

Strategies and Programmes of Safety and Health for the Future

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Respected Chair, Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my privilege to deliver a key note address at the First Plenary Session of the XVIII World Congress on Safety and Health at Work on the topic **“STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES OF SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR THE FUTURE.”** Let me begin by congratulating the organisers who have created history by having a Safety and Health Summit just prior to this Congress. The galaxy of safety and health professionals, decision makers, workers’ and employers’ representatives make this Congress a truly productive endeavour.

Safety, Health and Welfare at workplace are really the three important dimensions of any productive work environment, mining, manufacturing or any other industrial sector.

Accidents in industries are primarily man-made and can be prevented to a large extent. These accidents in workplaces cause injuries, fatalities and property damage. These are irreparable losses – both for the family and the society – human and material resources which are significant contributors to the growth and prosperity of a nation.

In the early stages of industrialisation, we had primarily mechanical industries. Innovations and technological advancements in later years have brought in new industries, new processes with the usage of new raw materials.

In terms of the ILO Global Strategy, the fostering and promotion of a preventive safety and health culture is a fundamental basis for improving OSH performance in the long term. The strategy has called for a systems approach to OSH management. At the national level, this entails the cultivation of a culture in which Governments and the social partners work together to secure a safe and healthy working environment and where each party has a clearly defined role in preventing accidents and risks. This systems approach to OSH management led to the development of ILO Guidelines on OSH Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001). Adoption of the systems approach at the national level is to be highly commended because while some old threats still persist, e.g. issues relating to asbestos are far from being resolved, there are new technologies which may have the potential to bring in tremendous benefits but also pose unknown dangers. Nanotechnology comes readily to mind. Thus national OSH systems and ILO instruments require constant updation. New instruments and laws, detailed guidelines are required in both new and old areas of occupational activity. OSH systems have to evolve and develop constantly. In fact, the feeling is that ILO should develop a methodology for a systematic updating of codes and guidelines wherever OSH requirements are more susceptible to obsolescence. Development of new instruments in the area of ergonomics, biological hazards and work-related psychological hazards is also urgently needed. OSH is inextricably linked to the emergence of new and unexpected social, economic and political systems. The need is not only to respond very quickly but perhaps even to anticipate the impact these changes would have on the

existing safety and health measures. There is no doubt that economies which are able to respond with appropriate OSH measures will have an edge over those whose OSH measures are outmoded, inadequate or completely obsolete.

A national programme can not succeed unless it ensures the active participation of employers, workers and every single relevant Government institution. As the programme would embody national thinking on the subject, such a programme must necessarily represent policy endorsement and commitment of a high order.

What is the role of ILO in promoting safety and health at work?

In 2003 at the 91st Session of the ILC, ILO identified its role as that of

- Endorsing the establishment of an annual event. We now celebrate 28th April as the World Safety Day to raise widespread awareness regarding the importance of OSH and promoting the rights of workers to a safe and healthy working environment.
- Raising the visibility of ILO and its OSH instruments.
- Launching a global knowledge and awareness campaign focussed on promoting the concept of *“sound management of safety and health at work”* as the most effective means for achieving strong and sustained preventive safety and health culture both at the national and enterprise levels.

- Strategically using international meetings to promote OSH culture.
- Internally implementing its own guidelines on OSH management systems.
- Encouraging the launching of national OSH programmes by the highest Government authorities.

The need for providing technical advisory and financial support for timely strengthening of OSH systems cannot be overemphasized.

The ILO should further hone its capability to assist member-countries to create an information exchange, to which free access should be available to seek information on successful models and experiences. Such sharing would greatly aid ILO's task of advocacy. Occupational safety and health awareness should be integrated into the training and imparting of skills to the job entrants. Special attention certainly needs to be given to those who work in the informal sectors. Training packages could be developed and made available to those dealing with the informal sector. It would be appropriate to take note of the fact that Convention No.187 adopted in 2006 provides the promotional framework, presenting clearly the structure of a national system of occupational safety and health, calling upon each ratifying member to continuously improve occupational safety and health to prevent occupational injuries, diseases and death, to take active steps to achieve progressively a safe and healthy working environment. It requires consultation with social partners. Its new features are its articulation of the need for creating support mechanisms for the SMEs and the informal

sector and provision for collaboration with social security schemes. In this context, the Draft Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health 2008-2017 is a very useful document.

It is important for us to recognise that OSH is an essential part of decent work and fair globalisation. Exposure to toxic chemicals and hazardous substances has the potential to cause not only physical trauma but even genetic mutations. Much of this damage unless it is cataclysmic may go unnoticed or register only inadequately in the minds of those most responsible for securing the safety of workers. Developing countries may be at even greater risk and may need to protect their workers both within their own borders and outside, by entering into necessary protocols. Construction activity which involves a lot of migrant labour is another area which requires very special attention to safety systems.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would now like to briefly refer to the present status of OSH system in India and our future plans.

The future strategies and programmes on statutes and policies on Safety and Health of the Government of India entail several steps. The most important are - to declare a National Policy on Occupational Safety and Health, to regularly update the list of occupational diseases under *The Factories Act, 1948* and *The Mines Act, 1952*, and to phase out manual loading by mechanical loading in mining thereby considerably reducing the exposure of workers to the risk of accidents and injuries at the workplace.

Future strategies and programmes on training and education require us to strengthen Occupational Safety and Health Institutions and to integrate Occupational

Health with Public Health Services, to include Industrial Safety as a compulsory subject in diploma and graduate courses in engineering and Occupational Health as a compulsory subject in graduate courses in Medicine, to establish Advanced Learning Centre to teach Post-graduate courses in safety and health, to conduct research activities in the field of safety and health as well as national study on occupational diseases and creating expertise in identification and prevention of occupational diseases.

The future strategies and programmes to strengthen core institution capacities are - by significantly strengthening the Directorate General, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI) and the Directorate General, Mines Safety (DGMS) as national resource centres, to develop Chemical Process Safety Division in DGFASLI for Process Safety in Chemical Industries, to create Industrial Fire Safety Centre in DGFASLI to advise, formulate policies and guidelines which need to be followed by various State Governments, to establish and develop research and development capabilities in the area of safety and health, and to provide assistance to industries in Industrial Risk Insurance Management Services.

On Technical Advice and Consultancy, we plan to create Emergency Preparedness and Response Centre for advising on matters relating to onsite and offsite preparedness planning to chemical industries, to create Chemical Disaster Resource Centre in Directorate General, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI) in gender related areas, and to develop Codes and Standards on Responsible Care as a measure of commitment to workers, public and environment.

As regards promotional activities, we are –

- To observe year 2008 as “*The Year of Industrial Safety and Health*” throughout the country with a view to encourage incorporation of workers’ health in national and sectoral policies;
- To increase awareness of safety and health at workplace through appropriate mass communication methods;
- Arrange for networking of safety professionals and institutions through website to be done;
- Promote safety culture in industries and mines.

In the operationalisation of these strategies and adopting a systems approach, we look forward to forging essential partnerships and the support of ILO.

In conclusion, I would call upon not only ILO but all experts, Governments, social partners and multilateral agencies to come together. They can effectively to bring to this subject, their expertise and experience to highlight the various ramifications of occupational safety and health, propagate its subtle nuances and facets and make possible a significant enhancement of health and safety standards on a continuous basis.

I would like to thank the organisers for giving me this unique opportunity to address this august audience.