

Remarks by Sandra Polaski, Deputy Director General for Policy

ILO World Day for Safety and Health at Work, 28 of April 2015

JOIN IN BUILDING A CULTURE OF PREVENTION ON OSH

Good afternoon. I am delighted to welcome you today to this year's World Day for Safety and Health at Work. I would like to express my appreciation on behalf of the ILO to the speakers, high-level leaders from government, employers' and workers' organizations, safety and health specialists and social security specialists who have joined us here today. I am also pleased to see among the audience so many colleagues from the ILO and UN agencies.

I would like to welcome in particular, the Executive Director of the Workplace Safety and Health Institute from the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore, who is a partner in this campaign to build national and global cultures of prevention on OSH. She has kindly travelled to Geneva to be with us today. Singapore is a traditional partner of the ILO in this field and a leader on OSH in its region. Singapore will also host the XXI World Congress on Safety and Health at Work in 2017, which is organized by the ILO jointly with our key partner ISSA, whose Secretary General is also here today, and I extend a warm welcome to him, as well.

We also expect that there will be thousands of active discussions at the national and workplace levels around the world to find practical ways to build and enhance a culture of prevention on OSH.

The protection of workers against death, disease and injury arising out of their employment has been a core mandate of the ILO since its establishment in 1919. And yet, despite continuous efforts by the ILO and by many of our constituent governments, workers organizations and employers, the challenge of creating safe and healthy workplaces for all remains enormous.

The ILO estimates that occupational accidents and work-related diseases cause over 6,300 deaths every day. That is **2.3 million fatalities every year**. Of this huge loss, about 350,000 deaths are caused by occupational accidents and close to 2 million by work-related diseases. Non-fatal **accidents** affect an even larger number: over 313 million workers are injured every year. And non-fatal work-related **diseases** are estimated to affect 160 million each year.

So in addition to the 2.3 million annual fatalities, **almost half a billion workers suffer injuries and diseases from workplace causes each and every year**. This takes a devastating toll on the affected workers, their families, communities, employers and economies.

In addition to causing immense human loss and suffering to victims and their families, work accidents and illnesses entail major economic losses. The ILO estimates that globally, around **4 per cent of the world's gross domestic product is lost** because of work-related accidents and diseases, counting the direct and indirect costs.

I am sure you agree with me that these huge human and economic losses are not acceptable. We need to take urgent steps to reinforce our action and redouble our efforts to create safe and healthy workplaces for all workers. In most cases, the means to prevent accidents and diseases are known. What is sometimes missing is the political will, or attention to these matters, or dissemination of knowledge. Sometimes there is denial about the extent of the problem.

This is why this year's campaign focuses on creating a **global culture of prevention on safety and health at work**.

There are critical roles for government, employers, workers and the broader public to play in making real progress. Safety and health at work is the responsibility of everyone. Later in this session you will be treated to an introduction to the new inter-active portal on the ILO website about how you can join in building the culture of prevention. This portal has information for each actor, whether government, employer, worker, trade union, OSH expert or social security official that is immediately relevant and useful. This site will help you do your job even better. And I think you will agree that it makes learning fun!

We are also taking advantage of this World Day for Safety and Health at Work to launch a major new ILO initiative on OSH, called OSH Global Action for Prevention. This new program will be funded by extra-budgetary contributions and will allow us to extend our efforts and impact far beyond the level of work that can be achieved with the ILO regular budget. The purpose is to better support our constituents, particularly in low and lower-middle income countries, in strengthening national OSH systems by mobilizing more alliances and resources.

The new program has four main objectives:

Building effective regulation of workplace risks through sound OSH legislative frameworks;
Strengthening knowledge for prevention through capacity building in the area of data collection and analysis for strategy-making purposes;
Developing effective dialogue for improved safety and health at work among governments, employers and workers organizations; and
Improving financing modalities for national OSH systems to achieve secure and sustainable funding, including through economic incentives for compliance and investment in prevention as well as linkage with employee injury insurance schemes.

We already have three development partners committing financial support to this effort: the US, Republic of Korea and Finland. We hope to have many other supporters in the near future, including through in-kind contributions of expertise and South-South collaboration.

We are also putting our own house in order. The ILO Director General adopted internal directives and procedures to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for ILO staff and established a Committee on Occupational Safety and Health and procedures for the implementation of an internal policy on OSH in all ILO Offices, along the lines of Convention No. 155 concerning occupational safety and health.

There is also progress in the UN. Last month, the High Level Committee on Management of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination of the UN Common System adopted an OSH Framework based on ILO standards, whereby the UN system commits to protect and

promote the safety and health of all staff and facilitate the adoption of an OSH management system across UN Organizations.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, the challenge of workplace health and safety is enormous. However, we have the knowledge and the organizational and management tools to succeed. Success however, relies on the commitment and effort by people in every country, every sector and every single workplace.

Let's work together to build a culture of prevention that will provide safe and healthy workplaces for all.

Thank you, and once again, a warm welcome to the ILO.