rights labour standard that can help them improve the issue of stigma and discrimination in their workplaces.

Beyond the initial response, there is also a very important understanding that countries need to report back to the Committee of Experts at the ILC in June 2011 on progress made in giving effect to the Recommendation. The first step is to translate the labour standard and have it checked by different ministries, so that it becomes a legal document that belongs to the government as a whole. National parliaments should then dedicate time during a parliamentary session to discuss how to give effect to the Recommendation.

We have had requests from several countries for the Recommendation to be translated. A number of trade union federations and employer organizations have asked for support and the necessary materials to make presentations to their members about the Recommendation. Ministers of labour have also been very keen for the ILO to initiate tripartite workshops on the Recommendation.

Furthermore, what has been really striking is how the networks of persons living with HIV have responded with such enthusiasm to the Recommendation.

In November 2010 the Governing Body of the ILO agreed that a Global Action Plan will be developed for giving effect to the Recommendation. What is the action plan and how will it be implemented?

Sophia Kisting: Along with the Recommendation, the 2010 ILC also adopted an accompanying resolution which requests that a Global Action Plan be established to achieve its widespread implementation. The Plan is being developed in a process of consultation and will be submitted to the ILO Governing Body in March 2011.

One of the most important steps for us is the development of national workplace policies and to make sure that they become part of the national HIV Programme and Strategy, so that the workplace response is not separate but rather part of the broader national response to HIV.

On the legislative side, we hope that our member states will give effect to the Recommendation by updating their legislation, particularly with regards to discrimination at work, by changing existing legislation that may discriminate against people living with HIV, or by writing entirely new legislation based on the Recommendation.

We aim to support at least 50 member states with the development of national workplace policies by the end of 2011 and at least 90 by 2015. I believe given the response that we have had so far, we can be much more ambitious than 90 countries.

The target of 2015 is related specifically to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 6 on combating HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. However it is clear that, particularly in countries with high burdens of HIV, the virus is a hindrance to achieving all of the MDGs. To reach all of the Goals, we have to find a way to deal with HIV and AIDS.

The UNAIDS vision for 2015 is zero new infections, zero HIV deaths and zero discrimination. This is an aspirational goal and is one that the workplace can play an effective role in helping to achieve.

Has the ILO received commitments from any Governments so far that the Recommendation will pass into national legislation?

Sophia Kisting: After the first discussion of the Recommendation in 2009, the government of Brazil developed specific legislation that prohibits discrimination on the basis of HIV status, real or perceived, for purposes of work.

Since adoption, we have had at least three ILO member states in the Africa region which have asked us to help review their legislation in the context of the new Recommendation. During the tripartite workshops foreseen for the development of national workplace policies in members States, there will be specific time given to the legislative aspect.

The theme for this year's World AIDS Day is Universal Access and Human Right; the ILO now has a human rights instrument concerning HIV and AIDS in the world of work. Can you tell us more about HIV and AIDS as a human rights issue?

Sophia Kisting: In the past HIV has been seen primarily as a health issue, but we have learned through the effects of for example, stigma and discrimination, that it is a much broader issue. It is very much an economic development issue and, above all perhaps, a human rights issue.

There is a tremendous amount of stigma and discrimination even now 30 years after the first patients were diagnosed with HIV. We feel that the government, worker and employer representatives of the ILO have made it possible for us to have a labour standard to tackle these issues and protect human rights.